



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Sensory Tourism Australia calls on regional tourism organisations and local governments to test their tourism experiences with blind and low-vision travellers

Last week at the Australian Tourism Exchange in Brisbane, Sensory Tourism Australia announced they have partnered with not for profit accessible tourism operator Cocky Guides to lead groups of blind and low-vision travellers on famil trips to selected regions across Australia. These famils share knowledge, create inclusive content and promote accessible tourism across regions.

Sensory Tourism Australia Director and co-founder Kellie Hayes says, "There has been plenty of infrastructure investment and training with attractions, properties and tour operators around accessible tourism, particularly the last couple of years. We want to keep this momentum going and ensure travellers with accessible needs are active in the community and experiencing improvements, whether this is infrastructure or staff training. Cocky Guides has been making this happen regularly with groups of blind and low-vision travellers since 2018. Our role at Sensory Tourism Australia is to ensure that conversations around accessible tourism, in particular, service excellence, continue both before, and after we visit regions with travellers led by Cocky Guides."

Creating a famil across a region was an idea developed and executed in 2024 through a collaboration with Sensory Tourism Australia and Destination Port Stephens. Destination Port Stephens wanted to showcase its members' accessible tourism offer to blind and low-vision travellers and improve confidence in local businesses wishing to learn more about accessible and inclusive tourism.

Mel Turner, Industry Engagement Manager at Destination Port Stephens, says, "Many of our local tourism industry members want to do more to improve accessibility and be more inclusive, but don't know where to begin. Others have invested substantially in their businesses and are keen to showcase their venue. Wherever a venue or attraction is on its accessible tourism journey, it's great to have organisations like Sensory Tourism Australia



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and Cocky Guides available to do regular visits to our members tourism businesses with travellers who have lived experience. It builds confidence for everybody involved."

During the Port Stephens famil, blind and low-vision travellers visited Irukandji Shark & Ray Encounters, where they jumped into a wetsuit to get close to the sharks and rays. The first encounter was in a shallow lagoon where the rays swam around their feet while the traveller got to feed them. As the rays circled their feet, travellers could reach out and touch them. But the highlight of the visit was the Zebra Shark Encounter, held in a deeper tropical lagoon. During this small group encounter, travellers sat on a shallow ledge in the lagoon, and the zebra shark would swim right across the top of their legs, where they could reach out and feel its rough texture.

Owner and Director of Irukandji Shark & Ray Encounters, Lia Pereira, says, "Irukandji has always been passionate about inclusion, especially focusing on unique, tailored visits. Being part of the Port Stephens famil with Sensory Tourism Australia was lovely. I was surprised to discover we were already leading the field in what was, in our eyes, a given. For all tourism operators starting or wanting to grow in the industry, reach out and be part of a famil. The program is professional, provides the best cooperative visits, and is terrific for melding new staff."

Sensory Tourism Australia now seek expressions of interest from Regional Tourism Organisations and Local Government keen to get involved with their local tourism businesses to continue the accessible tourism conversation and learn more about hosting a regional famil for blind and low-vision travellers with Cocky Guides. After each regional famil, business owners can talk to Sensory Tourism Australia to see how they can package their product or experience ready for travellers with accessible needs.

If you, as a tourism business, accommodation provider or region, would like to get involved during the launch of this initiative, reach out to Kellie Hayes via email at kellie@sensorytourism.com



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CONTACT

For further information, please get in touch with Kellie Hayes via email at kellie@sensorytourism.com or call 0411 850 095

ABOUT SENSORY TOURISM

Sensory tourism is an emerging concept that presents destinations differently, with less emphasis on traditional sightseeing. A destination's physical and multi-sensory aspects are the priority in enhancing the tourism experience for blind and low-vision travellers with their other senses - hearing, taste, smell, and touch.

ABOUT SENSORY TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Sensory Tourism Australia is a leader in curating engaging itineraries for blind and low-vision travellers. These itineraries showcase multi-sensory aspects of Australia's key destinations by engaging experienced local tourism businesses.

Sensory Tourism Australia is available to consult with travellers, travel agents and businesses to create supported travel itineraries to meet the needs of blind and low-vision travellers.

For more information, visit <https://sensorytourismaustralia.com/>

ABOUT COCKY GUIDES

Since launching on 15 August 2018, Cocky Guides have specialised in providing unique, multisensory adventures for the blind and low-vision community. More than 1,500 Australians have visited 70 destinations with Cocky Guides.

Cocky Guides purpose is to inspire blind and low-vision Australians to access new destinations and experiences, and they were the recipient of the Gold Award for Excellence in Accessible Tourism at the prestigious 2023 NSW Tourism Awards and finalist in the 2023 Australian Tourism Awards.

There are over 575,000 Australians who are blind or have low vision. Cocky Guides aims to be the leading support provider for adventure and travel, designed to increase independence, plus social and community participation for blind and low-vision Australians.

For more information, visit www.cockyguides.com.au