FACT SHEET
RE-IMAGINE THE VISITOR CENTRE

Why re-imagine the VIC concept?

It is simple. Tourists have changed. Today's challenge is to keep the Visitor Centre relevant, viable, sustainable and valuable to funding bodies, tourism associations, local business and tourists.

What has changed about tourist behaviour that impacts VIC services?

- Ability to look up and book from their personal device
- Desire for bespoke and personalised everything
- Ability to attract visitors enmasse to a planned event - requirement to provide heavy upfront detail, and meet or exceed expectations on arrival
- Desire to know the local secrets and what it is like to live here
- Transformational experiences - seeking personal growth through experiences.

Why are Visitor Centres important to tourism?

- They are the one place within a region or destination that embodies the character of the region as a whole, and can tell the story in a way that tourists can understand
- The staff are able to ask bold questions and change visitor's perceptions and preconceived ideas to create bespoke packages
- Staff are locals and often know the local secrets
- They can set a standard for the region.

How can visitor centres evolve to service today's tourists, and be sustainable and valuable in the long term?

Become gateways into, or hubs to service, the local region or destination.

Gateway: People passing through a point before they go to a destination. Works best for destinations or regions dominated by a single entry / exit point. Great example: Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre.

Make it work:

- Create a definitive built gateway or entrance statement - could be conceived with drive-through or stop and shop alternatives
- Provide services that are needed on the way in or out - payment of entrance fees, check-in registers, equipment that could be needed inside the destination, etc.
- Offer packages of food and drink that can be taken into the destination
- Create services and small events that cater to the beginning and end of a trip - breakfast, late afternoon break stop
- Create displays that centre around tour routes that begin at your gateway visitor centre
- Exit via the gift shop.

Hub: A central point within the destination or region, that provides services that would be needed within the local area. Works best for large destinations or regions with multiple entrance points.

Great example: Barossa Visitor Centre.

Make it work:

- Re-direct all tour service pick-up points, car hire, bike hire, walking trail departure points, etc. to begin at the visitor centre hub
- Provide plenty of full day parking
- Create an icon of the region so visitors are curious and attracted, and locals are proud
- Provide retail in a shop format with local producers' wares for sale
- Offer meals and drinks on site, or very local shops and restaurants
- Create rotating and short term services and small events that bring people back multiple times during their visit - meet the maker, featured producers showing goods, education sessions. Strong connections with local producers are critical for hub style visitor centres
- Create displays that entice people to try something they haven't considered before.

What needs to change?

- Refocus on what attracts tourists and what visitor centres are in a unique position to offer
- Strong connections with local industry to build bespoke packages
- Strong connections with tourism bodies to improve community connection and value
- Clever commercialisation to promote the region and provide income opportunities
- Rethinking location of visitor centres and how the infrastructure should function and look to best serve the region, what tourists and locals need and how they move around.

Learn more?

Talk to TiCSA or ATIC about VIC accreditation and priorities for re-thinking your VIC space

Download our E-Book from https://www.studio-s2.com.au/design-guides/visitor-and-welcome-centres/

Contact us at S2 Architects and let's just start with a coffee.

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