

Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

Mossman Gorge Centre, Douglas Shire Australia

“When I was a young man growing up in Mossman things were very different for Bama (local Aboriginal people). I left school at a young age and started working. I could see that so many people loved to visit the Gorge, and realised we had an opportunity to show them who we really are and our culture, so that we could share and learn from each other, to make things better for our young people. One day my Elders asked me ‘what do you think is the best option for our people?’ and I said Tourism! Because a lot of people were passing through our community and it felt like the right time. From there I started ‘Dreamtime Walks’ back in 1987. A few years later, it came to me in a dream, so powerful that I couldn’t ignore it. This made me think harder about how to really strengthen and make tourism bigger for our community, for more jobs and to reach more people through tourism and sharing our story. Tourism can give everybody a chance to really experience the culture and our environment in the Bama Kuku Yalanji way, which helps people to connect with us in a better way, and gives a better understanding of who we are. What we set out to do at Mossman Gorge Centre is all in the spirit of Reconciliation, we are proud and happy to welcome visitors to our Country, and show them our ways. This is our way of keeping our culture alive and walking together as one”. Roy Gibson, Traditional Owner & Elder of the Kuku Yalanji community.

Mossman Gorge Centre Overview

The Mossman Gorge Centre is a tourism operation situated at the southern-most entrance to the Mossman Gorge, located within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. With over 80% of employees being of Indigenous decent, the Centre provides an authentic experience to visitors, bringing to life the natural and cultural values of the area. The Centre hosts over 350,000 visitors per year and includes an art gallery, café, retail shop, conference rooms, shuttle bus service and offers guided cultural tours. In addition, the in-house training centre provides tourism and hospitality courses to Indigenous people located across Queensland, Australia. The aim of the Centre is to provide an Indigenous experience to visitors whilst creating real economic and employment opportunities for local Indigenous people.

The Journey

Located only 20 minutes from Port Douglas, the Mossman Gorge features ancient pristine tropical rainforests and cool streams. Prior to the opening of the Centre the area was popular amongst both

Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

locals and visitors, looking to explore the rainforest and cool off in one of the many swimming spots. In 1987 local Indigenous body, Bamanga Bubu Ngadimuku Aboriginal Corporation launched the Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Walks to share cultural stories and capitalise on the passing tourist trade. The sites' global ecological values were recognised in 1988, and the Mossman Gorge site was included within the Wet Tropics World Heritage boundary. As the site grew in popularity over the years, the area began to suffer from the impacts of over-visitation. Vehicle use and parking created congestion negatively impacting the natural environment and the local Mossman Gorge Indigenous community, which is home to 180 people. Paths through the ancient rainforest began to show evidence of erosion and vegetation was trampled as new informal paths were created by the more adventurous visitors. With the success of the Dreamtime Walks, the Bamanga Bubu Ngadimuku Aboriginal Corporation had grand plans to create a central visitor hub, eco-bus shuttle and boardwalks to minimise the environmental impact of tourism and provide further employment opportunities to the local Indigenous community. The group, with the assistance of Douglas Shire Council successfully lobbied the Australian Government Indigenous Land & Sea Corporation to secure A\$18 million to fund the project. The Corporation approached local cane farmer, Don Murday and purchased the 8.4 hectares of land for the project. Construction of the Centre began in 2010 and in August 2011 the Australian Government's Indigenous Employment Program provided an additional A\$680,000 to assist the Centre in employing 40 Indigenous staff. The Centre was officially opened by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin on 7 August 2012. The Mossman Gorge Accord was ratified in 2013 by the Australian Government, Queensland Government and the Corporation demonstrating a collective will and commitment to the Mossman Gorge people and their aspirations.

Cultural & Community Benefits

The Centre plays an important role in maintaining the cultural beliefs, heritage and practices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions. It promotes the preservation of language, with the Kuku Yalanji language being spoken by the majority of its employees. It has provided economic and employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people, for example the art gallery exclusively showcases the work of local Yalanji artists. A recent study undertaken by accounting firm, Deloitte quantified the economic impact of the Centre to be in excess of A\$3.5 million per annum. The Centre works with local schools and universities to promote cultural awareness, with over 360 students taking part in the Dreamtime Walk per year. There is also a small display of cultural artefacts onsite, including Indigenous stone tools and implements. The eco-shuttle bus and boom gate, governed by the Mossman Gorge Road Use Agreement not only delivers a traffic management solution, but provides a safer environment for the local Mossman Gorge community. Local residents are no longer photographed on a daily basis by visitors and children can safely play outside.

Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

The Centre Today

Today, the Centre continues to have an active role in the preservation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and traditions through its ecotourism operations, training facilities and art gallery. In their seventh year of trading, over 200 trainees have graduated from the Centre's tourism and hospitality courses, which includes four qualified chefs. The Dreamtime Walks remain one of the destination's most popular guided walks, with 40,000 visitors enjoying the cultural experience each year. The Centre remains committed to ensuring its operations have a minimal environmental impact and generates 40% of its energy requirements onsite using PV solar panels. In 2008, the Centre achieved the Ecotourism and Recognising Our Culture certifications, accredited by Ecotourism Australia. The Centre is currently enhancing its environmental practices and has recently announced that it will provide free electric vehicle charging stations within its carpark, catering for visitors driving more sustainable vehicles.

Further Information

The Mossman Gorge Accord is available on the Parliament of Australia website. For further information about the Mossman Gorge Centre tourism and training operations visit: www.mossmangorge.com.au

