



Destination Plan

2023-2026

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledge the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People as the Traditional Owners of lands within the City of Whittlesea. We pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging.



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COVER IMAGE

The Rectangular Cultural Scar.

This is a highly significant tree. The scars' size suggests the bark was used to build shelter. Located at RMIT Bundoora Campus – part of the 'Keelbundoora Scarred Trees and Heritage Trail'.

LEFT

Djirri Djirri dance group

Executive Summary

The City of Whittlesea Destination Plan 2023-2026 (Plan) provides direction for tourism development and growth within the City of Whittlesea, with the primary objective of increasing tourism visitation, length of stay and spend.

Tourism presents significant opportunity for the local economy in the City of Whittlesea and has strong potential for growth. In 2020-2021 the tourism output in the municipality was \$266.887 million (1.3 per cent of total output) and supported approximately 1,348 jobs (2.4 per cent of total employment), and value adding \$118.464 million.

After the past years of disruption due to COVID, tourism visitation has bounced back albeit in a slightly different way with changes to the normal patterns, brought along by changed attitudes and costly international travel. The market is looking closer to home and looking for a more meaningful experience. The challenge for the Tourism Industry in the City of Whittlesea is to adjust and adapt to new market conditions.

Background research and observations identified challenges to the destination such as location, lack of accommodation, visitor information services and transport while a range of opportunities exist for City of Whittlesea in areas such as heritage, arts and culture, nature based tourism, food and drink, and infrastructure. From, these, four priority areas have been identified as areas with the greatest potential for further development. The four priority areas include;



Heritage, Arts and Culture

Collaborate and support industry to enhance tourism experiences, events and attractions through sites of historical significance tours, public events, festivals, art displays and through private interests.



Nature Based

Our municipality will become a destination of choice for nature-based activities.



Food and Drink

Collaborate and strengthen industry where locally produced foods should be available and highlighted through menus, blackboards and digital media.



Tourism Infrastructure

Enhance and promote infrastructure and amenity requirements that will improve tourism facilities and tourist servicing.

Each priority area includes a set of actions to be implemented over the next three years which aim to support and encourage the development of products which strengthen the municipality as a destination, advocate for investment in visitor servicing infrastructure, build upon the existing brand of the City of Whittlesea to increase awareness of the municipality as a destination of choice and encourage greater length of stay and dispersal of visitors across the municipality.

In summary, tourism visitation to the City of Whittlesea experienced a significant downturn due to the Coronavirus pandemic and needs to plan for a changed market demand. Several opportunity areas were identified and a set of priorities and actions developed which will be incorporated into higher level plans and guide the management of the destination over the next three years. With new developments in both the private and public sectors coming to the City of Whittlesea and considering organic growth of visitation statistics in line with increased population, there is strong potential to consolidate sustainable visitation to the area.



About the Destination Plan (Plan)

The Plan provides direction to maintain and enhance the visitor economy. The objective of the Plan is to increase the number of visitors through greater awareness of the area for residents and visitors, promotion of the municipality and developing the tourism sector to support a strong local economy.

The Plan identifies several target markets bringing visitors to the City of Whittlesea. The target markets identified as important feeder markets are:



Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR)

The VFR is a key visitor market and accounts for a third of all domestic visitors.



Business/Corporate

The City is well placed to grow its business market due to the proximity to major employment, land and growth areas and location within Greater Melbourne.



Family Leisure Market

The rural areas and large tracts of parkland provide a strong basis for family leisure visitation.



Cyclists

The City has long been a popular cycling destination, which will continue with the ongoing developments and connectivity of trails.



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

The City is diverse, and the residential demographic of the community drives the VFR CALD market.

How this plan supports a Strong Local Economy Strategy

The Plan is identified as a key action in the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026 to support the City of Whittlesea's diverse natural, heritage, cultural and landscape values. The Plan supports three key directions by attracting investment, developing workforce skills and fostering business development.



Key direction 1:
Increase access to local employment



Key direction 2:
Education opportunities for all



Key direction 3:
Successful and innovative local businesses

The Plan directly aligns with key goal of Council's 'Whittlesea 2040' vision: A Place for All, including prioritising investment attraction, agriculture and diverse natural, cultural and landscape values which support a strong visitor economy sector.

The Plan aligns with strategies and plans both internal and external including:

- Cultural Heritage Strategy 2019-2025
- Green Wedge Management Plan 2023 – 2033 (GWMP)
- Northern Trails Strategy 2022
- Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- Walking and Cycling Plan 2022 – 2027
- Sustainable Environment Strategy 2022-2032
- Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy 2016- 2025
- Quarry Hills Future Direction Plan (draft)
- Arts and Culture Plan (draft)

LEFT
That's Amore,
Ricotta Festival 2023

What is tourism

Tourism is the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work, as well as their activities during their stay at these destinations.

Tourists may travel to a destination just for the day to return home, or they may stay overnight for one or more nights.

People come to the City of Whittlesea for numerous reasons such as leisure, business and VFR. They come to eat, play, explore, be active, learn and experience the way of life, the culture and the ambience of the area.

Tourism creates jobs, helps build a strong local economy, contributes to local infrastructure development and can help to conserve the natural environment, cultural assets and traditions, and to reduce poverty and inequality.

The impact of Tourism to the Australian Economy



\$32.4bn

In 2020-21, tourism directly contributed 1.6% of Australia's GDP



1 in 26 jobs

Directly employed 507,000 people



\$31.2bn

Accounted for 6.6% of Australia's total exports (Pre-pandemic)



1 in 7 businesses

In June 2021, there were 334,500 tourism related businesses

Victoria's Visitor Economy in the year ending June 2022 included:



\$20.7 billion total tourism spend



86.4 million total visitor nights



62.5 million total visitors

Achievements to date

Post COVID-19 activities have been aimed at rebuilding confidence, leveraging the changes in tourist behaviours and off State and National Tourism responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Activities include:

- delivered an It's all Here mass awareness campaign and branding. More than three thousand claims were processed resulting in \$150,000 being paid out in incentive rebates for buying local from over 650 City of Whittlesea businesses, injecting over \$800,000 into the local economy
- promoted the City of Whittlesea's attractions, events and hospitality businesses through the Explore Whittlesea website and social media channels (Facebook and Instagram)
- promoted an Outdoor Dining campaign including provision of furniture in retail precincts
- broadsheet promotion of visitor economy sector businesses through Visit Melbourne's North
- supported the annual Picnic of Plenty event with the Friends of Toorourrong
- supported the Whittlesea Courthouse to deliver visitor information services
- supported the annual Whittlesea Country Music Festival
- supported the annual Whittlesea Agricultural Show.



RIGHT
Turners Bakehouse
Eatery, Mernda

Visitation snapshot

The City of Whittlesea attracted approximately 912,000 domestic visitors and 25,500 international visitors in the 2019 calendar year.

Daytrip visitors account for almost 85 per cent of visitation, due to its location in Greater Melbourne, as well as limited accommodation to grow overnight visitation. The remaining accommodation is accounted for by domestic overnight visitors.

Total domestic visitation experienced growth of 4.6 per cent between 2010 and 2019, before experiencing a decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The City of Whittlesea has an average total domestic visitor expenditure of \$120 million, with an average domestic spend of \$102 per domestic day trip visitor and \$525 per domestic overnight visitor. The tourism sector employs a total of 4,120 people (direct and indirect) and contributes \$540 million in output and \$254 million in value add to the City of Whittlesea economy.

City of Whittlesea

Visitor Expenditure average 2019-2021

	Domestic Day	Domestic Overnight	Total
Average Spend Per Trip	\$102	\$524	
Average Visitors	551,996	121,239	673,235
Expenditure	\$56,303,608	\$63,563,715	\$119,867,323

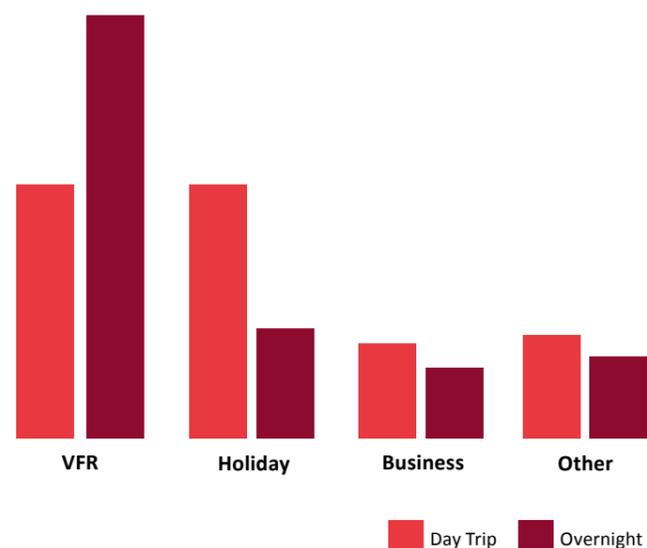
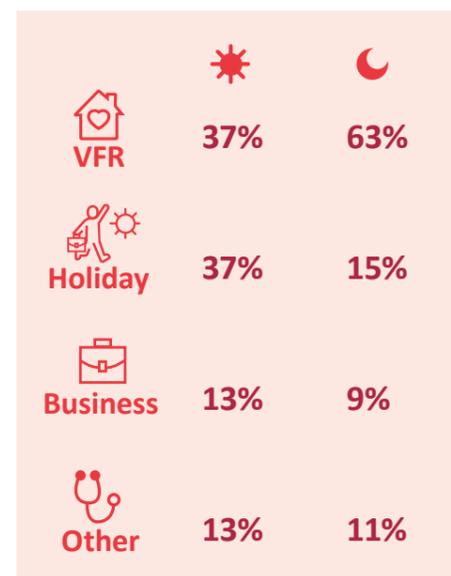
Source: Whittlesea Economy ID and Tourism Research Australia.

Economic Impact of Tourism (2020-2021)

	Direct	Indirect
Employment	2,473	1,741
Output/Sales	\$226m	\$314m
Value Added	\$109m	\$145m

Source: Whittlesea Economy ID Profile, accessed October 2022

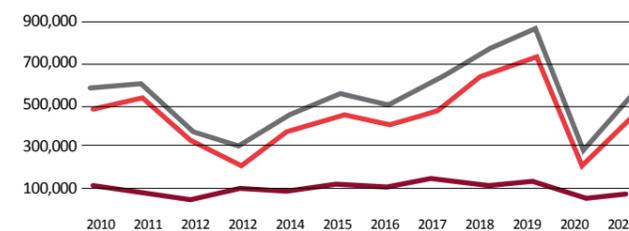
Purpose of visit



Tourism within the City of Whittlesea is largely made up of domestic visitors who travel into the area on day trips for leisure or to visit VFR and a large proportion of the VFR market stays overnight in the area with multiple nights being the norm. Around 74 per cent of day trip visitors are either VFR or leisure with business and other making up the rest. Overnight visitors are mostly VFR with 63 per cent followed by leisure 15 per cent, business 9 per cent and other 11 per cent.

The low number of overnight visitors in the business and leisure sectors could be a result of limited accommodation, reflecting a need for more accommodation in the area. Feedback from the primary accommodation providers in the City of Whittlesea is that most of their market is corporate, so there is opportunity to target overnight leisure visitors through packaging and events, especially on weekends.

Visitor arrivals City of Whittlesea 2010 - 2021

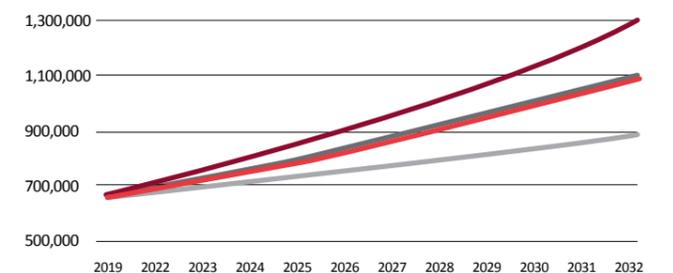


Source: National Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia, 2022

Day Trip Overnight Total

Projected visitation

It is projected that the City of Whittlesea will receive at least 1 million domestic visitors per annum by 2031. Ongoing investment in supporting infrastructure such as town amenity, roads, accommodation, signage and wayfinding will be required to ensure the City meets the needs of visitors. The future growth rates highlight a strong forecast demand for tourism products including nature-based tourism, agritourism and food and beverage business opportunities.



Source: Urban Enterprise, 2022.

Historic Visitation Growth Rate
 Historic Greater Melbourne Visitation Growth Rate
 Historic Greater Whittlesea Population Growth Rate
 VIF Projected Population Growth Rate

RIGHT
 Growing Frog
 Golf Course



Stakeholder consultation

The pre-consultation process included qualitative surveys undertaken at Carols by Candlelight 2022 and the Whittlesea Agricultural Show in 2023.

Over 50 surveys were completed by community members who were consulted on:

- what they like to see and do
- what they would like to see more of; and
- to describe what the area means to them in three words.

60 per cent of respondents listed dining out and shopping as their favourite activities to see and do. Picnics, farm visits, bike riding and swimming were the next most popular.

Outdoor eating areas, picnic areas, pop-up events, festivals and live theatre shows were the most popular activities, while adventure courses were a notable contender amongst what community would like to see more of in the area.

Respondents to the survey were primarily from Metropolitan Melbourne (including City of Whittlesea) with just over 81 per cent while almost 17 per cent were from rural or regional areas. There were two overseas respondents with one of those living in the area and the other visiting family. Just over 76 per cent of respondents were from within City of Whittlesea.

Further consultation with key stakeholders, industry experts, local businesses and the Wurrundjeri Cultural Corporation were conducted to gain an understanding of their vision for tourism, constraints to business development, Council's role in tourism and priority areas that Council should consider.

Stakeholders believe that Council should prioritise and play a role in areas including destination marketing, capacity building, mentoring and advocacy to support tourism.

Inhibiting factors identified by stakeholders listed several factors that may hold them back from developing their business including, planning constraints, funding, connectivity, transport and staffing issues.

Stakeholders believe that Council's role in tourism should be around the provision of quality facilities and infrastructure that support and manage tourism and that Council has a role to play in the promotion and development of the area for investments in tourism facilities and in streamlining the permit process.

Policy context and key drivers

Local

Council plays an essential role in the visitor economy and at its essence, is to ensure liveability for its residents. By continually investing in the creation of liveable destinations, Council in turn facilitates the creation of a vibrant visitor economy by supporting the private sector to invest in products and experiences.

The Plan recognises councils place-based planning framework and aims to link businesses through business-to-business connections across precincts, by encouraging businesses to work together to create products or opportunities that will attract and aid the dispersal of visitors across the municipality.

The City of Whittlesea continues to support the visitor economy through its four goals including:

1. Sustainable environment
2. Liveable neighbourhoods
3. Strong local economy and
4. Connected communities

Councils Green Wedge Management Plan 2023-2033, Walking and Cycling Plan 2022-2027, Arts Culture and Events Strategy, Northern Trails 2022 Strategy, Quarry Hills Future Direction Plan (Draft) all include actions that support the four strategic directions.

State

The Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy goal is to increase visitor spending to \$36.5 billion by 2025 and outlines nine priorities each with their own actions to achieve this goal. These include:

1. more private sector investment
2. build on the potential of rural and regional Victoria
3. improved branding and marketing
4. maximise the benefits of events
5. improved experiences for visitors from Asia
6. better tourism infrastructure
7. improved access into and around Victoria
8. a skilled and capable sector
9. more effective coordination.

Federal

Australia's National Tourism Body, Tourism Australia (TA), supports the activities of the states and territories, with Tourism Australia taking a national approach to stimulate demand for the entire tourism sector through its global marketing campaigns. Through its head office in Sydney and international hubs, TA undertakes consumer marketing and industry development activity in core markets including South Asia, Greater China, Japan and South Korea, Europe, The Americas, and New Zealand. This focus on international markets at the National level has direct implications for the VFR market in the City of Whittlesea, due to the significant numbers of long stay visitors staying in the area with relatives.

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission's Austrade, THRIVE 2030 Strategy is a national strategy for Australia's visitor economy recovery and return to sustainable growth from 2022 to 2030. The Plan has a direct alignment to the THRIVE Strategy in areas such as enhancing visitor infrastructure, building markets, growing high quality products and attracting visitors.



LEFT
Whittlesea Country
Music festival

Challenges



Location

The City of Whittlesea faces challenges to increased visitation in that the municipality falls within Greater Melbourne as a region and from a marketing perspective means the municipality may not be as visible as places with big iconic attractions like 'The Great Ocean Road' and 'Yarra Valley'. Greater Melbourne has twenty-eight Local Government Area's (LGA's) comprising many more suburbs including the Central Business District and Bay areas.

The GWMP supports tourism as an activity in Green Wedge Areas however the GWMP policy restricts developments and activities in various zones such as the Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ1) AND Green Wedge A Zone (GWAZ) and therefore will require innovation and creativity in future endeavours.



Transport

Public transport offers challenges in that most visitors rely on motor vehicles and road connections particularly in the growth areas. These areas are limited due to lack of public transport and inadequate roads, which all are inhibiting factors for visitors.



Major investments

Attracting major investment also offers challenges in that large investments in accommodation, infrastructure and transport is needed to fill gaps in the provision and development of tourism activities.



Visitor servicing

Visitor servicing at the Whittlesea Courthouse visitor information centre is limited to a voluntary service working with limited resources in an unofficial capacity.



LEFT
Gang Gang Cockatoo
Plenty Gorge Parklands
Photo Courtesy Bradley James

RIGHT
Yan Yean Reservoir



Opportunities

Location

While there are challenges facing the City of Whittlesea these same challenges offer considerable opportunity. The ease of access and proximity to Greater Melbourne and in particular Northern Melbourne means that one of the major target markets is on the doorstep. Day visitors from nearby areas can easily travel to the City of Whittlesea via several road networks and public transport.

There is also opportunity sitting largely untapped in the VFR market which makes up 33 per cent of total visitation figures, with a small proportion of those being international visitors who stay almost 30 nights on average. More needs to be learned about the needs and aspirations of this market.

Heritage, arts and culture

The City of Whittlesea already produces collateral involving 'fifty sites of significance' around the municipality. Many of these sites include structures made from bluestone such as walls, churches, farm buildings, old municipal buildings and schools. Council's Culture and Heritage department operates seasonal tours that celebrate the cultural diversity, history and heritage of the area and opportunity exists to develop this concept further. The Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC) is a multi-million-dollar facility which hosts a variety of programs including live shows, comedy, theatre, conferences, meetings, school productions for groups up to 700. Opportunities exist to further develop this space to attract more visitors from outside the municipality.

The proposed Aboriginal Gathering place within the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland space will offer a place of belonging, a place to share knowledge, create and leave artwork, have indoor and outdoor places, and welcome people into the area. Opportunities exist to promote any activities or events aimed at the general community and to work with the traditional owners on the development of tourism product.

There is also opportunity to support, enhance and develop festival and events in the area. Whittlesea Show, Whittlesea Country Music Festival and the City of Whittlesea Community Festival are existing events that offer opportunities and should be retained and enhanced. Other cultural festivals such as Divali Festival also provide opportunities.

Food and drink tourism and food production

The food and drink sector offers a strong opportunity for businesses to highlight locally produced goods in marketing and on the menu. There is an opportunity to develop a strong brand for the City of Whittlesea under the 'It's all Here' banner, as a place where local products are produced, promoted and consumed.

There is opportunity to include food producers in events such as the Community Festival to include a local produce area where manufacturers may showcase their products in one area. This would become a strong drawcard attracting visitors from outside the area.

Nature based tourism

The Quarry Hills Regional Parkland and Plenty Gorge offer opportunities for eco-tourism, active recreation and sporting events. Quarry Hills Regional Parkland promises to be a place where the whole community can pursue active and passive recreation activities and should become an iconic presence in the marketing of the area in the future and building on existing qualities being ecological and cultural.

Plenty Gorge is undergoing a trail development, improvements to Nioka Bush Camp and Hawkstowe picnic area which will offer opportunities for active recreation by way of bike riding, picnics, walking, jogging, bird watching and possible connections with nearby areas where riders could continue their adventures for many kilometres into neighbouring shires.

Caravan and RV market

The township of Whittlesea has potential to become an RV friendly town which would offer opportunities to provide services for RV users visiting the town. The Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) states that the RV community spends an average of \$100 a day whilst travelling (from a study in 2013) and that this figure is likely to have increased substantially since that study was completed.

'It's all Here' brand campaign

The campaign was introduced to help build the local economy by encouraging the community to spend money locally. There is opportunity to enhance this brand as an all-encompassing feature for all sectors of the local economy.

Collaboration with other Local Government areas

Taking a more regional approach to Destination management offers opportunities for collaborative marketing, networking and industry development. Partnering with organisations such as Tourism North-East and Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges may offer increased exposure to the markets, while collaboration with rural councils to the North and West of the City of Whittlesea could offer opportunities for shared promotions of events and products within the area.

Future developments

In the City of Whittlesea there are several developments and policy directions currently in or close to development including, Quarry Hills Regional Parkland, Regional Aquatic Facility located in Mernda and Five Vineyard winery, Mernda. There will be opportunities to leverage the marketing activities around these new developments to further promote the area to target markets.

Traditional Owner collaboration

It is important that City of Whittlesea maintains an integrated approach to consultation and development of strategies and plans. Traditional Owners will be invited to self-determine involvement and opportunities for collaboration and partnership in tourism projects or potential business start-up opportunities in the aim of removing barriers and continuing connection to country.

The proposed Aboriginal Gathering Place to be situated within Quarry Hills Regional Park aims to be a place designed to foster reconciliation and healing for Aboriginal people and a place for belonging and connection to culture where opportunities for reconciliation activities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people may be planned.

Whittlesea Customer Hub

The new customer hub at the town of Whittlesea will provide opportunities to engage with local Tourism businesses and could become a registered Visitor Information Centre (VIC) providing an official centre targeting visitors and anyone seeking Tourist information about the City of Whittlesea.

BELOW
Farm Vigano



Priority areas

The priority areas for the Plan have been identified through consultation with stakeholders and consideration of target markets and industry trends, to respond to the challenges and opportunities and to support the activities of other City of Whittlesea plans including the Strong Local Economy Strategy.

The priority areas have been identified as areas with the greatest potential for further development.

Actions developed as part of the Destination Plan will support and encourage the development of products which strengthen the municipality as a destination, advocate for investment in visitor servicing; build upon the existing brand of City of Whittlesea to increase awareness of the municipality as a destination of choice and encourage greater length of stay and dispersal of visitors across the municipality.

Making it happen

The Plan will support actions that will result in increased visitation, visitor spending, visitor dispersal and visitor awareness by the development of new products, improved connectivity within the industry, targeted marketing campaigns, increased operator capacity and community awareness.

The Plan will support annual actions in the Strong Local Economy Action Plan over an initial three-year period commencing 2023-2024 and will be measured against three key directions aligned to the Strong Local Economy Strategy:

1. increased local employment
2. education opportunities for all
3. successful and innovative local businesses.

Glossary

Agri-tourism – Agritourism refers to experiences attracting visitors to places where they get to interact with a variety of food and agribusiness elements such as farm gate sales, entertainment or educating the visitors, while generating income for the farm or business owner. In some areas this may involve consuming local products at cafes and restaurants.

Corporate Travel – Travel arrangements for business purposes.

Domestic Day Trip – Domestic tourism involves residents traveling within their own country. While day trips are those that do not involve overnight stay.

Domestic Overnight Visitor – Domestic tourism involves residents traveling within their own country. While overnight trips are those that involve at least one overnight stay.

Direct impact – Refers to economic data from businesses that benefit directly from the visitor economy. This is money spent directly in the Tourism Industry.

Eco Tourism – Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people.

Indirect impact – Refers to economic data from businesses that benefit indirectly from the visitor economy. Indirect contribution is the flow-on effect of the tourism industry. For every dollar spent in the tourism industry in Vic, an extra 79 cents were spent elsewhere in the economy.

International Visitor – Visitors travelling to Australia from another country.

Intrastate – Visitors travelling from places within Victoria.

Interstate – Visitors from other states in Australia.

Visitor Economy – The visitor economy is made up of anyone who provides or promotes services to Australia's domestic and international visitors. It includes a diverse set of businesses that span several industry sectors and operate across cities and regional destinations. (Austrade)

Wholesaler – Refers to wholesale travel agents offering tariffs to overseas or domestic agents



LEFT
Bicycle riding at Quarry
Hills Regional Parkland

References

How this plan supports a Strong Local Economy Strategy

Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026

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Policy Context

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State - Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy

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Visitation Snapshot

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Quarry Hill Regional Parkland

<https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/suburban-parks/quarry-hills-regional-parklands>

Council Offices

25 Ferres Boulevard
South Morang VIC 3752

Email: info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Website whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Postal address

City of Whittlesea Locked Bag
Bundoora MDC VIC 3083

Phone: 9217 2170

National Relay Service: 133 677
(ask for 9217 2170)

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131 450