

Geelong Otway Tourism's Membership System

Gaye Jennings.

Business Administration Co-ordinator

Tel. (03) 5244 7113

gaye.jennings@geelong.vic.gov.au

www.geelongotwaytourism.com.au



Since its establishment in 1993, Geelong Otway Tourism (G.O.T.) has operated a one-fee dual-membership system.

Tourism operators in Geelong, Bellarine Peninsula, Surf Coast and Otway sub-regions are encouraged to join their local tourism association (LTA), which automatically affiliates them to the multi-award winning regional body. Forty per cent of the fee is retained by the LTA, while sixty per cent is earmarked for regional marketing activity.

It's a simple and transparent system, which makes life a lot clearer for tourism operators, who can get confused about which bodies they need to join. With 1200 business members and an attrition rate of only 5% a year, Geelong-Otway Tourism's scheme attests to the success of the system.

G.O.T. emphasises that the operator chooses to become a member of their local association, which strengthens tourism participation where it is most needed. Very strong linkages between the LTAs and the regional body – including direct representation on the board – ensures that policy development and marketing is carried out hand-in-hand with the wishes of the membership.

G.O.T. manages the administration of the membership system, which relieves the LTA of the administrative burden they previously carried. It also enables G.O.T. to keep accurate track of who is eligible to participate in its marketing campaigns and ensures that membership funds are invoiced and paid promptly.

The membership income helps to fund the position of Destination Officers for the Bellarine and Geelong sub regions. The officer is a staff member of G.O.T., but works closely with the LTA on administrative and marketing matters, including membership development at the local level. The Destination Officer also acts as the first point of contact for a membership enquiry in their area. The positions have helped to increase the professionalism of the LTAs and improved communication between the region and local level.

Gaye Jennings of Geelong Otway Tourism helped to establish the organization in the early 1990s and has overseen development of the membership system since then. It was recognised from the outset that a dual membership scheme would increase participation and reduce operator confusion.

In recent years she has undertaken a review of tourism membership schemes around the country in order to further enhance the G.O.T. system. The best elements of several were adopted to produce a more simplified four tier membership system.

Interested individuals or organizations can join as a 'Friends of Tourism', while businesses can choose between joining as an Associate Member, with limited benefits, as a full member under four size-related categories, or as a corporate sponsor.

Additional marketing packages are also available to augment general memberships, which bundles-up many of the marketing programs into one price point.



PARTICIPATION GETTING INVOLVED



TOURISM
EXCELLENCE

According to Gaye Jennings, the onus is primarily on businesses to decide at which level they wish to join and to reflect upon how involved they wish to be in the wider industry. She emphasises that the business is always made aware that they are joining their local association, which is affiliated with the regional body, rather than directly joining the regional body. New membership sourcing is done at the LTA level, in conjunction with the Destination Officer. The principle point of ongoing contact between a business and Geelong Otway Tourism is through their area's Destination Officer.

One of the big success stories of recent years has been the introduction of the membership book, which is provided to new members and is mailed annually to all members. It explains membership benefits, the tourism structure, where a business can go to learn new information, and provides an overview of some of the important policies, eg brochure distribution, as well as the overall marketing program for the year.



G.O.T's annual survey of the membership reveals a very positive response to membership book.

Forums for new members are held four times a year. These are designed to welcome businesses and to explain how the tourism system works, as well as to communicate the benefits they can expect from membership.

The events are a very good mechanism to increase a businesses feeling of 'ownership' of their tourism bodies and to encourage their broader involvement.