

Dialogue

Shoalhaven arts & Lifestyle

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Cultural tourism potential in the Shoalhaven : kick-starting a dialogue

"Cultural tourism is a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological."

'Cultural Tourism as Serious Leisure' by Robert Stebbins 1996

In my opinion, the Shoalhaven needs to have a long hard look as to how to attract cultural tourism. The reasons why cultural tourism is still not strong on our agenda are probably many but a start would probably be a lack of understanding of just what cultural tourism is and what impact it can have. While sports tourism seems to be a strong contender as key events to attract people to our area, our cultural life is what many tourists seek.

There are a number of very good reasons for attracting cultural tourists, first and foremost is that these tourists, during their stay, spend much more than other classes of tourists. There are numerous statistics and papers on this subject, but to take just one example :

Bureau of Tourism Research Occasional Paper 27 Cultural Tourism in Australia states : “ cultural visitors were found to spend approximately 20 per cent more than the average international visitor to Australia. Further, while inbound visitors who sought cultural experiences in Australia represent 60 per cent of all visitors to Australia, they represent 70 per cent of all visitor expenditure.”

This higher spend also applies to domestic tourists, as does the fact that these tourists stay longer, the highest percentage are aged 20 to 50 and 55% female to 45% male. The highest spends are in the areas of accommodation, shopping and food.

While cultural tourism covers many areas I will comment on those which are the main cultural tourism assets in the Shoalhaven.

Arts

- Eight museums and galleries are listed on the Shoalhaven Cultural Trail, the biggest being Bundanon, Lady Denman, Fleet Air Arm and the City Arts Centre. Not listed on the cultural trail but on the visitor centre cultural list are also a number commercial art galleries and exhibitions like the Shoalhaven photographic exhibition at the Information Centre.



All of these are important as cultural resources for visitors already staying in the area and as attractors to small specialist audiences e.g aircraft, surveying specialists etc, none of them individually, or as a whole, are keynote attractions. Bundanon, City Arts Centre and Denman all have the potential for holding keynote exhibitions that would attract thousands of people but, to date, none have, probably because of a lack of resources, opportunity and product. Examples of regional cities that have been successful with exhibitions attracting large numbers is numerous, ranging from Bendigo to Warrnambool.

Figure 1
The Gods had no Mouths by Myangah Pirate

- Public art, strategically placed throughout the region and integrated into the city and landscape, provides a backdrop along with visual surprises, amusement and delight, announces that the area is civilized and cultural. Though this requires commitment, policy and resources from Council, Mayor, Councillors and Staff, from business, artists and the public. At the moment the Council via the Arts Board is developing a policy but in effect public art does not exist.
- Architecture: While the Shoalhaven does have Meroogal, Bundanon and other individual dwellings of interest, plus towns /villages such as Berry, Milton and, say, Nerriga, unless the equivalent of say, Hobart's MONA, is built, architecture is not a keynote attraction, more an interesting trail to lookout for as the tourist travels in the area
- Theatre and dance have potential for local tourism both in the entertainment centre and at other venues in the Shoalhaven but I would suggest that the potential is for being part of a event or Festival rather than hosting a keynote event.



Figure 2 *Too soon Goodbye*
by Elizabeth Faul

Festivals: Are events that have great potential to become keynote attractions either for intrastate, interstate, inbound or all three. The existing Festivals are all reasonably successful in their own way but all would be better if they could attract more resources to put into programming, advertising and staff. *Arts in the Valley* is very successful in what it does and no doubt draws a number of local and intrastate tourists to the area as well as promoting the Shoalhaven or at least Kangaroo Valley as a cultural destination. Apart from the shortage of the usual resources the major limitation is lack of suitable venues for any sort of growth in terms of larger numbers of visitors. *Blessing of the Fleet*, is well known at least locally and intrastate, it draws good numbers and could no doubt grow somewhat. It also provides a multicultural focus.

Escape Artfest is well organized and well known in the local area. It has a good broad combination of art, photography, sculpture, cinema, walks, talks and food events, plus the historic village of Milton; the 2013 festival in particular with its well known speakers at the Long Table lunches. There is considerable scope for this Festival to grow into a keynote event

The new *River Festival*, is an unknown quantity, but judging by the program and a search on the internet for media and / advertorial coverage this first is a local event for families. It does have potential to grow into a keynote event but needs better content, promotion and more imagination. Consultation with the arts would provide the latter e.g. Bundanon and their "Siteworks" programs.

The *Sand Fly Festival* is a great local initiative, a video / cinema festival held at the Huskisson cinema, that has overcome the limitations of a small venue by taking the festival beyond the Shoalhaven and not just to Sydney and the Blue Mountains, it is now international from Bogota to New York and Paris, carrying the Shoalhaven as a cultural venue along for the ride.

The *See Change Festival*, organized by a Jervis Bay & Basin Arts is a local community Festival for the arts, mostly exhibitions by local artists, with some tours and talks. After a slight slowing down in pace, they now have a Contemporary Art Award in place, the first held this year. Given support and encouragement this could be developed into a strong contemporary art festival, a market position not covered elsewhere in the Shoalhaven

Food: Food trails, farmers markets, wineries and great restaurants and cafes underpin a reputation as a great food culture destination. Needless to say these all have to be of the highest quality and packaged as a destination, focused on an event or festival but also as a individual trail that can be followed anytime of the year.

There are a few mentions of Shoalhaven food outlets and suppliers in food guides and internet sites the definitive guide or trail is waiting to be published. Just as there are no Australian Farmers Markets Association registered markets in the Shoalhaven. To be registered, a market has to meet the Association's Charter and fit within its definition:

A Farmers' Market is a predominantly fresh food market that operates regularly within a community, at a focal public location that provides a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell farm-origin and associated value-added processed artisan food products directly to customers.

Shoalhaven wineries are fairly well organised and have an annual tasting weekend and also are represented at various national and state wine shows, but they would benefit from an integrated promotion of the region's food culture.

Restaurants listed in the main food guides are few and far between, even locally known top venues are not that many, not that many really top restaurants are needed, just one or two nationally known are enough along with top quality and good value outlets in the middle range. As for cafes, Shoalhaven should invest in barista training.

There are a number of specialist food suppliers in the region, from Alpaca meat, blueberries and chestnuts to Silver Perch, pork and yabbies, but it is basically only the Greenwell Point oysters that are "celebrated" in articles outside the region.

In effect there is a huge amount of effort required for Shoalhaven to become recognized as a food region that offers more than oysters, starting from encouraging farmers, providing outlets for their unique product, training of staff, encouraging quality, providing incentives to tourists and developing a food festival that encompasses the region. Recognizing that past efforts such as paying an entry fee into a site with thirty stalls, half of them selling chilli-jam, does not constitute a food festival.

Nature and wildlife is one area where the Shoalhaven is particularly blessed and is so broad that justice cannot be done in this short article. While individual areas are promoted, they are mainly the popular sea side locations. A lot more can be done to develop the area as a region of accessible nature, appealing to the growing market of tourism from places such as China and India as well as the "green" tourist from the Americas and Europe. Not forgetting that this also requires the development of the infrastructure such as walking and bicycle tracks and encouragement of appropriate accommodation.

To develop a long term cultural tourism industry in the Shoalhaven would require vision and strong leadership, the development of strategic input from Council, increased investment in infrastructure and resources, policies that encourage the coming together of arts, business, planning, tourism, farming, fishing and environmental interests and overcome silo mentalities. Also factoring in that increased tourism brings with it a negative impact on both



Figure 3 - Snapper soup with native greens, Finger Lime 'caviar', Greenwell Point Oysters & Sussex Inlet school prawns



Figure 4 - Swamp Wallaby in Conjola National Park

the built and the natural environment that needs to be taken into account when developing strategies.

All in all this article only lightly touches the surface of the issues involved but overall cultural tourism is a huge growth area and if the right mix of products can be offered, success provides increased employment, growth of the regional economy, a better environment and a better quality of life.

Further dialogue on this subject is encouraged and contributions should be addressed to the Editor.

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