



Developing your Networks: Improving the Sustainability of Tourism in your Region

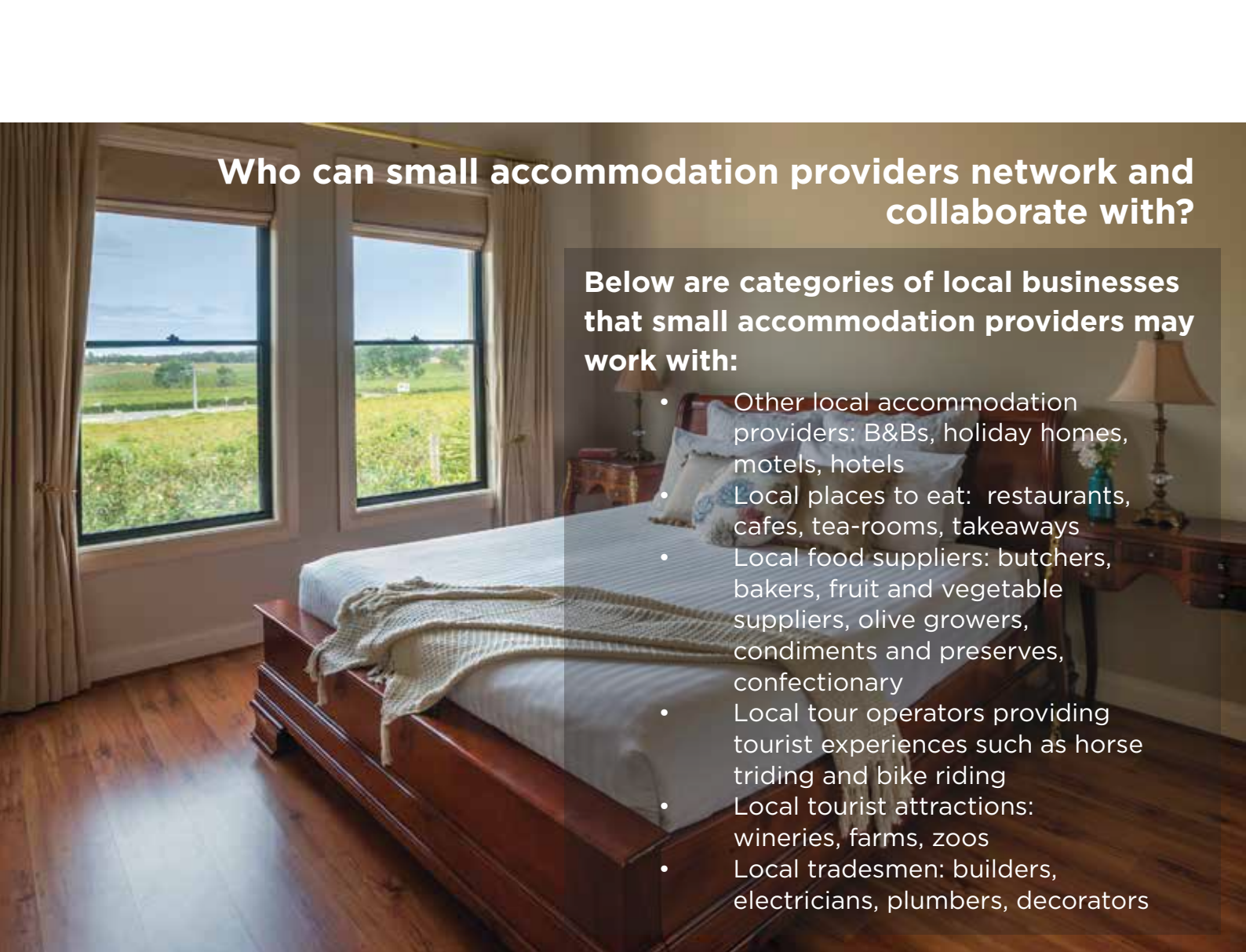


Background

There are many motivations for operating a B&B or letting a holiday home; from a major lifestyle change to developing a new source of income. Regardless of the motivation, small accommodation providers play an important role in contributing to the local economy and tourism development of their region.

To contribute to a sustainable tourism industry, small accommodation providers need to consider how they can increase the positive economic, social and environmental impacts that their business brings to the region. One way to achieve this is by working with other businesses in the area.

This leaflet is based on a research project that examined practices employed by small accommodation providers that contribute to a more sustainable tourism industry. The findings are used to develop general guidance for small accommodation providers on networking with other businesses and the benefits of this collaborative approach. Recommendations for small accommodation providers and local governments are provided.



Who can small accommodation providers network and collaborate with?

Below are categories of local businesses that small accommodation providers may work with:

- Other local accommodation providers: B&Bs, holiday homes, motels, hotels
- Local places to eat: restaurants, cafes, tea-rooms, takeaways
- Local food suppliers: butchers, bakers, fruit and vegetable suppliers, olive growers, condiments and preserves, confectionary
- Local tour operators providing tourist experiences such as horse riding and bike riding
- Local tourist attractions: wineries, farms, zoos
- Local tradesmen: builders, electricians, plumbers, decorators

Two key factors need to be considered in deciding which local businesses to work with. First, small accommodation providers need to consider how working with other local businesses will benefit them. This may be financial, but it may also reflect other aspects such as saving time, increasing guest experience or enhancing the local community which they live in. Second, for the relationship to be successful it is important to ensure an alignment between the personal and business values of all parties.

What are the benefits of collaborating with other local businesses?

Increasing guest satisfaction and willingness to recommend

Studies show that whilst tourists seek novelty by travelling to new destinations, they often participate in the same activities. To enhance tourists' experience, small accommodation providers can identify the experiences that prospective guests enjoy during their holidays and match them with local providers. This will increase guests' overall satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the accommodation to others.



Increasing reciprocal economic benefits and contributing to regional economic growth

When local businesses work together they receive reciprocal economic benefits while contributing to regional growth. Providing prospective guests with information on the range of local attractions and experiences prior to their stay may encourage them to extend their stay; benefitting the small accommodation provider but also increasing the amount of money spent in the region.

Tourists who choose to stay in small accommodations often enjoy the feeling of being part of the local community. Providing locally produced food supplies will satisfy guests, not only due to the high quality of food but also the contribution to the local economy and environment.

Contributing to the local community

By developing strong local networks, small accommodation providers can contribute to the sustainability of local businesses, which in turn ensures locals have access to a range of shops, restaurants, tradesmen and transport.

Additionally, small accommodation providers can consider providing relevant information to guests in order to influence their behaviour. This may include providing details of local taxi firms in wine regions or highlighting protected areas on local beaches in seaside locations. In addition, providing guests with information on local produce providers increases the likelihood of them purchasing items from these businesses during their stay or taking them home as gifts.



Contributing to the tourist destination image

Destinations initially develop because they have features that attract tourists. This may be something in the natural environment such as beautiful beaches or a site of historical interest. Working with other local businesses provides small accommodation providers with an opportunity to contribute to the development of a strong destination image.

If a region wishes to be known for its good food and wine or its beautiful beaches, local businesses need to ensure that their marketing materials reflect this. Working together, small accommodation providers and other local businesses can develop consistent promotional messages that increase tourists' awareness about a destination and their associations with the region. This makes the region more attractive to tourists with the potential to increase visitor numbers.

Supporting other small accommodation providers

There are many benefits from small accommodation providers working together which include: sharing business experiences and ideas, solving shared problems, and developing business skills such as marketing which will assist providers in sustaining their business.

Small accommodation providers can consider joining an established group such as Hosted Accommodation Australia (HAA) or create their own support network by arranging an informal “get together”.

Summary and recommendations

Small accommodation providers may work together with local businesses to develop a sustainable tourism industry. Recommendations for small accommodation providers as well as tourism agencies on how they could support these providers are shown below:



Small accommodation providers

- Organise a support group with other small accommodation providers.
- Develop a Best Practice Guide to provide consistent quality at small accommodations.
- Act as a mentor to new small accommodation providers.
- Provide guests with information to assist them in behaving positively during their stay.

Tourism agencies

- Acknowledge small accommodation Champions and their contribution to a sustainable tourism industry.
- Support new small accommodation providers by developing a network of mentors to assist with overcoming issues connected with “start-ups” and implementing sustainable practices.
- Ensure easy access to a range of online support materials for new and existing small accommodation providers.
- Assist small accommodation providers by developing an online register of all local businesses in the region that are directly or indirectly involved in tourism.
- Develop a regional marketing pack for small accommodation providers, offering support and guidance on product, pricing and distribution strategies. Ensure consistency with the destination image by providing examples of marketing materials and messages to use within their promotion.
- Provide free workshops to develop business skills in areas such as operating a B&B, using social media, and developing promotional materials.
- Involve small accommodation providers when developing regional tourism policies.



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The researchers would like to thank the small accommodation providers in the McLaren Vale Region who took part in this research.



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