

# News Release

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## **AUSTRALIAN'S LOVE THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS!**

Destination Southern Highlands was recently awarded Gold for best destination marketing in NSW and Bronze at the Australian Tourism Awards with the 'My Southern Highlands' program. The program was designed to let the market know how much we love where we live via the innovative 'My Heart Lives Here' campaigns. Well it seems it's not only residents' love the Highlands. The latest domestic visitor estimates for the Southern Highlands from Tourism Research Australia's National Visitor Survey have hit levels not experienced since the Sydney Olympics! Take the one-off impact of the Olympics out of the equation and domestic overnight visitor numbers are the highest for any calendar year since records began in 1998. We love the Highlands and it seems so does Australia!

Domestic overnight visitors to the Wingecarribee Shire fell just shy of the 450,000 mark for the year ending December 2014, said Destination Southern Highlands, Manager, Steve Rosa. "The last time we saw this volume was in the year 2000" said Mr. Rosa. Whilst Mr. Rosa is happy with the results he played down the importance of only looking at visitor numbers. "Visitor numbers are obviously an important indicator of how we are travelling as a destination and we are more than happy with these numbers" said Mr. Rosa. "A more important indicator is the number of nights these visitors spent in our Shire. It's one thing to get visitors but another for these visitors to spend time in the Highlands. The more nights, the greater benefit to the visitor economy expenditure and in turn the more jobs tourism supports."

The number of nights spent in the Wingecarribee Shire in 2014 by domestic visitors broke through the 1 million level (1.1m). The only other calendar year this has happened was the year of the Sydney Olympics in 2000. "We are really pleased with the nights result for 2014. Domestic nights have only broken through the 1 million mark on four other occasions out of a total 65 periods on record" said Mr. Rosa.

Domestic day visitors also broke through the 1 million mark in 2014 (1.1m). This is only the third calendar year that Wingecarribee Shire has hosted more than 1 million day visitors and one of only a handful of times when all 65 periods are considered. Mr. Rosa points out that domestic day visitors are a critical part of the Highlands visitor mix and are often the same people who stay with us overnight on other trips. Often, according to Mr.

Rosa, “day visitor numbers rise and overnight numbers fall. To have both hitting near record highs during the same year is the destination marketing equivalent of the trifecta and bodes well for the future”.

Importantly, the results don’t simply reflect what’s going on in the market. “We’re not simply ‘riding the same wave’ that everyone else is. Our growth is well above that of the surrounding Capital Country Region and even further above Regional NSW. Visitor nights to the Region grew 24% in 2014 and for Regional NSW growth was only 1%. Our nights growth was double that of the Region and completely against the grain when you look at Regional NSW as a whole”.

Mr. Rosa said “Destination marketing is complex and so is evaluating its effectiveness. We always consider what the market is doing and what other factors are at work. In this case, however, we are doing the opposite of what the market is doing and there are no other stand outs driving visitors our way. It’s a good indicator that our strategy is on the money”. With the fall in the Australian dollar and petrol prices we are hoping that this will further grow our visitation from both domestic and international visitors.

Speaking on money, expenditure data for the Southern Highlands recently released by Tourism Research Australia puts the domestic expenditure for 2014 just over \$250 million into the Wingecarribee Shire visitor economy. “International data for the year end December 2014 is yet to be released” said Mr. Rosa, “so expenditure by international visitors on top of this will make 2014 a very important year for the Highlands.” Mr. Rosa is quick to point out he and his team won’t be resting on its laurels. “Results like this are great but you can’t afford to sit back and hope these numbers will automatically continue. Competition is greater than ever so we’ll be looking to the future, not the past”.

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