



Tourism Fact Sheets

Gawler Visitor Information Centre

A service of the 'Town of Gawler'



The Social & Cultural Impacts of Tourism

Tourism is a fast growing industry and a valuable sector, contributing significantly to the Australian economy. Tourism affects the economy and lives of communities and has proven to be a lifesaver for many destinations. There are real and perceived fears that are sometimes attributed to tourism and largely related to poorly managed or mass tourism ventures. As with any economic activity, tourism can have negative impacts on communities. These must be minimised and measured against the benefits that tourism brings.

There is some concern that tourism development may lead to destinations losing their cultural identity by catering for the perceived needs of tourists – particularly from international markets. This is based on the observations of other “destinations” having compromised their sense of identity. However, research shows that most tourists travel, not to visit home away from home, but because they want to experience the personality and true character of Australian towns, communities and attractions. The tourism experience is different to what they can see or do at home and this includes experiencing the real life and lifestyle of the destinations they visit. Sustainable tourism is thoughtful tourism. It is “derived,” not “contrived.”

A community involved in the planning and implementation of tourism has a more positive attitude, is more supportive and has better chance of making a profit than a population passively ruled – or overrun – by tourism. One of the core elements of sustainable tourism development is community development. This is giving the community the process and capacity to make decisions that consider the long-term economy, ecology and equity of all communities.

Tourism benefits

The economic benefits of tourism are well documented. In 1997/98, tourism consumption in Australia totalled \$58.2 billion contributing 4.5% of Australia’s total GDP and 6% of its employment.

Services such as tourism act as an economic “shock absorber” helping to support communities, particularly in rural areas, through economic drought, as services are more recession-proof than goods. The tourism industry is “decentralised” meaning that there is little dependence on urban centres and imports to sustain tourism activity. Sustainable/community based tourism relies on small, locally operated business, local features and products and thrives on entrepreneurial activity from individuals.

Especially in community owned/operated businesses the tourist dollar recirculates adding to the multiplier effect to the local economy. Visitors inject money into the community by paying for products, services and experiences; largely food, accommodation, travel and entertainment. While the greatest economic benefit is gained from overnight visitors, substantial benefit can also be extracted from through traffic.

Tourism provides opportunities for regional development particularly for regional areas undergoing structural change. Being a labour intensive industry, with the right encouragement tourism can deliver great employment and training opportunities particularly for young people.

Development of tourism product does not necessarily require building “tourist things.” Tourism is often structured around existing points of interest, be it natural, heritage, cultural experiences or economic activities. Communities need to overcome the perception that they must “build things” to become a tourist destination. Instead, they must focus on what they do best rather than trying to replicate other “tourist” attractions.

Tourism development that “leverages” existing attributes often brings a range of benefits to host communities. Improved infrastructure (power, water, and telecommunications), access, services (banks, transport) and new investments, all serve to enhance the lifestyles of communities. Community support will follow developments that service the community and provide ongoing benefits.

Tourism can help foster a sense of community pride as visitors choose to visit a location for a reason. However, community pride is generally related to economic prosperity with affluent communities more likely to take pride in their district. Well-presented towns and well-maintained facilities help visitors to feel welcome and can contribute to community pride.

Tourism is an interface for cultural exchange, facilitating the interaction between communities and visitors (domestic and international). Economic benefits aside, outside contact draws attention to the host community. People want to interact with other cultures, learn about traditions and even confront themselves with new perspectives on life and society. It has been said that travel is a means to “*discover those things unknown or forgotten within ourselves.*” Tourism is largely an experience driven industry, and local culture is a unique experience – more so local personality, hospitality and food than “built attractions.” The more one knows and learns about a destination, the more fulfilling the experience will be.

Tourism can be used as a tool for raising awareness. Branding of local product and achievements creates regional identity both nationally and internationally. Tourism can also raise awareness of local issues and needs.

There is a global trend towards investment in interpretation of natural and cultural resources. Attraction to natural and heritage icons often helps fund conservation efforts and provides opportunities for effective management of sensitive and significant areas. However, cultural attractions are not the sole drawcard for visitation but provide one of many experiences.

A growing number of cultural celebrations are emerging highlighting important events and paying homage to ancestry. Cultural events assert cultural identity and help preserve local traditions in younger generations while influencing visitors firsthand. Australia’s primary urban areas are multi-cultural and have developed their own unique cultures, however many regional areas are still heavily influenced by the food and culture of their founders. Tourism allows for local crafts, foods and personalities to be kept alive while raising funds for the community.

Tourism can boost the preservation and transmission of cultural and historical traditions. This often contributes to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, the protection of local heritage, and a revival of indigenous cultures, cultural arts and crafts.

Negative Impacts of Tourism

Many of the fears surrounding tourism are closely associated with uncontrolled, unsustainable and massed tourism growth. Tourism is an industry and is dominated by private enterprise with a purpose of making money by selling experiences. Market led planning can fail to achieve the objectives of sustainable tourism and has a tendency to forget environmental, social and cultural impacts. Like all industries, impacts do occur, but the extent to which impacts are negative can be minimised.

In the extremes, tourism has contributed to a wide range of issues – many of which seem insignificant but detract from the quality of life of local residents. Intrusion on daily life, loss of privacy, and a sense of crowding contribute to ill feelings towards tourism development. IN reality, on average, international visitors represent only 0.2% of South Australia’s population.

Tourism infrastructure is often accused of taking the “best sites” and local secrets seen as being spectacles and losing their destination appeal. Planning authorities should ensure that only sites that are tourism ready should be selected for tourism development, if necessary.

Tourism is often seen as “the solution” to economic hardship rather than a diversification of the local economy. It is easy for small communities to become reliant on tourism drawing labour away from staple industries such as agriculture and manufacture.

Tourism is a service and experience based industry. Tourists often have their own set images about destinations before they arrive. Communities should concentrate on what they do best and must be careful not to manufacture the tourism experience to meet the preconceived touristy ideals. It is up to tourism agencies and retailers to ensure that travellers receive accurate information about destinations.

Many impacts are socio-cultural and an outcome of lack of information, false impressions, misinformation, poor communication and poor knowledge. Negative perceptions and attitudes towards visitors and tourism can also affect tourism/communities. Ill feelings towards tourism, delays/obstructions to tourism product development and lack of council/authority support can prevent tourism from flourishing; perhaps these communities are not ready for tourism. It is easy to blame tourism for any economic, social and environmental problems. Open communication channels, proper consultation, transparency and involvement at the community level at all stages of the planning process can aid in communities taking ownership of their tourism product.

To many people the label tourist has become a negative term; in fact many travellers do not consider themselves tourists. There is a noticeable shift in attitude in both communities and travellers to the concept of “visitor.” The visitor concept reinforces the fact that travellers are guests within a community, and that their stay is a privilege and not a right.

South Australian Community Attitudes Survey

McGregor Tan Research conducted a community attitudes survey in 2001. The results were very positive with the majority of South Australians seeing the value of tourism and related developments. The big challenge is to encourage tourism growth but to ensure that this growth is sustainable.

Most South Australians consider that tourism is a positive impact on their region and can be sustainable in the future. Concerns were only expressed in environmentally sensitive areas.

South Australian residents recognise that tourism can create employment opportunities and can create demand for business. There are high levels of community pride, although there is a perception that tourism places unreasonable demand on communities.

The Town of Gawler Commitment to Sustainable Tourism

The ‘Town of Gawler’ is committed to the sustainable development of tourism services. As a Council, the needs of the community are a priority. Many of these needs are directly relevant to tourism for example roads, footpaths, bridges, walking trails, parks and gardens and public amenities.

The “Gawler Tourism Strategic Plan: 2005-2009” identified heritage and events as the key tourism strengths. The Plan sets out clear steps to grow tourism as an industry in the town by utilising existing infrastructure and selling the personality of the town. Key objectives of this plan were incorporated into the Town Strategic Plan.