Supporting the growth of regionally-significant tourism experiences across the Riverina Murray

Program Overview

Destination Riverina Murray (DRM) is proud to launch the Pilot Tourism Development Program, a targeted, operator-first initiative designed to strengthen regionally significant visitor experiences and build industry capability across the Riverina Murray.

The program will deliver tailored support to a small cohort of operators through one-on-one mentoring, practical tools, structured development focus areas and a personalised roadmap, helping turn potential into progress while informing the delivery of a future cornerstone DRM initiative planned for 2027.

Targeted, operator-first support to strengthen market-ready visitor experiences

Why this program?

The Riverina Murray is rich with bold ideas, passionate operators, and experiences worth travelling for. As one of NSW's largest and most diverse tourism regions, spanning almost 150,000 square kilometres across 22 Local Government Areas, the Riverina Murray has an important role to play in driving visitor economy growth.

Following an operational and strategic review of recent activity, DRM recognises the need to take a more operator-first approach to strengthen our role in the visitor economy and deliver the impact we aspire to achieve.

This shift is shaped by:

- Increasing pressure on councils, including reduced budgets and limited capacity to support operators at a local level
- Insights from stakeholder engagement and feedback, highlighting confusion around DRM's role, and a desire for clearer support pathways
- The absence of a single peak body advocating for tourism across the Riverina Murray, resulting in operators looking to DRM for stronger coordination, communication and direction

Aligned with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2035 and the Riverina Murray Destination Management Plan, this pilot program reflects a more targeted, outcomes-led approach to industry development, backing the people doing the work on the ground with practical guidance, stronger connections and clearer direction.

This pilot program is designed to complement existing council-led tourism efforts, reduce pressure on local resources, and strengthen the Riverina Murray visitor economy through direct support to operators.

Destination
Riverina Murray NSW

A Pilot Initiative

This is a 10-month pilot initiative designed to test and refine a more targeted, outcomes-focused model for operator support across the Riverina Murray. Delivered to a small cohort of selected participants, insights and learnings from the pilot will directly inform the design and delivery of DRM's future cornerstone tourism development program, set to roll out in 2027.

The program provides tailored, expert-led support to enable operators to develop and refine regionally significant, market-ready visitor experiences. Through one-on-one mentoring, dedicated resources and a structured roadmap, participants are supported to identify key gaps, implement improvements and achieve measurable outcomes.

Phase 1: Selection & Alignment

Participants are selected through a rigorous Expression of Interest (EOI) process, prioritising operators with strong potential to create new products or enhance existing experiences aligned with the NSW Government's Visitor Economy Strategy 2035.

Phase 2: Audit & Roadmap

The program begins with a one-on-one onsite visit and a comprehensive experience audit led by DRM's Industry Development Manager. This results in a tailored roadmap with clear milestones, recommended focus areas and development priorities.

Phase 3: Mentorship & Focus Areas

Participants complete monthly mentoring and targeted development themes, supported by networking and connection opportunities and utilising resources like the NSW First program. Sessions are designed to identify business-specific gaps, unlock opportunities, and support the delivery of agreed milestones and measurable outcomes.

Phase 4: Alumni Network

Graduating participants form the foundation of an ongoing Alumni Network, remaining connected to future development opportunities and continued engagement across the Destination Riverina Murray industry ecosystem.

This approach keeps momentum strong, strengthens product readiness, industry capability and regional economic contribution through high-quality visitor experiences.

Program Goals

The Pilot Tourism Development Program aims to deliver:

- Six (6) new developments or enhanced visitor experiences
- Stronger tourism capability across the cohort and broader region
- Greater clarity around DRM's role and value to industry
- Increased regional awareness and stronger promotion of visitor experiences
- Reduced barriers to tourism growth through targeted problem-solving
- Strengthened alignment between operators, DRM, tourism bodies and state departments
- Enhanced contribution to the visitor economy through significant, market-ready experiences

**Destination
Riverina Murray NSW**

Course Focus Areas & Outcomes

Participants will complete 6–8 tailored focus areas, selected in consultation, to strengthen the skills and capabilities needed to grow their visitor experience. These will form the foundation of each participant's strategic roadmap.

Focus areas & outcomes (indicative) may include:

1. Experience Development
Strengthening or developing immersive, market-ready visitor experiences aligned to regional strengths.

- Develop or refine a market-ready visitor experience
- Identify and strengthen a clear USP / point of difference
- Apply storytelling and emotional engagement to improve visitor connection

2. Visitor Experience & Understanding Customers
Understanding your target visitor and improving the end-to-end customer journey.

- Develop customer personas / archetypes
- Map the visitor experience journey and identify key improvements
- Strengthen engagement through feedback, testimonials and reviews

3. Strategic Marketing & Branding
Building visibility through compelling brand storytelling and strong digital foundations.

- Establish a clear brand identity and value proposition
- Build a practical digital marketing and content strategy
- Develop a media library (imagery/video) and leverage Destination NSW campaign assets

4. Data & Insights
Using visitor insights, feedback and economic data to guide smarter decisions.

- Implement feedback loops and insights tracking
- Use council/regional data to identify opportunities and guide planning
- Apply data to improve experience design and investment priorities

5. Business Fundamentals & Compliance
Strengthening operational foundations for sustainable growth.

- Ensure planning approvals, compliance and operational requirements are in place
- Develop/refine key documents (risk, policies, procedures, business plans)
- Improve budgeting, profitability and sustainability planning (including insurances)

6. Distribution & Bookability
Ensuring products are easy to find, understand and book.

- Improve online bookability via direct and/or third-party channels
- Understand distribution strategies including OTAs and marketplaces (where applicable)
- Package and price experiences effectively for conversion and growth

7. Sustainability & Regenerative Tourism
Operating responsibly and strengthening long-term sustainability and community benefit.

- Implement sustainable practices aligned to Ecotourism Australia guidelines
- Reduce environmental impact and encourage responsible visitor behaviour
- Strengthen local community wellbeing and positive regional contribution

8. Accessibility & Inclusion
Improving inclusion and access to ensure experiences welcome diverse visitors.

Destination
Riverina Murray NSW

- Identify opportunities to improve accessibility across facilities and delivery
- Strengthen signage, amenities and inclusive visitor information
- Improve readiness to cater for diverse customer needs

9. First Nations Engagement
Supporting respectful engagement with First Nations tourism and cultural initiatives.

- Improve understanding of culturally respectful practice and engagement
- Incorporate appropriate acknowledgements, signage and cultural representation
- Explore partnerships through First Nations tourism networks and programs

10. Agritourism & Niche Market Development
Strengthening niche experiences aligned to regional strengths (e.g. farm, food, culture).

- Develop or enhance agritourism, culinary, heritage/culture, inland waterways or wellness offerings
- Integrate regional storytelling and local produce
- Align with relevant niche strategies and regional priorities where applicable

11. Digital Capability & Innovation
Using tools and technology to improve operations and visitor engagement.

- Adopt or improve digital tools (website, bookings, CRM)
- Use automation and analytics to support marketing and customer engagement
- Explore emerging tech opportunities (AI tools, virtual tours, innovation pathways)

12. Workforce Development & Capability Building
Building internal capacity, leadership and operational resilience.

- Strengthen leadership and team capability to support growth
- Develop practical workforce attraction/retention approaches
- Align workforce development with THRIVE 2030 and DNSW goals.

13. Strategic Partnerships & Industry Alignment
Building partnerships to strengthen scale, visibility and visitor outcomes.

- Establish partnerships with DNSW, RTOs and local stakeholders
- Identify cross-promotion and cooperative marketing opportunities
- Align growth with relevant regional and state priorities

14. PR, Media & Influencer Engagement
Improving media readiness and strengthening regional visibility.

- Prepare or refine media assets (press kit, imagery, messaging)
- Build confidence in PR and storytelling opportunities
- Identify potential pathways for influencers, famils or event leverage

15. Awards & Grant Readiness
Supporting operators to pursue funding and recognition pathways.

- Identify relevant grants and funding opportunities
- Strengthen capability to prepare and submit applications
- Prepare award submissions to elevate visibility and credibility

16. Planning & Regulation
Navigating planning processes, approvals and development pathways.

- Improved understanding of planning requirements and approval steps
- Stronger confidence engaging with local planners/consultants
- Practical actions toward permits, approvals and compliant growth

**Destination
Riverina Murray NSW**

Alumni Network

Graduating participants will form the foundation of an ongoing Pilot Program Alumni Network — a connected group of regionally significant operators who continue to play an active role in strengthening the Riverina Murray visitor economy.

The Alumni Network is designed to maintain momentum beyond the pilot, supporting long-term capability building, collaboration and shared learning. Alumni will remain connected to DRM through ongoing engagement opportunities, including invitations to targeted workshops and forums, access to emerging development initiatives, and opportunities to contribute to future tourism development priorities across the region.

As trusted industry partners, alumni may also be invited to participate in future case studies, peer mentoring, collaboration opportunities and stakeholder engagement activity, helping elevate regional visibility and shape the next phase of tourism development delivery in the Riverina Murray.

Who Should Apply

The Pilot Tourism Development Program is intended for Riverina Murray-based operators who are well-positioned to act on tailored support, progress development priorities, and bring regionally significant visitor-ready experiences to market within the allocated timeframe.

To ensure the program delivers meaningful, measurable outcomes for both operators and the wider Riverina Murray visitor economy, participants must meet the eligibility criteria.

Destination
Riverina Murray NSW