

5. The Steve Irwin Award for Ecotourism

This category recognises ecologically sustainable tourism businesses with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas. Entrants in this category foster environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and conservation.

Word Count: 6,000 min – 10,000 max words

Written Submission: 90 Points

Online Review: 10 Points

Site Visit: 20 Points

Total Points: 120

Business Impact Summary (0 marks)

Please provide the judges with an understanding of any impact to the business's situation resulting from natural, national and/or world events during the qualifying period. E.g., natural disasters (fire/flood), pandemic.

NOTE: This response does not contribute to the overall score but provide a clearer picture for judges to understand what the business has been able to achieve. This is factual information only, allowing you to tell the business story in the subsequent questions.

NOTE: If no impact to the business has occurred in the qualifying period, this question does not need to be answered.

Bullet points are recommended. The response should be short and sharp. (Max 250 words overall)

List any issues that have had a significant impact on the business during the qualifying period (1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024).

Include the following information:

- *What the event/situation was (fire, flood, business restrictions).*
- *How it impacted the business (e.g., closure of business, staff shortages, stock levels, cash flow).*
- *The severity of the impact.*
- *For what period (e.g., how many months within the qualifying period).*

1. Introduction (15 marks)

A. Provide an overview of the tourism products, experiences, and/or services including the nature and history of the business. 7 marks

Take the judge on a journey of the business products and/or service; how and when it began, where the business is located or where the services are provided, who works in the business etc.

How has the business developed over time? For example, what new additions to the infrastructure were made (and when), how have staffing levels grown, what significant improvements have been made to the product/service?

What are the products, experiences and/or services on offer to visitors? Provide sufficient detail to ensure the judge can obtain a good understanding of what is on offer.

Highlight the businesses points of difference and what makes it stand out from others (its unique selling points). Consider the amenities, products, services, or facilities that enhance visitor satisfaction.

This is where the judges (and auditors) will gain an understanding of how the business fits into the category; therefore, it is important to clearly demonstrate your eligibility by aligning with the category criteria to ensure that there is no misunderstanding as to why you have entered this category.

The judges may not be familiar with the business – your submission may be judged nationally and could have judges that are not from your state/territory. Therefore, explain everything from the ground up.

B. Outline the key features of your business plan. 4 marks

Provide an overview of the key features of your business plan. This should include the overall vision of the business and its main goals, strategies.

Provide insight as to the rationale for these goals/strategies.

This will assist the judge to understand how business development (Q2) and marketing efforts (Q3) align with the business's overall strategies.

C. How does the business demonstrate tourism excellence? 4 marks

Demonstrate the business' commitment to tourism excellence by explaining the values and philosophy of the business. How does the business go above and beyond to provide an exceptional visitor experience?

This should be reflected in the business' policies and procedures, how staff are inducted, incentivised and/or trained – so include details of these to show the business commitment to excellence.

How has the business been actively involved with and contributed to the tourism industry (locally, regionally, and nationally) through both business and personal participation?

Tourism excellence can also be demonstrated by listing any awards won and accreditations held.

IMAGES

Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 1. (accurately named) to support and enhance the response. For example, a map of where you are located, images of the product/service and any specific facilities/amenities/services you have highlighted in your response, a collage of the accreditation programs you participate in and/or any award achievements.

2. Environmental Protection and Sustainable Resource Use (20 marks)

A. Demonstrate how the business mitigates or minimizes its impact on natural resources. 10 marks

This is where judges will gain an understanding of how the business considers its impact on natural resources and how it marries preservation and protection with allowing visitor access and providing a tourism experience.

According to the Department of Environment and Energy, Natural Heritage is ‘the natural, Indigenous and historic places that are of outstanding heritage value to the nation’.

Describe how the business limits the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment through the responsible use of resources, effective waste management and minimizing of pollution.

Detail the activities the business conducts in relation to water conservation, waste management and recycling, fuel and energy reduction, carbon reduction/offset.

The inclusion of actual measurement data including the amounts saved/reduced in comparison to the previous qualifying period will enhance the response. However, it is anticipated that data may not be available, or the predicted outcomes may not be able to be demonstrated due to business disruptions. If this is the case, demonstrate to the judge how your results have been impacted/can’t be measured.

B. Demonstrate how the business educates visitors and communities about environmental conservation and the need to preserve and enjoy the environment sustainably. 10 marks

The judges are looking for leadership in visitor education of ecotourism.

Therefore, you need to outline how the business shares knowledge and awareness of environmental conservation. Consider for example, education programs, communication systems and activity programs delivered throughout the visitor experience (pre/during/post).

Consider all the ways in which awareness and education are delivered to visitors and communities about the importance of conserving the environment. For example, onsite communications/signage, staff training and development, education programs.

Demonstrate what the outcomes of these activities were and how the business has influenced visitors through activities which foster responsible use and enjoyment of the natural environment.

Consider how the business involves stakeholder groups with a meaningful role in planning and decision-making for the design, development and delivery of ecotourism programs and services.

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Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 2. to support and enhance the response.

3. Business Development (15 Marks)

A. During the qualifying period, what innovations/enhancements has the business implemented to improve the product/experience/service and how was environmental sustainability integrated into these developments? 10 marks

In Question 2.A. you will have provided judges with a broad overview of all the preservation and protection the business undertakes to minimise its impact on natural resources. This question requires you to share what innovations and/or developments have been implemented during the qualifying period to enhance the visitor experience and how environmental sustainability was considered in these developments.

An innovation can be defined as “The process of introducing new or significantly improved goods or services and/or implementing new or significantly improved processes.” (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics).

An enhancement could include, for example, a new experience/facility, creation of education programs, development of asset management strategies, etc. Actions that supported the ongoing survival of your business could include, for example, diversifying your product/experience, seeking alternative ways for the delivery of the experience/product/service.

If the business has been significantly impacted within the qualifying period, describe what the business implemented to support its recovery/resilience. Outline the strategies implemented for business endurance through the challenging national and world events.

Demonstrate how these innovations/enhancements protect and preserve the natural environment.

B. Why were these innovations and/or developments initiated, and what were the outcomes? 5 marks

Explain the decision-making process and what drove the business to implement these innovations/developments. As this is an Ecotourism category, consider how these enhance the visitor experience as well as how they further support the protection of the natural environment.

Your response should include the research and planning undertaken by the business to reach the decisions made. For example: external research that was considered, past customers surveyed, etc.

Include how the innovations/developments align with the businesses main goals and strategies that were outlined in Q1.B. Ensure the goals are specific.

Outline what measures are in place to track the success of these innovations/enhancements.

Judges are looking for qualitative and quantifiable data that demonstrates what the expected outcomes of the innovations/enhancements were, and whether these were achieved.

The response is looking for more than the innovation enhancement being successfully created e.g. ‘new infrastructure was successfully built’, rather, it is looking for insight as to how it supported the business to reach its goals/strategies e.g. visitation increased by an average of 10 visitors per day, visitor satisfaction improved by 13%, engagement with the website increased from an average of 3 mins to 11 mins.

If able to, provide previous years data to assist to demonstrate improvements.

If the anticipated outcomes were not reached, acknowledge this, and provide the judge with insight as to why. How did the business respond?

If the outcomes are still pending, provide what data is available and what the forecasted results may be.

IMAGES

Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 3. to support and enhance your response. For example, an image of any new products or facilities, posters promoting changes that have been implemented.

4. Marketing (15 marks)

A. Describe the marketing strategies used to differentiate the ecotourism business and promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the region's natural resources. Why were these strategies chosen? 10 marks

The response needs to focus on innovative approaches to marketing and promotions and relate back to the ecotourism experience.

Demonstrate how the business promotes the appreciation and enjoyment of the region's natural heritage resources.

Outline the marketing strategies identified for the business. Demonstrate how these marketing strategies were formulated by outlining the research undertaken and how the strategies align with the target markets attributes as well as, where able, with local, regional, or state marketing plans.

How do the marketing strategies align with the Business Plan as outlined in Question 1.B?

Describe the tactics used to achieve these strategies.

What has been done differently to attract or maintain customers within the qualifying period? Consider, for example, social media, digital or interactive advertising, apps, product packaging, tactical or paid advertising campaigns, relationship marketing.

Outline the key target markets for the marketing activity. Who were these campaigns directed at and how were the channels relevant to them?

If the business has been impacted by natural or world events it is important that the judges understand whether the strategies were developed for business growth, business endurance, or whether the strategies were adopted to keep connected to the businesses target market whilst normal business operations were unable to take place.

B. What was the outcomes of these marketing strategies? 5 marks

Detail how the marketing strategies provided in Q4.A have been successful.

Outline what measures are in place to track the success of these marketing strategies.

Use metrics to measure the outcomes and consider media coverage, social media engagement, increased web traffic, increased bookings, etc. to quantify your response. If available, use previous years/projected data to demonstrate improvements or how outcomes have been achieved.

If providing a snapshot of data within your image allocation, ensure you provide an analysis and/or interpretation of this in your written response, rather than leaving it to the judges to decipher.

If the anticipated outcomes were not reached, acknowledge this, and provide the judges with insight as to why. How did the business respond?

Consider using a table to clearly assist in aligning your answer to Question 3.A.

Ensure that your response is relevant to the qualifying period.

IMAGES

Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 4. to support and enhance your response. For example, images of marketing placement (social media screen shots, website, advertisements).

5. Customer Experiences (15 marks)

A. How does the business provide quality customer service pre, post and during the visitor experience? 7 marks

This question requires you to outline the practices put in place to ensure the delivery of high-quality customer service throughout the visitor experience journey.

Outline how the business is committed to quality customer service throughout all areas of the business. This could include areas such as staff training, service principles and policies and staff reward systems.

Consider all points of customer engagement e.g., email, phone, guest greetings/welcome and interaction before, during and after the experience.

Ensure you consider all touch points of the visitor journey pre, post and during the visitor experience.

For those businesses that had significant disruption during the qualifying period, consider how you provide quality customer experiences in the alternatives ways in which you operated, such as changed opening times, restricted access to business, kept customers informed during closures etc.

B. How does the business monitor and assess customer satisfaction to improve the visitor experience? 4 marks

Describe how the business monitors and assesses customer satisfaction to ensure continued quality delivery. For example, feedback forms, monitoring social media, blogs and mystery shoppers.

Consider how feedback is actively encouraged and how feedback is used to improve the visitor experience.

Provide a case study/example where a change has been implemented based on customer feedback and/or testimonials that further demonstrate outcomes of quality customer experiences.

C. Describe the inclusive practices integrated across the business. 4 marks

As a part of the delivery of quality customer experiences, demonstrate how the business considers the specific needs of a diverse community.

Provide examples of how the business has made the product/service inclusive or accessible to specific individuals/groups that may have faced barriers to participation previously.

Barriers to participation could include, but are not limited to, cultural reasons, language, physical constraints, intellectual capability, cognitive constraints, dietary requirements, or other specific needs groups e.g., LGBTQIA+.

Explain the outcomes achieved from making the product/service inclusive or accessible to specific individuals/groups. Include a case study to support your answer.

Refer back to the business' target markets – consider each market and what specific products/services are offered to those guests to accommodate their needs.

IMAGES

Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 4. to support and enhance your response. For example, staff communications posters, flow charts of customer service processes, reception cards encouraging feedback.

6. Responsible Tourism (10 Marks)

A. Demonstrate how the business has made a positive impact through being socially, economically and ethically responsible. 10 marks

This question requires you to consider how the business has been socially, economically and/or ethically responsible and the positive impact this has made on the local and/or broader community.

For example;

- *Social*
 - *What strategies are in place for the business to support the local community e.g., supporting local businesses, product packaging, charitable donations, sponsorship, engagement with community groups, supporting local talent, school education and involvement, work experience, support of community fundraising.*
- *Economic*
 - *What strategies are in place for the business to support the local economy e.g., local purchasing, creating job opportunities, promotion of local businesses, support of community funding initiatives, understanding of spend by the business' customers to the region/community.*
 - *Where able, use metric examples to demonstrate the contribution made. For example, "75% of all our expenses were spent in X region."*
- *Ethical*
 - *How has the business considered its ethical responsibilities throughout its development e.g., through its engagement and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultural or historical representation, animal welfare, restoration.*

For all examples, ensure that you outline how a positive impact has been made.

IMAGES

Attach a minimum of two graphics throughout Question 6. to support and enhance your response. For example, certificates of appreciation from community groups, signage demonstrating environmental sustainability measures, participation in community activities.