



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Darug and Gundungurra people, and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

Tourism after the pandemic

Land Use Subcommittee

The current hiatus in international tourist visitor numbers created by the COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to step back and consider the future of tourism in the Blue Mountains.

‘Sustainable tourism’ is often used to badge tourism in the Blue Mountains and the achievement of Eco Destination Certification status seems to confirm that perception. With the recent purchase of the Katoomba golf course clubhouse for a Global Planetary Health Leadership Centre, along with its target of net zero carbon emissions by the end of 2025, Council is on its way to achieving its goal of making the Blue Mountains ‘the sustainability capital of Australia’.

But these slogans and aspirations often don’t match reality on the ground. Before the COVID pandemic, tourism in the mountains was arguably already unsustainable in terms of infrastructure provision, residential amenity and the environment. Parking, toilets and waste bins at popular destinations, other than the main drawcard sites, were either non-existent or unable to cope with increasing visitor numbers. Rubbish left behind by visitors to these locations inevitably made its way into the national park, contributing to the cumulative impact of human activity on the world heritage area downhill. Crowding and parking and traffic chaos at peak times created havoc for local residents. With regional tourism now increasing these problems are returning.

Right now, Katoomba and the southern escarpment ‘tourism precinct’ are the subject of a Council masterplanning process. ‘Opportunity sites’ in this precinct include the old Katoomba golf course. For many years ‘big tourism’ developers have had their eyes on the

golf course as an ideal site for a large scale hotel / resort / conference centre or tourist ‘hub’. Currently, the golf course is a popular public recreation area for walking, birdwatching and picnics and the Society wants it to remain in public hands for the continuing benefit of residents and visitors. The golf course could also be used for educational activities associated with the adjoining Global Planetary Leadership Centre.

It’s time for a community discussion about what ‘sustainable tourism’ looks like and how tourism can be better managed. The Blue Mountains could be a leader in sustainable tourism if we pivot away from mass market and ‘big tourism’ models to one more befitting our status as a city in a world heritage area and (potentially) ‘the sustainability capital of Australia’. More ‘big tourism’ development on the escarpment will only further diminish the scenic values of the world heritage area. Instead, we need to consider how to encourage and grow a more diverse local tourism sector, particularly indigenous, low impact nature-based and sustainability-related tourism.

So during the upcoming Council election period you may hear from ‘big tourism’ industry and some candidates. They may say that what the Blue Mountains needs is a quick recovery to a ‘business as usual’ mass-market model of tourism and new large-scale hotels, resorts and conference centres. We urge you to consider what a better future for tourism in the Blue Mountains could be and ‘vote for the environment’ in the upcoming Council election.

You’ll find our 2021 Council Election webpage at <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/elections/bmce21/>