

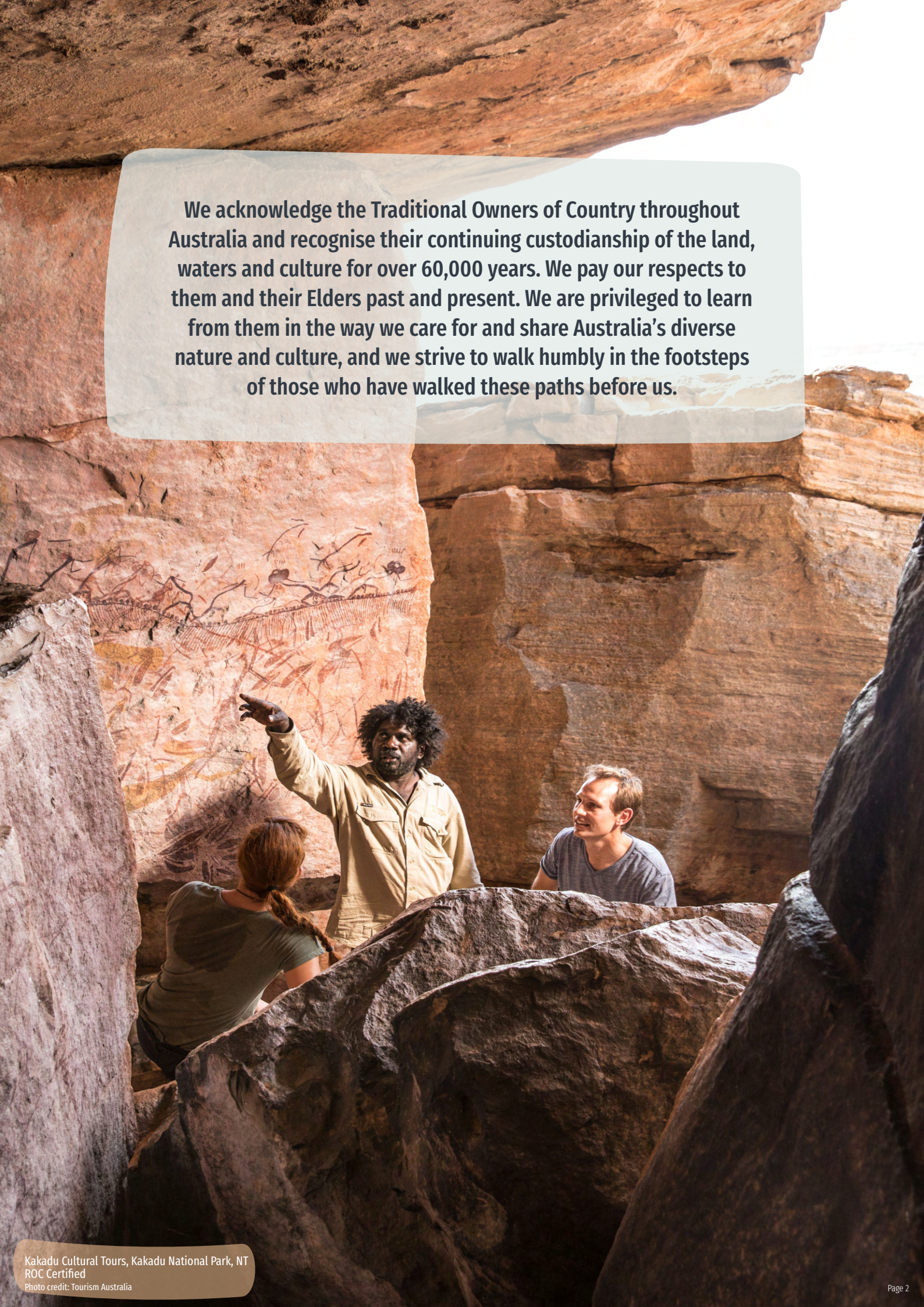


Ecotourism Australia Annual Report 2024/25



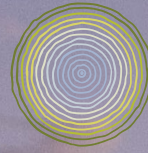
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A photograph of a guide pointing at ancient rock art in a cave, with two tourists listening. The guide is a Black Australian man with curly hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, pointing towards a wall of red rock art. Two tourists, a man and a woman, are looking at the art. The cave walls are made of large, reddish-brown rock blocks. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the rock and the figures of the people.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing custodianship of the land, waters and culture for over 60,000 years. We pay our respects to them and their Elders past and present. We are privileged to learn from them in the way we care for and share Australia's diverse nature and culture, and we strive to walk humbly in the footsteps of those who have walked these paths before us.

Snapshot 2024 – 2025



ECO
TOURISM
australia

2300+ total certified experiences

664 total certified operators

14 total certified destinations

28 new ECO Certified operators

195 new Sustainable Tourism Certified operators

3 new ECO Certified destinations

58 new applicants for ECO Certification

78 new applicants for Sustainable Tourism Certification

101 Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard registrations

11 new Hall of Fame entrants

12 new Green Travel Leaders

1st certified operator in New Zealand



Wooleen Station, Golden Outback, WA
Ecotourism Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia



What We Do

We promote the development of tourism by supporting visitor economy businesses on a pathway to sustainable practices and global best-practice certification for tourism operators and destinations.

Our Purpose

Sustainable, nature-based tourism and ecotourism are growing in demand. Ecotourism is the lighthouse for growing sustainable tourism more broadly. We pave the way for our operators and destinations to stand out with highly appealing products that support their business viability and the social, cultural and environmental pillars in their regions. We partner with operators and destinations so they can be global best-practice leaders; and we enable the broader tourism industry to build a pathway to sustainability.

Our Vision

Leading tourism to be a catalyst for positive change.

Our Mission

As the peak body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism, we connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and global best-practice standards.

Our Values

- 1 Positive**
We are proud of our legacy, we are optimistic, and we continue to influence change as future-focused custodians for eco, regenerative and sustainable tourism.
- 2 Integrity**
We work with trust, transparency and best-practice standards and we help our certified operators and members create better experiences through ethical and sustainable operations and destinations.
- 3 Respect**
We respect and advocate for global best-practice standards and recognition of culture and we champion our operators, our team and our sector.
- 4 Collaborate**
We are one team and value our partnerships that help us connect, champion, inspire and inform our industry.



About **Ecotourism Australia**

Ecotourism Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1991, that promotes and supports Australia's visitor economy through building capacity and actively promoting sustainable tourism operations and systems. We are recognised as the credible, national peak body for eco and sustainable tourism in Australia.

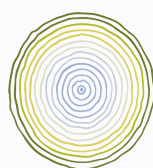
Our foundational program – ECO Certification – was the world's first national ecotourism certification program. We have more than 2300 certified accommodation, tours, attractions and experiences in our ECO, Sustainable Tourism, Climate Action, and Respecting Our Culture Certifications.

In 2018, we launched the ECO Destination program to support regions across Australia with their commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism management practices and there are now 14 certified destinations across Australia.

In 2022, we launched a new Sustainable Tourism program, including a pre-certification benchmarking tool in the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard with founding partner Tourism Australia, to support and recognise the broader tourism industry for their commitment to sustainable tourism; and a new Sustainable Tourism Certification, recognised as global best practice, to support non-nature based tourism operators.

Ecotourism Australia's certification programs are acknowledged and recognised globally. Our [Green Travel Guide](#) is our consumer-facing website that features all our certified operators and destinations across Australia.

Ecotourism Australia has global partnerships, working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), UN Tourism, Green Destinations (an international organisation for sustainable destination development) and the newly launched Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA); and key partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region including with WWF-Australia, Parks Australia and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).



GREEN TRAVEL GUIDE

Our [Green Travel Guide](#) is our consumer-facing website that features every ECO Certified and Sustainable Tourism Certified operator and destination.



Message from the Board Chair

Nat Burke

Ecotourism Australia has continued to build on its strong foundations throughout 2024–2025, as the appetite for eco and sustainable tourism grows steadily across Australia and globally. This momentum reflects a broader shift in the tourism industry; one that prioritises environmental stewardship, cultural respect, and community benefit. We remain focused on delivering our 2024–2028 Corporate Strategy, with a mission to connect, champion, inspire and inform through strategic partnerships and globally recognised best-practice standards.

Our ambition to lead tourism toward a more sustainable future is translating into real outcomes. Through our certification programs, advocacy efforts, and collaborative partnerships, we are helping operators and destinations embed sustainability into their core operations and long-term planning. These efforts are not only strengthening the sector, but ensuring the overall sustainable growth of Australia's visitor economy in line with THRIVE 2030, the national tourism strategy.

As the national peak body for eco and sustainable tourism, this year has seen us deepen our engagement with government, particularly at state and federal levels. We've advocated strongly for the establishment of a national sustainability standard for tourism, which we see as an essential framework to clarify best practice, prevent greenwashing, and provide consistent guidance for operators. We've also called for targeted financial support for small to medium-sized tourism businesses, enabling them to adopt low-emission technologies and other initiatives to support sustainability; and urged for greater investment in the protection of Australia's natural and cultural assets, including increased funding for national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas, and strengthened co-management partnerships with Traditional Owners.

These advocacy efforts reflect our belief that sustainability must be embedded not only in business operations, but in the policies and systems that shape our industry. We are proud to contribute to this national conversation and to represent our certified operators and destinations in forums that influence the future of tourism.

In October 2024, I had the honour of stepping into the role of Chair, following the departure of Dr. Claire Ellis, who served with distinction on the Board for 13 years. I want to extend my sincere thanks to Claire for her leadership and legacy, and to Deputy Chair Alysia Brandenburg and all our Directors' for their ongoing support, insight and commitment.

I also want to acknowledge the exceptional team at Ecotourism Australia, led by Chief Executive Officer Elissa Keenan. Their passion, professionalism and dedication are evident in everything they do, from supporting operators and destinations to achieve certification, to driving innovation and advocacy across the sector. They truly live and breathe our purpose and values.

I look forward to another exciting year ahead and to continuing to support the growth of eco and sustainable tourism across Australia.



Message from the CEO

Elissa Keenan

As I look back over the past year, I'm proud to reflect on the significant progress Ecotourism Australia has made in advancing sustainable tourism across the country. The 2024–2025 period has been defined by growth, collaboration, and a deepening commitment to our vision of leading tourism to be a catalyst for positive change.

This year, we reached new heights with more than 2,300 certified accommodations, tours, and experiences now available across Australia. 28 new operators achieved ECO Certification, while we saw significant growth in our Sustainable Tourism Certification program, with 195 new operators certified. The Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard continued to gain traction, with 101 new registrations from businesses seeking to benchmark and improve their practices. We also welcomed three new certified destinations, with the Scenic Rim, Barrington Coast and Cassowary Coast making a total of 14 ECO Certified destinations across Australia. Our community continues to lead by example, with 11 operators inducted into our Hall of Fame for maintaining certification for over 20 years, taking our Hall of Fame to 71 operators; and 12 operators achieving Green Travel Leader status for 10 years of continuous certification, to a total of 100. These numbers reflect a growing appetite for authenticity, transparency, and increased positive impact across the visitor economy.

On the global stage, Ecotourism Australia stepped into a new leadership role as a founding member of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA), an international not-for-profit association of the most established sustainable tourism certification bodies in the world, brought together to foster a global tourism industry that thrives on sustainability. Ecotourism Australia's leadership with TSCA underscores our strong reputation for delivering global best-practice sustainable tourism certification programs. I am honoured to have been nominated by the TSCA founding members as the inaugural Chair, demonstrating our significant standing within the Alliance and the continued recognition of Australia as a leader in sustainable tourism.

Closer to home, we've continued to work closely with partners including Tourism Australia, Accor Pacific, the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC), Accommodation Australia, the Caravan Industry Association of Australia, Big Red Group, and the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse. These partnerships have expanded the reach of our programs and helped embed sustainability across diverse sectors.

As we look ahead, our focus remains on supporting our operators and destinations to continue to be recognised as global best-practice leaders in eco and sustainable tourism by providing world-class certifications and pathway programs. Ecotourism Australia is proud to work with our certified operators, applicants, corporate, business and individual supporter members; and our corporate and industry partners. We look forward to seeing sustainable tourism and recognition of global best practice standards continue to rise in the years ahead.

Thank you to the voluntary Board of Directors for your continued support and vision for our organisation, and thank you to our certified operators, partners, and supporters for walking this path with us.

Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 Update

Over the past year we have continued to implement our 2024-2028 Corporate Strategy, steering our strategic and operational efforts against six strategic priority areas and goals designed to support eco and sustainable tourism, our operators, destinations and our industry:

1 LEGACY LEADER

Goal: We deliver globally recognised certification and recognition programs to the tourism industry in Australia and across the world.

Status: In 2024-2025, Ecotourism Australia continued to strengthen its position as a global leader in sustainable tourism certification. Our ECO Certification and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs for operators are recognised internationally by organisations such as Booking.com and Travalyst, expanding our reach and impact. Our founding role in establishing the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance reinforces our commitment to transparency, credibility, and continuous improvement in tourism certification standards.

2 STRENGTHENING INDUSTRY

Goal: We strengthen and promote our industry and recognise the contribution of ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators and destinations in our region and globally; we generate value for our certified operators, destinations and members; and we deliver new products and services to support the broader tourism industry.

Status: In 2024-2025, we continued our support for certified operators and destinations by providing certification and pathways programs, with a record 2300 experiences and 14 destinations now certified. We have seen uptake of our Sustainable Tourism Certification program across diverse businesses, including hot air balloon operators, wineries, distilleries and catering companies in addition to expanding our reach with multiple national and international hotel chains and brands now working with Ecotourism Australia. We also celebrated the achievements of our community of certified operators through targeted promotion and recognition, such as our Hall of Fame campaign, which reinforces the value of certification and strengthens the visibility of sustainable tourism across Australia.

3 ADVOCACY

Goal: We provide a credible and respected voice for ecotourism, nature-based tourism, and sustainable tourism across our region; we focus on positive outcomes generated by quality tourism; and play a strategic international role in identifying issues and solutions. We work globally to promote Australia's commitment to sustainable tourism and Ecotourism Australia's leadership in this space.

Status: This year, Ecotourism Australia amplified its voice as a trusted advocate for sustainable tourism, engaging with government bodies, industry stakeholders, and international forums to shape policy and drive positive change. Through submissions to government at both the national and state level, our advocacy efforts focused on key priorities such as the development of a National Sustainability Standard for Tourism, increased support for SMEs adopting low-emission technologies and other initiatives to support sustainable outcomes, and enhanced investment in protected areas. By representing Australia at global events including the Green Destinations Conference in Chile and the APEC Tourism Working Group roundtable in Malaysia, we reinforced our leadership in sustainable tourism policy and practice.

Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 Update

4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Goal: Identify strategic partnerships for collaboration and program delivery, measuring and demonstrating value added to the UN Tourism objectives for sustainable, nature-based and ecotourism.

Status: This year Ecotourism Australia forged a major new partnership as one of nine founding members of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance, a collaborative certification platform for the tourism industry to ensure that travellers make informed choices based on reliable sustainability standards. We also continued to collaborate with both government and industry partners to enable the delivery of certification and pathway programs and other capacity-building initiatives. These partnerships not only extended our reach but also demonstrated measurable value in promoting eco and sustainable tourism more broadly.

We continue to partner with government agencies and industry to develop consistent policies and incentives for best-practice management of national parks and protected areas with our Protected Area Manager members.

5 BRAND AWARENESS

Goal: Through effective communication, marketing and positioning, supported by key industry research and data, increase awareness of Ecotourism Australia, the products, services and programs we deliver, and the value of certification.

Status: Ecotourism Australia increased brand visibility and public engagement in 2024-2025 through utilising our website, social platforms and targeted industry and media outreach to highlight new partnerships, the benefits of certification and the achievements of our certified operators and destinations. Our newsletter, case studies and articles as well as attendance at a range of industry events helped position Ecotourism Australia as the go-to authority for sustainable tourism, driving awareness and uptake of our programs across diverse audiences.

6 SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS

Goal: Ecotourism Australia is a sustainable organisation with prosperous growth opportunities.

Status: Ecotourism Australia continued to build a resilient and future-focused organisation, underpinned by sound governance and strategic growth. In 2024-2025, we invested in operational efficiencies and strengthened internal capabilities to support long-term sustainability. Our commitment to continuous improvement and financial stewardship ensures we remain well-positioned to deliver value to our members and lead the sustainable tourism movement into the future.

Sustainable Travel Trends

[Booking.com's Travel & Sustainability Report 2025](#), drawing on insights from nearly 230,000 travellers across 35 markets, reveals a marked and increasing awareness of both the benefits and potential negative impact of tourism. For the first time, more than half of Australian travellers (51%) and a similar global share (53%) recognised tourism's effects not only on the environment but also on local communities, with many choosing to travel during less crowded periods and visit alternative destinations to reduce their footprint. Reflecting this shift, the share of Australians intending to travel sustainably has jumped from 40% in 2016 to 91% in 2025, closely matched by global growth from 42% to 93%.

Despite challenges such as traffic congestion (40%), rising living costs (34%), littering (32%) and overcrowding (32%), 62% of Australians feel tourism positively impacts their local areas, and 67% express a desire to leave destinations better than they found them. Further, 73% of travellers worldwide want their spending to directly benefit local communities, underscoring the growing importance of community-focused tourism.

At Ecotourism Australia, our certification programs are uniquely positioned to meet these evolving traveller expectations. Ecotourism Australia's certified accommodation operators are recognised on platforms like Booking.com, helping travellers easily identify properties that have been rigorously assessed against the four pillars of sustainability. This third-party verification provides travellers with confidence that their choices are supporting sustainable operators who align with their values – including protecting natural ecosystems, demonstrating a commitment to reducing environmental impact, preserving Indigenous heritage, and ensuring local economic benefits.

This research affirms that sustainable tourism is no longer a niche concern but a mainstream traveller priority. Ecotourism Australia remains committed to supporting this shift by certifying and promoting accommodation that balance ecological stewardship with authentic cultural experiences – meeting the expectations of both Australian travellers and the millions of international visitors seeking meaningful, responsible travel across Australia.



Partnerships

Global



Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance

In 2025, Ecotourism Australia joined other leading travel and tourism certification organisations to launch the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA) — a registered not-for-profit association dedicated to advancing a global tourism industry built on sustainability, transparency, and trust. Our CEO Elissa Keenan was appointed inaugural chair of TSCA.

The formation of the TSCA marks a significant step forward in addressing two of the most pressing issues facing sustainable tourism today:

- The growing demand from businesses for simpler, credible, and internationally recognised certification pathways.
- The urgent need to tackle greenwashing and ensure travellers receive accurate, evidence-based sustainability information.

Under the leadership of the nine founding members, representing the most credible certification labels in the world, the Alliance has introduced a minimum Sustainable Tourism Standard – a baseline framework that all members will align with. It is supported by independent auditing procedures to ensure consistency and credibility across certification programs worldwide.

Collectively, TSCA members currently certify more than 19,000 travel and tourism enterprises, organisations and destinations worldwide. Through this global network, travellers will be empowered to choose certified tourism experiences that meet rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards — knowing these credentials are independently audited and backed by documented evidence.

The TSCA will also play an important role in helping tourism businesses meet new regulatory requirements, including the EU Empowering Consumers Directive, aimed at eradicating misleading environmental claims. This work will involve aligning certification systems, refining reporting standards, and streamlining compliance processes to support businesses in both local and global markets.

For Ecotourism Australia, participation in the TSCA represents both a continuation of our long-standing commitment to credible, independent certification, and a leap forward in shaping the future of sustainable tourism at an international level.



Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance Founding Members
Photo credit: Green Globe Certification

Image (from left) Billy Bishop - Travelife for Accommodation; Daniel Schaffer - FEE; Patricio Azcárate Díaz de Losada - Biosphere; Instituto de Turismo Responsable; Elissa Keenan - Ecotourism Australia; Naut Kusters - Travelife for Tour Operators; Birte Pelayo - Green Globe Certification; Gary Graham - Green Key Global; Albert Salman - Good Travel Seat; Marco Giraldo - Tourcert.



UN Tourism/UNESCO

At the heart of global sustainable tourism innovation, Ecotourism Australia works with international organisations, including the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) and UNESCO, under formal Memoranda of Understanding and through the work of the TSCA. International partnerships not only amplify Australia's voice in worldwide discussions but also bring leading global practices and insights to our domestic tourism operators.



Travelife

Through alliances with international leaders such as Travelife, Ecotourism Australia delivers certification programs that meet the highest global benchmarks. This commitment ensures Australian tourism operators benefit from best-practice standards and supports the advancement of certification systems across the world.



Green Destinations

We continued to deliver our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification programs in partnership with Green Destinations, an international leader in destination sustainability certification. This year our CEO, Elissa Keenan, was invited to travel to the Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica region to deliver the international keynote address on how Ecotourism Australia's Destination Certification program, with the support of WWF-Australia, helped regions build back better following the devastating Black Summer bushfires. Our participation and engagement at these forums ensures our destination certification programs continue to meet best-practice standards and extends our global reach. With the support of Green Destinations, there are 14 destinations now certified across Australia. All destinations in our programs are eligible for free nomination in the annual Top 100 Stories competition, hosted by Green Destinations and showcased on the world stage at ITB Berlin each March. This year, the Central Coast and the Barrington Coast were both recognised for their outstanding approach to sustainable destination management in these awards.

National

TOURISM AUSTRALIA



Tourism Australia

This year Ecotourism Australia and Tourism Australia further deepened our strategic collaboration, driving widespread adoption and completion of the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard across the tourism sector. Since the program's introduction in 2022, more than 600 tourism operators have embarked on their sustainability journey using the Scorecard. To support participants, Ecotourism Australia hosted a series of online webinars and in-person workshops at both national and state levels, including events such as the National Caravan Industry Association of Australia conference. This year also saw the development of two promotional videos to promote the uptake and completion of the Scorecard by businesses. The partnership has been vital in embedding sustainability practices across diverse industry segments and has expanded the Scorecard's reach to all Australian states. This ongoing alliance reinforces a shared commitment to developing a sustainable tourism industry that aligns with traveller values and expectations.



Australian Tourism Export Council

ATEC is the only national body that connects and grows the commercial networks of members engaged in the international tourism industry. ATEC brings together the industry's buyers and sellers via commercially focused industry events and deliver structured development pathways which grow Australia's offering of internationally-ready, distribution-ready, trade-ready products, including through the annual Meeting Place event, which Ecotourism Australia is pleased to attend. ATEC's Trade Ready Check List includes Ecotourism Australia's certifications as a benchmark of best practice for operators targeting international visitors.



Australian Tourism Data Warehouse

Ecotourism Australia and Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) continue to ensure leading ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified businesses are showcased through the ATDW platform and various visitor facing websites. ATDW is currently developing a new platform and when live, this will include links for Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard outcomes. Highlighting operators with the highest scores is a key priority for ATDW. The inclusion of scorecard status on operators' listings enables them to demonstrate their commitment to starting their sustainability journey.



Caravan Industry Association of Australia

Representing caravan parks, RV parks and camping sites across Australia, the Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA) first partnered with Ecotourism Australia in 2023 to enhance sustainability within the caravanning sector. Now in its second year, our partnership continues to grow. This year, the Ecotourism Australia team once again delivered an interactive workshop at the annual CIAA conference on the Gold Coast, contributed sustainability content for CIAA newsletters, and conducted dozens of one-on-one coaching sessions with individual parks as they embarked on their certification journey.

Accommodation Australia



In September 2023, Ecotourism Australia joined forces with Accommodation Australia to promote sustainability within the accommodation sector and recognise properties progressing on their sustainable tourism journeys. As the foremost industry body representing over 80 per cent of Australia's accommodation providers, Accommodation Australia plays a critical role in encouraging the uptake of sustainable practices. Now in its second year, this partnership reflects a mutual dedication to advancing sustainability across the sector and helping the accommodation industry align with international best-practice standards.

WWF - Australia



PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY
**Australian Wildlife and
Nature Recovery Fund**

As the leading authority on eco and sustainable tourism, Ecotourism Australia plays a vital role in fostering strong partnerships with organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia, one of Australia's most trusted conservation organisations. For more than 40 years, WWF-Australia has worked to protect threatened species and habitats, meet the challenge of climate change, and build a world where people live in harmony with nature. Ecotourism Australia's partnership with WWF-Australia has seen 7 destinations supported to achieve certification, with the Scenic Rim in Queensland and the Barrington Coast in New South Wales obtaining certification in 2025.

Accor Australia Pacific



This year saw Accor make significant progress towards their goal of achieving 100% global standard certification across their network by 2026, with 190 hotels across its brands including Pullman, Peppers, Sofitel, Mantra, Novotel, Mercure and Ibis having earned Sustainable Tourism Certification, representing more than 50% of Accor's network in the Australia-Pacific region. This collaboration underscores the importance of our shared mission to elevate sustainable practices and set global standards for sustainable tourism.

"Sustainable Tourism Certification not only enhances the competitiveness and attractiveness of our hotels but also boosts operational excellence and revenue generation."

– Adrian Williams, Chief Operating Officer, Accor Asia-Pacific



Pullman Bunker Bay Resort, Bunker Bay, WA
Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: Pullman Bunker Bay Resort



Bloodwood Cabin, Rawbelle, QLD
Ecotourism Certified
Photo credit: Bloodwood Cabin

Big Red Group



In 2025, Big Red Group continue to strengthen its commitment to sustainability by partnering with Ecotourism Australia to support the advancement of environmentally responsible tourism. This collaboration focused on promoting the ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certifications, alongside the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard – key tools designed to guide and recognise operators on their sustainability journey.

As a Key Enablement Partner, Big Red Group played a pivotal role in driving adoption of these initiatives across its platform through its 'Responsible Range' of experiences on their Red Balloon platform and 'Low Footprint Adventures' on Adrenaline.com. Experiences providers with Ecotourism Australia certification can be featured in these ranges.

University of Queensland



The partnership between Ecotourism Australia and the University of Queensland (UQ) fosters valuable knowledge exchange and builds a strong research foundation to address current tourism and sustainability challenges. This year, our destination certification program plays a central role in a PhD research project exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by certified destinations at the 'post-certification' stage. We also worked closely with UQ on the Parks Australia funded Indian Ocean Territories Marine Parks Grant, which aimed to foster sustainable tourism in the Indian Ocean Territories.

Shiji ReviewPro



Ecotourism Australia partners with Shiji ReviewPro to provide visitor satisfaction monitoring functionality to all ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certified operators, which are displayed on the Green Travel Guide. The tool aggregates more than 100 million online reviews from 140+ online travel agencies (OTAs) and review sites in more than 45 languages with daily content updates.

This year, our operators achieved an average Global Review Score of 90.2% - demonstrating an exceptionally high level of customer satisfaction.

Partnerships with Protected Area Managers (PAMs)

Ecotourism Australia maintains robust and strategic collaborations with Protected Area Managers (PAMs) across every state and territory to uphold high standards of sustainable tourism within Australia's national parks and marine reserves. Our key partners include:

- Parks Australia
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (Western Australia)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia
- Parks Victoria
- Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Through these partnerships, ECO Certified operators are recognised with concrete benefits, such as extended permit durations or reduced licence fees, tailored to state-specific guidelines.

Tourism and Parks Agencies Forum (TAPAF)

A cornerstone of our national-level engagement, Ecotourism Australia continues to provide secretariat services to the Tourism and Parks Agencies Forum (TAPAF). This quarterly forum brings together state tourism organisations and both state and federal parks agencies to align approaches, share insights, and collectively promote responsible tourism practices across Australia's protected areas.

Great Barrier Reef – High Standard Tourism Operators

In collaboration with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Ecotourism Australia champions "High Standard Tourism Operators" - those holding recognised global-standard certifications and embedding best-practice sustainable tourism principles. These operators are essential stewards of the Reef, with benefits including extended permits of up to 20 years, as well as access to professional development opportunities such as the Master Reef Guide program and the Tourism Industry Activation and Reef Protection Initiative (TRIPI), which supports operators in enhancing reef stewardship through targeted funding, training, and conservation partnerships.



Calypso Reef Cruises, Port Douglas, QLD
Advanced Ecotourism Certified, Climate Action and 2025 Hall of Fame entrant
Photo credit: Tourism Australia



Capital Hill, Canberra, ACT
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Advocacy

As the national peak body for eco and sustainable tourism, Ecotourism Australia is committed to advocating for a more responsible tourism sector at all levels of government and across industry. Our advocacy work sees us representing the interests of sustainable tourism practitioners across a range of forums, working groups, and associations, ensuring we remain at the forefront of developing trends, consumer preferences and regulations.

Our participation in these events is crucial in elevating the voices of our members and the broader sustainable tourism industry. These platforms have allowed us to address key sector issues, raise awareness and enhance sustainability across the visitor economy. This year, we continued to build on our advocacy efforts, with highlights including a submission to both the government and opposition prior to the federal election; to the Federal Budget in February; and to the Queensland Government's Destination 2045 strategy in May.

At a national and state level, our advocacy centred on the following **core policy recommendations**:

To **establish a National Sustainability Standard for Tourism** to eliminate confusion around what best practice looks like, prevent greenwashing, and offer clearer guidance for tourism operators.

To **provide small to medium tourism businesses with financial support** to help drive uptake of sustainable practices and technologies, especially those that reduce carbon emissions.

To **further invest in the protection of our natural and cultural assets** through increased funding for national parks, Indigenous Protected Areas, and to strengthen co-management partnerships with Traditional Owners to safeguard Australia's natural and cultural heritage.

To **create a national High Standard Tour Operator program** across national parks and protected areas to reward certified operators with incentives such as longer licences and streamline compliance processes across protected areas.

To **establish a resilience fund for tourism operators** impacted by climate-related disasters, ensuring rapid recovery, sustainable rebuilding, and long-term resilience planning.

To **endorse credible certification programs** to help operators demonstrate their sustainability efforts, improve resilience, and reduce insurance costs.

International

Green Destinations, Chile

In December 2024, Ecotourism Australia was pleased to be represented at the Green Destinations Global Conference in Punta Arenas, Chilean Patagonia, an iconic setting for a globally significant event in sustainable tourism.

The conference brought together destinations from around the world to share insights and innovations across key sustainability themes, including:

- Addressing over-tourism and supporting regional areas that benefit from increased visitation.
- Emphasising the shift from sustainable tourism as a niche offering to an integral component of all tourism experiences.
- The growing adoption of visitor codes of conduct to promote responsible travel behaviour and climate action.
- The increasing demand for First Nations tourism experiences, with a strong focus on ensuring cultural stories are led and shared by First Nations peoples.
- Harnessing sustainable tourism as a force for conservation, community resilience, and positive transformation.

We were invited to deliver a keynote presentation, providing an opportunity to highlight Australia's pioneering leadership in ecotourism. Our presentation featured a case study focused on our collaboration with WWF-Australia to support regional recovery following the Black Summer bushfires. This initiative, aimed at helping destinations rebuild more sustainably and resiliently, received overwhelmingly positive feedback from delegates and was recognised as an inspiring example of global best practice.



CEO, Elissa Keenan, speaking at Green Destinations Conference
Photo credit: Green Destinations

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Working Group Roundtable, Malaysia

Ecotourism Australia was honoured to represent Australia at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Working Group roundtable in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, following an invitation from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade. The roundtable brought together leading sustainable tourism practitioners and policymakers from across the region to explore best-practice approaches to building tourism capacity in three critical areas: sustainability, women's empowerment, and technology adoption. This forum provided a valuable opportunity for Ecotourism Australia to share insights from our certified operators and destinations, demonstrating how tourism can be a powerful force for good by supporting local communities and economies, fostering environmental education and awareness, and celebrating cultural diversity. Our participation reinforced the importance of collaborative, region-wide efforts to embed sustainability into tourism policy and practice. The training module being developed will be released at an APEC forum in 2026.

National



Australian Government

Australian Trade and Investment Commission



Australian Government - Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)

This year, we continued to work closely with the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) including by attending their quarterly Visitor Economy Stakeholder Forums and Ministerial Roundtables. Ecotourism Australia is proud to be among approximately 20 organisations who are regularly invited to attend the Forum, where we have the opportunity to raise key issues affecting the sector and provide relevant updates on developments within the sustainable tourism space.

Ecotourism Australia is featured within THRIVE 2030, the national strategy for the visitor economy, which states a vision for Australia's visitor economy to provide world-leading services and visitor experiences to consumers, while delivering significant and sustainable benefits to the Australian community. Ecotourism Australia supports several THRIVE 2030 priorities, including improving business capability and growing unique and high-quality products, including First Nations experiences. We continue to work closely with Austrade as they finalise the next action plan for THRIVE 2030, as the strategy moves into the Consolidation phase for 2025 – 2027.

State



Queensland Government – Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI)

The Queensland Government released the new Destination 2045 strategy in June 2025, listing ecotourism as one of 6 key priorities. Ecotourism Australia participated in several consultations with the Queensland Government prior to the strategy's release and is continuing to engage with the Government on how we can ensure new ecotourism product is developed responsibly.

Local

City of Sydney - Sustainable Destinations Partnership

Ecotourism Australia is an associate member of the Sustainable Destination Partnership, a collaboration of accommodation providers, cultural institutions, entertainment venues and industry groups working together to make Sydney a sustainable destination. In 2024, our partnership with hotel brands such as Accor saw 9 hotels certified in Sydney, 15 per cent of the 60 ratings and certifications achieved overall. Increasing the number of businesses with third-party environmental certifications such as Ecotourism Australia's is a key goal of the Partnership, with the number of certified properties contributing directly to Sydney's top 10 ranking in the Global Destination Sustainability Index.

Ecotourism Australia also participated in the following initiatives, associations and alliances this year, providing our feedback and insights from a sustainable tourism perspective:

- Climate Ready Initiative
- Murray Darling Basin Authority Peaks Association
- Sustainable Ocean Plan
- Queensland Tourism and Conservation Alliance
- QTIC Associations Council

Grants

Australian Government



Austrade – Sustainability Measurement Pilot for Business Events

Ecotourism Australia received funding from the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) to conduct a Sustainability Measurement Pilot project from July 2024 through to June 2025. The pilot, which used Climate Zero software, aimed to assist small and medium businesses with a business events focus in measuring their carbon emissions and improving climate literacy. Over the 12-month period, 25 businesses participated, with 68% actively reporting emissions data. The pilot highlighted key challenges such as time constraints, knowledge gaps, and the complexity of Scope 3 emissions reporting. Despite these barriers, participants demonstrated significant improvements in climate change understanding, emissions tracking, and commitment to sustainability practices. Our recommendations to Austrade for future action included subsidising training and tools, integrating emissions reporting into regulatory frameworks, and encouraging globally recognised sustainability certifications to support SMEs in meeting national and global climate goals.



Parks Australia - Indian Ocean Territories Marine Parks Grant

In partnership with the University of Queensland and the Christmas Island Tourism Association, Ecotourism Australia contributed to the Parks Australia-funded project aimed at fostering sustainable tourism in the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT). Undertaken between 2023 to 2025, the initiative supported local businesses through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, coaching, and a sustainable tourism toolkit. The project empowered operators to adopt eco-friendly practices, with IOT businesses outperforming national averages in sustainability metrics. Additionally, research into Christmas Island residents' preferences informed recommendations for tourism development aligned with community needs and environmental conservation. This collaborative effort has laid the foundation for a sustainable tourism future, balancing economic growth with the protection of the region's unique natural and cultural heritage.

Indian Ocean Experiences, Christmas Island
Credit: Christmas Cocos Islands Tourism Association

State and Regional Collaboration

June 2025 saw the completion of two major government grant programs in Queensland and New South Wales to assist operators undertake ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification with Ecotourism Australia, or to commence their journey through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, with excellent results.



Sydney Harbour, Sydney, NSW
Credit: Tourism Australia

New South Wales - Destination NSW

Ecotourism Australia continued to partner with Destination NSW to provide NSW visitor economy businesses with free access to the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard over a two-year period commencing in June 2023.

Concluding in June 2025, the program saw strong engagement, with majority of participants being either accommodation providers or attractions. The average score across these businesses was 70%, indicating a solid level of sustainability know-how.

We are proud to work closely with Destination NSW to support visitor economy businesses on their sustainability journey.



Queensland - Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (formerly Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport)

Launched in February 2024, the Queensland Government's \$2 million Tourism Business Capability Subsidy was designed to boost the growth of Queensland's tourism industry and support targeted business capability development to help businesses thrive, deliver exceptional experiences and exceed visitor expectations. The Subsidy supported sole traders, micro, small and medium size (0-199 employees) tourism and event businesses to undertake targeted tourism certification, accreditation and/or training programs from a select number of pre-identified programs, including Ecotourism Australia's, to meet their business needs.



**Queensland
Government**

This program has now concluded with a total of 100 businesses successfully applying for either our Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, Sustainable Tourism or ECO Certification programs.

Thank you to the Queensland Government for your commitment to supporting tourism operators improve their sustainability practices.



Certification and Pathway Program Highlights

Our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification and Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard programs continue to go from strength to strength through dynamic partnerships with government and industry, ongoing advocacy, and a changing consumer landscape that has seen a renewed focus on the importance of globally recognised, third-party verified certification.

Following a robust selection process, both our ECO and Sustainable Tourism programs continue to be recognised by global organisations such as Booking.com, Google, and Travalyst. This means that accommodation providers with Ecotourism Australia certification are clearly labelled, making it easy for responsible travellers to find these properties.

ECO Certification



Our flagship ECO Certification program, the world's first national ecotourism certification, continues to set the benchmark in nature-based tourism, with highlights including:

- 58 new applicants
- 28 new certified operators, a 40% increase from 2023-2024.

Sustainable Tourism Certification



Our Sustainable Tourism Certification program, established in 2022 is supporting non-nature based tourism operators across the visitor economy achieve global best practice, with highlights including:

- 78 new applicants
- 195 new certified operators, a significant increase, largely due to our partnership with Accor who are working towards certifying all their hotels by 2026 and pleasingly new major hotel and accommodation chains including YHA, Marriott and EVT now choosing Ecotourism Australia's certification programs.

Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard



Our pathway program, the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, assists operators at the start of their sustainability journey. The Scorecard showcases businesses' strengths and provides insights into areas where improvements can be made, offering transparency and guidance to enhance sustainable practices. To date, a total of 634 businesses have registered for the Scorecard, with 101 registrations this year.



First **Hotel Chain** Certifications

This year, Ecotourism Australia marked significant milestones with three of Australia's leading hotel chains embarking on their sustainability journeys, with one or more of their properties achieving Sustainable Tourism Certification. Selected properties across YHA Australia, Marriott Hotels and EVT Hotels and Resorts successfully met over 200 rigorous criteria encompassing environmental, socio-economic, cultural and sustainable management practices. By achieving certification, these hotels are now able to display their achievement on major booking platforms, while also reinforcing their sustained leadership and commitment to sustainable tourism practices.

YHA Australia



In December, YHA Australia announced that YHA Sydney Harbour, YHA Port Elliot Beach House and YHA Adelaide Central had achieved Sustainable Tourism Certification through a range of initiatives demonstrating environmental stewardship and community engagement. YHA Sydney Harbour operates the Big Dig Archaeology Education Centre, providing school groups with hands-on learning experiences about Australia's largest urban archaeological site. YHA Port Elliot Beach House maintains a vegetable garden, participates in community programs, and promotes waste reduction and energy efficiency. YHA Adelaide Central hosts initiatives such as Feel Good Fridays, where proceeds from community-focused events support local charities. Together, these programs provide eco-conscious travellers with meaningful and responsible experiences. Ecotourism Australia will continue to support YHA as it works to certify all 19 of their properties in the coming years, further reinforcing its leadership in sustainable accommodation.

Achieving Ecotourism Australia's Sustainable Tourism Certification underscores our commitment to environmental stewardship and community support. This certification not only differentiates us in a competitive market but also enhances our operational efficiency. By adopting sustainable practices, we are proud to offer eco-conscious travellers a responsible and enriching stay, while contributing positively to local economies and cultural preservation. Our inclusion in the Green Travel Guide further amplifies our visibility and reputation as a leader in sustainable accommodation. Our partnership with Ecotourism Australia is a win-win situation with sustainable travel the big winner.

– Paul McGrath, Chief Operating Officer, YHA Australia



Sydney Harbour Marriott Hotel at Circular Quay, Sydney, NSW
Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: Sydney Harbour Marriott Hotel at Circular Quay

Marriott Hotels



Sydney Harbour Marriott Hotel at Circular Quay became the first Marriott property in Australia to achieve Sustainable Tourism Certification. Guided by Marriott's Serve 360 platform, the hotel has implemented a range of sustainability initiatives, including energy-efficient lighting and HVAC systems, water-saving measures, comprehensive waste management and sustainable sourcing of locally produced and ethically sourced food. Additionally, its Connect Responsibly program ensures that meetings and events meet strict sustainability standards. These efforts reduce the hotel's environmental footprint, support community engagement and demonstrate leadership in sustainable tourism, with Ecotourism Australia continuing to support Marriott in certifying additional properties nationwide.

EVT Hotels and Resorts



EVT Hotels and Resorts reached their own sustainability milestone in March 2025, with QT Gold Coast and Rydges Latimer Christchurch achieving Sustainable Tourism Certification. Rydges Latimer Christchurch is the first New Zealand property to receive this recognition, marking an important expansion of Ecotourism Australia's presence in the Pacific. The hotel has implemented a comprehensive range of initiatives, including energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction and responsible sourcing of materials and food, while also engaging with the local community through educational programs and partnerships with local suppliers. In Australia, QT Gold Coast launched the A Brighter Tomorrow program, which focuses on eliminating single-use plastics, installing energy-efficient systems, sourcing sustainable ingredients for dining, implementing water-saving measures and supporting community engagement projects. Collectively, these initiatives reflect EVT's commitment to internationally recognised sustainability standards, with Ecotourism Australia continuing to support the group as it expands its sustainability programs across Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.



Christchurch, New Zealand
Photo credit: ChristchurchNZ Toolkit



'First' Operators

This year we were delighted to certify a range of operators who were the 'first of their kind' in Ecotourism Australia's history. As time goes on, more diverse businesses are embracing sustainability, proving it is no longer just the domain of hotels and traditional tour operators. This year's trailblazers included breweries, caterers, marinas and hot air balloon operators – each championing a new era of sustainable tourism.

Firescreek Botanical Winery, NSW

First Winery

This year, Firescreek Botanical Winery led the way as the first winery experience in Australia to gain ECO Certification. Located on the Central Coast of New South Wales, this regenerative organic farm produces award-winning wines from over 40 varieties of organically grown fruits and flowers, all cultivated using permaculture principles. By avoiding synthetic chemicals, enhancing soil health, conserving water and supporting local wildlife, Firescreek has built a thriving, sustainable ecosystem. Visitors can enjoy guided tours that not only showcase the winery's unique botanical creations but also inspire a deeper appreciation for sustainable farming and organic agriculture.

Coral Bay Marina, QLD

First Marina

Coral Sea Marina has made history as the first marina in Australia to achieve Sustainable Tourism Certification. Located at the gateway to the World-Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef, this award-winning destination marina boasts 520 wet berths, two vibrant marina villages and is home to 80% of the Whitsundays' on-water tourism experiences. Renowned for its environmental leadership, Coral Sea Marina integrates sustainability into every aspect of its operations – from eco-education through the Coral Sea Academy and citizen science programs to cultural collaborations with the Birri-Gubba Nation. By combining premium facilities with a strong commitment to protecting the region's natural and cultural heritage, Coral Sea Marina sets a new benchmark for sustainable tourism in Australia's marine industry.



Sunny Rays Catering, Mountain Creek, QLD
Sustainable Tourism Certified
Credit: Sunny Rays Catering

Sunny Rays, QLD

First Catering Company

Sunny Rays Catering became the first catering and events company to achieve Sustainable Tourism Certification. Based on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, this two-person team is proving that small businesses can make a big impact in sustainability. From partnering with producers like Maleny Dairies and Mooloolaba Fisheries to offering seasonal Bush Tucker menus, measuring and reducing emissions with portable solar panels, and prioritising reusable crockery over single-use packaging, Sunny Rays is redefining what it means to cater responsibly. With their blend of creativity, flavour and environmental care, they're setting a delicious new standard for eco-friendly events.

Balloon Aloft, NSW

First Hot Air Balloon Company

Balloon Aloft has made history as Australia's first tourism operator to progress through the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard and achieve Ecotourism Australia's globally recognised Sustainable Tourism Certification. Family-owned and operating in breathtaking locations such as the Hunter Valley in New South Wales and Burketown in outback Queensland, Balloon Aloft delivers unforgettable and accessible ballooning adventures with sustainability at their core. Their commitment spans from partnering with Greenfleet to offset the carbon footprint of every ticket sold, to raising awareness for marine conservation through their Sea Shepherd balloon. After receiving an impressive score, the team took the next step to meet global best-practice standards and undertake certification – ensuring their operations protect the environment, support local communities and inspire passengers to appreciate and preserve Australia's natural beauty.



Balloon Aloft, Hunter Valley, NSW
Sustainable Tourism Certified
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Connecting with Industry

Throughout the year, Ecotourism Australia continued to collaborate closely with the tourism industry to promote and strengthen sustainable practices. From major summits to targeted workshops and conferences, we remained focused on advancing the sustainability agenda across the sector. Some of the key events we contributed to this year include:

Australian Tourism Exchange, Brisbane

In May, Ecotourism Australia took part in ATE25 in Brisbane, where we promoted our ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification programs to a broad cross-section of the tourism sector. With international buyers increasingly seeking evidence of responsible environmental and social practices, interest in credible sustainability certification continues to grow.

Across four days, our team engaged in more than 60 meetings with businesses, destinations, and industry partners, and reconnected with many certified operators championing positive change. The strong engagement throughout ATE25 sets the tone for continued collaboration—and an even bigger presence at ATE26 in Adelaide/Tarntanya. We thank Tourism Australia for hosting another exceptional event.



Image: Pictured left to right, Myvawny Costelloe, Martin Lopez Behar, Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia), Luis Ponce and Shea Wittig at ATE25 in Brisbane, QLD.



Image: Shea Wittig at Meeting Place 2024 in Gold Coast, QLD.

Meeting Place, Gold Coast

At Meeting Place 2024, hosted by the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) on the Gold Coast, Ecotourism Australia joined over 600 tourism professionals, including international travel buyers and decision-makers, for three days of strategic discussion and industry connection. Attending on behalf of the organisation were CEO Elissa Keenan, Sustainable and Ecotourism Specialist Shea Wittig, and Head of Sustainability and Business Operations Nadine Schramm.

Nadine featured on a panel exploring how businesses can prepare for global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) regulations — sharing practical insights on aligning operations with sustainability goals, managing risk, and embedding long-term success.

NoVacancy, Sydney

In September, CEO Elissa Keenan and Head of Sustainability and Business Operations Nadine Schramm represented Ecotourism Australia at the NoVacancy Hotel + Accommodation Industry Expo at the Sydney Convention Centre. The event offered a great opportunity to connect with hotel and accommodation providers, discussing how our programs can support and strengthen their sustainability pathways.

Elissa also joined a panel titled *What Ecotourism Can Teach Us About Enhancing Guest Experience and Sustainability*, contributing to a dynamic conversation on how ecotourism principles can shape the future of sustainable hospitality.

Caravan Industry National Conference, Gold Coast

Ecotourism Australia was proud to lead a sustainability workshop at the Caravan Industry Association of Australia's 2025 National Conference. The session, conducted by Eco and Sustainable Tourism Specialist Martin Lopez Behar and supported by Program Coordinator Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia), explored the importance of calculating carbon footprints as part of a broader sustainability approach built on the four key pillars of environmental, socio-economic, cultural, and management impacts. The high level of engagement and thoughtful discussion reflected a strong industry-wide commitment to driving meaningful change.



Image: Martin Lopez Behar and Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia) at the Caravan Industry National Conference, Gold Coast, QLD.

Sydney Climate Action Week

During Sydney Climate Action Week, we were proud to contribute to the first-ever global panel focused on tourism emissions, an urgent and long-overdue conversation, given the sector's 8.8% share of global emissions. We used the opportunity to reinforce the importance of certified sustainability practices and supply chain engagement. We were especially pleased to highlight Ecotourism Australia's internationally recognised certification standards, which are trusted by global platforms like Booking.com and help position Australian operators as leaders in low-emissions travel.

SXSW, Sydney

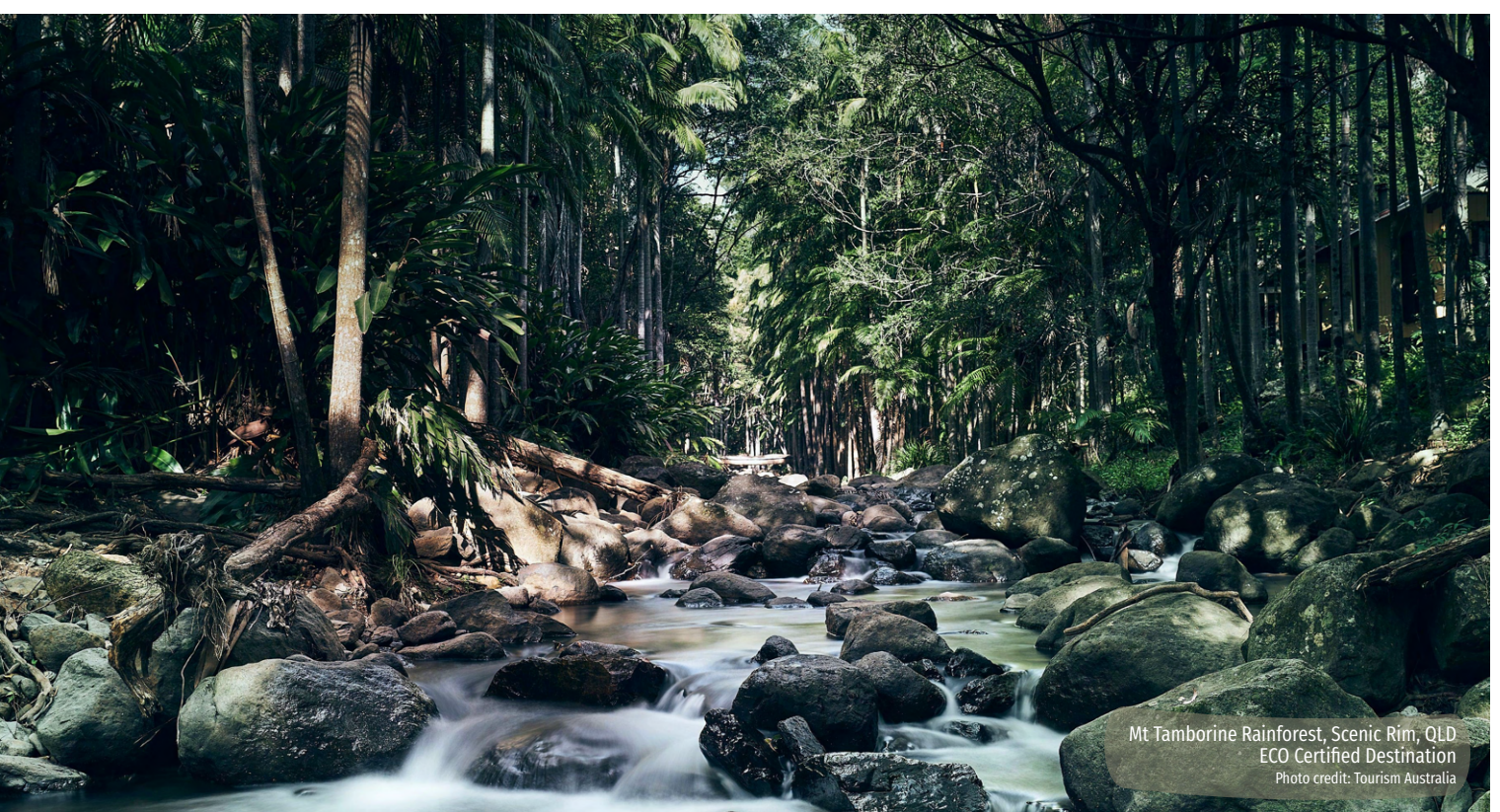
Ecotourism Australia was invited to join a dynamic panel discussion titled "A Sustainable Future for Travel: From Crisis to Transformation." Led by Intrepid Travel's Leigh Barnes, the session focused on how the industry can become more sustainable and provide greater benefits for local communities and the planet. A global conference that originated in Austin, Texas, SXSW showcases the convergence of tech, film, music, education, and culture. It was great to have sustainable travel included as a discussion topic, demonstrating the international interest in the future of tourism.

Our team were pleased to attend a range of other industry events at the international, national, state and regional level this year. This active engagement with our industry is critical to promote our sustainable tourism agenda and support the growth of the visitor economy. Events and forums this year included:

- Destination Australia and Regional Tourism Organisation Forum
- Australian Regional Tourism Convention
- VTIC Vision Summit
- Tourism Mid West Conference
- THRIVE 2030 consultations
- Destination 2045 consultations
- City of Melbourne Hotel Masterclass

Destinations

Ecotourism Australia welcomed three new destinations to our certified cohort this year, bringing the total number of Certified Destinations to 14. We provide two certification programs for destinations, ensuring that certified destinations are supported by a robust, well-managed commitment to continuous improvement of sustainable practices and offer high-quality tourism experiences within the region. Our Destination Certification programs are based on international best practice standards, using the international Green Destinations framework.



Scenic Rim, QLD

Newly Certified

The Scenic Rim officially became the first destination in 2025 to achieve ECO Destination Certification. This achievement was led by Scenic Rim Regional Council in close partnership with local tourism operators and stakeholders, with vital support from the Queensland Government and WWF-Australia's Australian Wildlife and Nature Recovery Fund, part of a post-Black Summer bushfire recovery partnership.

Located just an hour from Brisbane and the Gold Coast, the Scenic Rim is celebrated for its UNESCO World Heritage Gondwana rainforests, dramatic landscapes, 6 national parks, award-winning local produce and warm country hospitality. ECO Certification positions the region to capitalise on the growing demand for nature-based tourism, fostering local jobs and enhancing community services and facilities – all while setting the stage to maximise tourism opportunities ahead of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



Image credit: Myv Costelloe (left) at the Barrington Coast ECO Destination announcement, NSW.

Barrington Coast, NSW

Newly Certified

The Barrington Coast proudly became the 13th destination to receive ECO Destination Certification, joining 5 certified destinations in New South Wales. Located 3 hours north of Sydney, the region is renowned for its World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests and the internationally acclaimed Myall Lakes Ramsar wetland. Drawing on this extraordinary heritage, MidCoast Council have driven a comprehensive program of sustainability initiatives, from adopting a 2040 Climate Action Strategy and installing over 200kW of solar panels across public buildings, to running water resilience workshops and introducing digital visitor guides to reduce waste.

Alongside ECO Destination Certification, the Barrington Coast has supported local operators to gain their own certifications or complete the Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, strengthening the region's sustainable tourism network. The certification program was also supported by WWF-Australia.



Image credit: Elissa Keenan at the Cassowary Coast ECO Destination Announcement, QLD.

Cassowary Coast, QLD

Newly Certified

The Cassowary Coast was our final destination to achieve ECO Destination Certification this year, becoming Queensland's seventh and Australia's 14th certified destination. Located just south of Cairns, the region is renowned for its rich biodiversity and stunning natural landscapes, including the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef. The Cassowary Coast Regional Council is deeply committed to preserving this natural heritage by supporting conservation and regeneration projects and providing resources to help businesses and residents minimise their environmental impact. This commitment builds on a strong ecotourism legacy, rooted in the efforts of local advocate John Busst, whose pivotal role in establishing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act of 1975 was commemorated this year as 'GBR50'.

This certification milestone stands as a testament to the powerful collaboration between the Regional Council, local tourism organisations, community stakeholders and the vital support of the Queensland Government's Eco-certified Tourism Destination Program.

Certified Operators and Destination **Achievements**

Across Australia, our certified operators and destinations have once again demonstrated what it means to deliver world-class sustainable tourism. Their initiatives champion both environmental care and community wellbeing, proving that responsible travel can inspire and transform. By pushing boundaries and embracing innovative practices, our members have raised the bar for excellence, influencing the wider tourism sector. We are proud to acknowledge their outstanding efforts, which continue to shape a more sustainable future for tourism nationwide.

Qantas Australian Tourism Awards 2024

Ecotourism Australia proudly celebrated a record-breaking achievement for our certified operators at the 2024 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. From a strong field of 40 national finalists, our operators secured 17 awards across 10 categories – the highest number of wins in our organisation’s history.

Collectively, these results included 7 Gold, 5 Silver and 5 Bronze awards, reflecting the depth, diversity and quality of certified businesses across Australia. In addition to their national success, many of our operators were also recognised at state and regional tourism awards, reinforcing their leadership in delivering sustainable, world-class visitor experiences.

Gold

Balloon Aloft Australia (Sustainable Tourism Certified) - Adventure Tourism & Excellence in Accessible Tourism

BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort (Ecotourism Certified) - Caravan & Holiday Parks Hall of Fame

Fun Over 50 Holidays (Advanced Ecotourism, Climate Action and ROC Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Tour & Transport Operators

HeliSpirit (Ecotourism Certified and Hall of Fame) – Major Tour & Transport Operators

Peppers Silo Hotel (Sustainable Tourism Certified) - Business Event Venues & 4-4.5 Star Deluxe Accommodation

Silver

The Big Duck Boat Tours (Advanced Ecotourism Certified) – Ecotourism

Wintjiri Wiru – Ayers Rock Resort (Advanced Ecotourism and ROC Certified) – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Experiences

Pennicott Wilderness Journeys (Advanced Ecotourism Certified + Green Travel Leader) - Major Tour & Transport Operators

Spirit of the Coorong (Advanced Ecotourism and ROC Certified) - Tour & Transport Operators

Bendleby Ranges (Advanced Ecotourism Certified + Green Travel Leader) - Adventure Tourism

Bronze

Busselton Jetty (Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Certified + Green Travel Leader) – Ecotourism

Ocean Rafting (Advanced ECO & Climate Action Certified & Hall of Fame) - Major Tour & Transport Operators

Aquascene Magnetic Island (Advanced Ecotourism Certified) - Adventure Tourism

Novotel Cairns Oasis Resort (Sustainable Tourism Certified) – 4-4.5 Star Deluxe Accommodation

Pullman Bunker Bay (Sustainable Tourism Certified) - 5 Star Luxury Accommodation



HeliSpirit, Kimberley, WA
Ecotourism Certified and Hall of Fame
Photo credit: Tourism Australia



Sugarloaf Point, Barrington Coast, NSW
ECO Certified Destination
Credit: Tourism Australia

Green Destinations 2025 Top 100 Story Awards

This year, we celebrated the success of two ECO Certified destinations recognised at the prestigious Green Destinations Top 100 Story Awards, held at ITB Berlin. Since 2014, this annual competition has celebrated destinations around the world that demonstrate social responsibility and inspire leadership in responsible tourism. Barrington Coast / MidCoast Council took second place in the Destination Management category for *“The place where the leaves touch the waters, from the mountains to the sea”* - a powerful story highlighting five years of sustainable tourism initiatives led by Council and the community, valuing natural and cultural assets while carefully managing visitor impact. Also taking home second place, the Central Coast was recognised in the Nature & Scenery category for *“Waterways and Wildlife: Good Turns to Balance Conservation and Visitation.”* A consistent finalist in the Top 100 Stories competition for the past four years, the Central Coast’s achievement reflects its ongoing commitment to protecting biodiversity and natural landscapes while fostering responsible tourism.

Banksia National Sustainability Awards 2025

This year, we proudly celebrated the achievements of our certified operators recognised as finalists at the 36th Banksia National Sustainability Awards. These prestigious awards honour Australia’s leaders in sustainability and innovation, recognising initiatives tackling the nation’s most pressing environmental and social challenges. Congratulations to Ecotourism Australia’s Advanced Ecotourism Certified operator Nic Cooper from Wild Adventures Melbourne, who was awarded the Tourism and Destinations Award for his outstanding work delivering low-impact, high-adventure tours across the Mornington Peninsula. Nic’s achievement was shared among great company, with fellow certified finalists Polperro Dolphin Swims and Taronga Conservation Society Australia showcasing the depth of expertise and commitment within our certified community to delivering impactful, sustainability-led tourism experiences.



Image credit: Nic Cooper, Wild Adventures Melbourne accepting the Tourism and Destinations Award at the 2025 Banksia National Sustainability Awards in Melbourne, VIC.



Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises, Great Barrier Reef, QLD
Advanced Ecotourism Certified, Climate Action and Hall of Fame entrant 2025
Photo credit: Tourism Australia

2025 Ecotourism Australia Hall of Fame Entrants

An incredible 11 of Australia's leading ecotourism operators were inducted into Ecotourism Australia's Hall of Fame this year, recognised for maintaining ECO Certification for an extraordinary 20 years. These long-term leaders join 58 other operators previously honoured for their consistent commitment to world-class sustainability standards.

Adrenalin Snorkel and Dive, QLD

Operating since 1987, Adrenalin Snorkel and Dive specialise in day trips on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and to the wreck of the SS Yongala, offering snorkelling, diving and free diving. They also offer adventurous dives to the remarkable Museum of Underwater Art and scenic whale watching and wildlife tours on board their custom vessels. Adrenalin Snorkel and Dive actively work to minimise their environmental impact while offering immersive, educational, and unforgettable reef experiences. Their support for and involvement in citizen science initiatives like *Eye on the Reef* displays their deep commitment to engaging the public in the reef's protection and preservation.

Baird Bay Experience, SA

Baird Bay Experience operate within South Australia's rugged Eyre Peninsula, an area known for its ecological value and contribution to marine conservation. Offering both half day ocean tours and multi-day Seaside Safaris, their unique tours range from embarking on aquatic experiences with wild sea lions and dolphins, to staying, exploring, dining and unwinding on the edge of the Eyre Peninsula. As an operator with deep respect for the haven they inhabit, Baird Bay Experience walk the talk in their sustainability initiatives including waste, water and energy management, low impact tour designs and local produce sourcing.

Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises, QLD

With 30+ years of industry experience, Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises provide half- and full-day tours to Green Island, contributing to sustainable reef tourism in the Cairns region. Guests can choose to snorkel, dive, stay dry or view the underwater reefs in their semi submarine or glass bottom boats. As a leading reef tourism operator operating within the Great Barrier Reef, Big Cat recognises environmental management as a top responsibility. A key initiative sees them partner with Experience Co's GBR Biology Team to deliver curriculum-based educational programs connecting students to local reef systems.

Calypso Reef Cruises, QLD

Calypso' Port Douglas Reef Cruises offer a variety of family cruises, reef tours, and dive trips to the stunning Great Barrier Reef for snorkelling and scuba diving. Guest can explore the coral gardens and the weird and wonderful marine creatures which inhabit Opal Reef and Agincourt Reef. Calypso Reef Cruises are committed to minimising adverse impacts on the environment, promoting environmental stewardship and reducing carbon emissions. Examples of these actions include minimising waste, recycling, tracking their carbon emissions footprint, custom-designed vessels, and outsourcing catering to local restaurants.

Cooinda Lodge Kakadu, NT

Located within Kakadu National Park, Cooinda Lodge provides one of the region's broader selections of accommodation, from lodge rooms to villas. The resort offers two shaded swimming pools, incredible dining, the Warradjan Cultural Centre and extensive touring options including world-famous Yellow Water Cruises. As part of their commitment to sustainability, Cooinda Lodge Kakadu have recently established their own onsite recycling centre which has significantly reduced landfill waste, improved resource management, and fostered greater environmental awareness with their team and community.

JPT Tours, QLD

JPT Tour Group is a national tour company who have been operating since 1982, curating travel products such as day tours, cruises and farm stays amongst iconic locations such as Surfers Paradise, Lamington National Park, Tamborine Mountain and Byron Bay. Their Natural Bridge Glow Worm Tour offers guests the chance to witness a true living constellation and is designed to leave minimal footprint, promote environmental awareness and support the local community. JPT Tours are trusted to deliver meaningful sustainable experiences through their use of eco-friendly transportation and partnership with local suppliers.

Kangaroo Island Marine Adventures, SA

Kangaroo Island Marine Adventures offer a truly unique experience in marine ecotourism on Kangaroo Island. Offering licensed guided tours to swim with wild dolphins on Kangaroo Island, guests can be part of the adventure of a lifetime in the clear calm and protected waters that dolphins call home. As pioneers of marine tourism on Kangaroo Island, Kangaroo Island Marine Adventures protect the delicate ecosystems they visit by operating propeller-free and using safe boat jets that provide sympathetic acoustic patterns their resident dolphins love. They were also chosen by Dolphin Watch to monitor the wellbeing and habitat of local whales and dolphin pods.



Kangaroo Island Marine Adventures, Kangaroo Island, SA
Nature Tourism Certified and Hall of Fame Entrant 2025
Photo credit: Tourism Australia



Photo credit: Tourism Australia

Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, VIC

Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park grew out of the childhood dreams of Founder and Director Michael Johnson, who imagined a place where people could experience the rare and unusual animals that roam the Australian bush. Located 50 minutes southeast of Melbourne's CBD, Moonlit Sanctuary allows guests to get up-close and personal with iconic Australian fauna like kangaroos, wallabies, koalas and take part in captivating encounters with colourful birds, mesmerising reptiles and playful dingoes. Moonlit Sanctuary are dedicated to helping save Australia's endangered wildlife, housing 10 threatened species that they work to save from extinction.



Image: The Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park team with their 2025 Hall of Fame plaque, Pearcedale, VIC. Pictured left to right: Holly, Caitlin, Michael, Samantha, Erin, Graeme, and Michelle.

OzSail Adventures, QLD

OzSail Adventures operate 2-day 2-night tours around Queensland's Whitsunday Islands on their 3 sailing vessels. They are an independently run family business driven by their passion to showcase the beautiful Whitsundays. Their adventurous tours provide guest with great food and good company while they travel to world-famous beaches, swim in coral gardens and stargaze under the Whitsundays' view of the Milky Way. OzSail protect the nature they inhabit through a plethora of sustainability initiatives including, thorough recycling, water conservation, collecting marine debris and educating guests about reducing their carbon footprint.

Passions of Paradise, QLD

Passions of Paradise operates daily sailing tours from Cairns to 2 outer Great Barrier Reef locations, providing opportunities for snorkelling and diving. The 25-metre catamaran supports marine tourism in the region and showcases the reef's biodiversity, including coral species, turtles, and reef fish. Passions of Paradise are innovative leaders in sustainability who understood the importance of protecting the Great Barrier Reef long before sustainability became a mainstream focus in tourism. Their 'Be a Marine Bio' eco tour allows guests to be part of a Citizen Science and Research Team contributing to ongoing reef conservation projects on the Great Barrier Reef.

Sunlover Reef Cruises, QLD

Sunlover Reef Cruises has been operating tours from Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef since 1991. Their unique outer reef tours see their catamaran dock alongside a floating pontoon near beautiful coral; they also offer trips to the tropical paradise of Fitzroy Island. Sunlover Reef Cruises deliver a range of Great Barrier reef experiences catering to diverse visitor needs, including options for non-swimmers and experienced divers. As stewards of the Great Barrier Reef, Sunlover's sustainable approach includes minimising waste generation, conserving water and energy and even printing brochures on paper sourced from responsibly managed forests.

2025 New Green Travel Leaders

This year, an additional 12 operators were acknowledged as Green Travel Leaders, celebrating a decade of ECO Certification and their enduring contribution to responsible tourism. They join 88 other operators as Green Travel Leaders.

- **Boat Club Adventure Cruises**
- **Cobbold Gorge Tours**
- **Cumberland Charter Yachts**
- **Dolphin Swim Australia**
- **Minjerribah Camping**
- **Skytrek Willow Springs Station**
- **South West Eco Discoveries**
- **Sugarbag Safaris**
- **Surf N' Dirt Adventure Tours Margaret River**
- **Rottneest Island Authority**
- **Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk**
- **Walk into Luxury**



Our board

Thank you to our voluntary Directors who served on the Ecotourism Australia Board during FY2024-2025.

Chair | Nat Burke | World Wildlife Fund for Nature Australia

Deputy Chair | Alysia Brandenburg | AbPs Consulting Services

Caroline Densley | Diverse Travel Australia

Amy Gash | Lady Elliott Island Eco Resort

Jeff Gillies | Coral Expeditions

Wendy Hills | Hills Consulting

Robert Taylor | Western Australia Indigenous Tourism Operations Council (WAITOC)

David Young | Accor Pacific (to May 2025)

Peter Johnson | Diamond Waters Treehouse Retreat (to August 2025)

Janet Mackay | TRC Tourism (to October 2025)

Our team

Elissa Keenan | Chief Executive Officer

Nadine Schramm | Head of Sustainability and Business Operations

Myv Costelloe | Stakeholder Engagement Manager

Shea Wittig | a/g Certification Manager

Corinne Lewis | ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist

Martin Lopez Behar | ECO and Sustainable Tourism Specialist

Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia) | Certification Programs Coordinator

Luis Ponce | Certification Programs Coordinator

Emily Flanagan | Communications and Engagement Specialist

Lexie Gillies | Communications Coordinator

We thank our former staff for their valuable contributions to Ecotourism Australia: Alyssa Sanders, Annalina Fichtner, Jillian Santry and Jessica Yun.

A heartfelt thank you to our interns Saw Yu Yu Nwe (Zinnia), Luis Ponce and Tsetsegsuren Khurelbaatar (Kira) who have worked with us this year. We're proud to support students and young professionals to pursue their career goals, with two interns going on to gain employment with Ecotourism Australia.

Ecotourism Australia History

Since 1991, Ecotourism Australia has been at the forefront of the Australian responsible tourism industry and is proud to be the recognised national peak body for sustainable and ecotourism.

1991	Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region is formed and later renamed the Ecotourism Association of Australia in 1992.
1996	The world's first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) is launched.
2000	EcoGuide Certification is launched to certify high-quality guides across Australia.
2002	The organisation is renamed Ecotourism Australia Limited (EA) in the International Year of Ecotourism designated by the United Nations General Assembly.
2003	ECO Certification replaces NEAP.
2008	Ecotourism Australia wins the Conservation Award at the World Tourism and Travel Council Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. Respecting Our Culture Certification is adopted from Aboriginal Tourism Australia recognising high-quality, authentic Indigenous cultural experiences. Climate Action Certification is launched focusing on operator actions toward mitigating their emissions.
2011	56 operators awarded the first Green Travel Leader Certification for their commitment to greening the tourism industry by maintaining ECO Certification for 10 years or more as Ecotourism Australia celebrated 20 years of operation.
2013-14	The combined annual turnover of all Ecotourism Australia certified tour operators exceeded \$1 billion, demonstrating how ecotourism is no longer a niche but has become mainstream.
2018	Ecotourism Australia launches the ECO Destination Certification program.
2019	Port Douglas Daintree (Kuku Yalanji and Yirrganydji Country) region achieves Australia's first ECO Destination Certification.
2020	Ecotourism Australia partners with WWF-Australia through the Bushfire Recovery Fund to support destinations around Australia to 'build back better' after the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019-20.

2021	Ecotourism Australia celebrates its 30th birthday and launches a new brand with a 'ripple' design, organically flowing outward, encompassing the ripple effect of our purpose to 'do good' and create greater change. With a hint of nostalgia, our gecko can still be found on the Green Travel Guide. An extra two destinations achieved ECO Destination Certification taking the total to four. The inaugural ECO Think Destination Forum is held in the Coffs Coast and Bellingen regions.
2022	Central Coast (Darkinjung Country) and Augusta-Margaret River (Wadandi and Pibelmen Boodja Country) achieve ECO Destination Certification. Ecotourism Australia launches the new sustainable tourism pathway program with a pre-certification benchmarking tool, Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, and Sustainable Tourism Certification for non-nature focused operators and destinations.
2023	A total of seven regions are now ECO Destination Certified. Australia's first tourism business is awarded Sustainable Tourism Certification (Bundaberg Rum Visitor Experience Centre). Accor selected Ecotourism Australia as one of three global providers to provide ECO and Sustainable Tourism Certification to Hotels in Australia and the Pacific.
2024	Ecotourism Australia has certified some 2000 tours, attractions and accommodation across more than 500 operators. Eleven destinations are now ECO Certified. Ecotourism Australia enhances their branding, corporate website and Green Travel Guide to be more accessible. Ecotourism Australia hosts the inaugural Global Sustainable Tourism Summit in Meanjin/ Brisbane in June with more than 280 delegates and 62 speakers. The event marks a continuation of Ecotourism Australia's proud legacy of hosting the world's longest running ecotourism conference, Global Eco.
2025	Three new destinations achieve ECO Destination Certification bringing the total to 14, and more than 2300 tours, attractions and accommodations across 664 operators now hold ECO or Sustainable Tourism Certification with Ecotourism Australia. Ecotourism Australia becomes a founding member of the Tourism Sustainability Certifications Alliance (TSCA), an international not for profit organisation established to ensure the continued high standards and in sustainable tourism certification and to enable travellers to make informed choices based on the highest sustainability standards.

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