



## Swan Hill Visitor Profile and Satisfaction Report: Summary of results

The following Visitor Profile and Satisfaction (VPS) report is based on a sample of 263 visitors to Swan Hill in Victoria during September and October 2008.

For comparison purposes, some data are compared with benchmark data which includes all destinations completed within the VPS program. Benchmarks are the average of all VPS destination projects with at least 50 respondents. Only the most recent waves for each destination are included.

Additionally, some data are compared with a 'sub-group' of destinations that have similar attributes to Swan Hill. The 'sub-group' includes:

- Echuca
- Mildura
- Albury Wodonga
- Gippsland Lakes
- Bendigo
- Murrindindi.

Swan Hill data are included in both the benchmark and sub-group data.

### Discussion of findings

The following focuses on key findings of the VPS survey and makes reference to the Swan Hill Incorporated 2007–2014 Seven Year Strategic Plan.

The greatest proportion of visitors to Swan Hill during the survey period can be characterised as self-driving, older, mostly retired Victorian couples who stay either one or two nights. They might be on a short trip from home or on a longer 'grey nomad' style trip and see Swan Hill as a convenient stopover and/or a place to experience the Murray River and the history that accompanies it. For many, especially repeat visitors, Swan Hill is also seen as a place to enjoy a taste of the quiet country life.

Swan Hill also has a significant proportion of family visitors who share similar motivations to visit, in addition to the expectation that Swan Hill will offer something that their kids will enjoy.

A relatively high proportion of leisure visitors travel to Swan Hill by train, which is unique to Swan Hill amongst participating VPS destinations.

The satisfaction results for the Swan Hill VPS are generally positive and when the results are compared against the 80 other VPS destinations, Swan Hill performs very highly on the following features:

- 'Experience Australia's history'
- 'A chance to discover or learn something new'
- 'Experience the Mighty Murray'
- 'Something the kids would enjoy'.

*History* and *the Murray* are the defining features of Swan Hill for both the older and family visitor groups. The result for *history* is significantly higher than other Murray River VPS destinations of Echuca, Mildura and Albury Wodonga.

Complementing these experiences are some of the more functional aspects which receive relatively high satisfaction scores, including *attractions*, *commercial accommodation*, *information services in the region*, *shopping* and *value for money*.

However, despite these positive results Swan Hill ranks relatively low on *overall satisfaction* (see below), *likelihood to return* and *recommend* compared to the other VPS destinations.

The survey results do not point to one feature or aspect of Swan Hill that is driving modest satisfaction levels. However, the unprompted responses from the survey respondents do highlight several possibilities:

- A number of respondents note that access to the river could be better and that Swan Hill could make more use of the river setting as a feature of the town. It is possible that this observation is reflected in the lower than average scores for *relaxation and rejuvenation* and *nature based experiences*.
- Although *shopping* was rated positively, there was some concern about opening hours on Sunday.
- Some respondents felt there was a lack of activities in Swan Hill for both children and adults.

In the 2007–2014 Seven Year Strategic Plan, Swan Hill Incorporated have outlined the challenge for Swan Hill to:

- increase visitor numbers
- increase length of stay
- increase visitor expenditure.

The VPS results provide some robust benchmarks from which to measure progress and to further develop tourism:

- The *opportunity to experience some of Australia's history* makes Swan Hill a desirable destination for many visitors.
- *Information services* in Swan Hill are highly regarded.
- *Accommodation* is rated highly as are *attractions* (driven mainly by The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement).
- Repeat visitors find Swan Hill to be a great place to *enjoy the quiet country lifestyle*.

## Who are they?

Most visitors were in Swan Hill for *holiday/leisure*, were retired and travelling with their partner/spouse and had been there before.

- Most visitors were aged over 55 (62%), with 42% retirees.
- Around two thirds (65%) of domestic visitors to Swan Hill were from Victoria, 13% from New South Wales and 11% from South Australia.
- The majority (80%) visited for *holiday and leisure purposes*, while 8% visited *friends or relatives (VFR)*.
- Visitors were more likely to have travelled with their partner/spouse (60%).

## Why did they visit Swan Hill?

Swan Hill was considered *a convenient stopover* although most did not consider an alternative. *The Murray River* and *local attractions* were also drawcards for Swan Hill.

- The single main reasons for choosing Swan Hill to visit were:
  - ‘It was a convenient stopover’ (18%)
  - ‘Visit a specific attraction’ (15%)
  - ‘To experience the Murray River’ (12%).
- Although most visitors planned their trip in advance, 13% planned their trip while on the road; a higher proportion than other benchmark destinations.
- Two thirds (66%) did not consider another location as an alternative to Swan Hill. Of those who did, the Murray destinations of Mildura (27%) and Echuca (26%) were the most considered.

## How did they decide?

Visitors were more likely to plan their trip on the road and make bookings with accommodation and rail operators compared with visitors to other benchmark destinations.

- *Previous visit(s)* (41%), *the internet* (33%) and *travel books, guides and brochures* (20%) were the most popular information sources for visitors to Swan Hill before leaving home.
- Bookings most commonly made before their trip were with *accommodation providers* (38%) and *rail operators* (10%) – both higher proportions compared with the benchmark.
- Almost one third (31%) of visitors made bookings on *the internet*, with 95% of these booking *accommodation*.
- Of all visitors to Swan Hill, 37% did not make a booking prior to their trip.

## How did visitors get to Swan Hill?

Although most visitors to Swan Hill were self-drive, a relatively high proportion also travelled by rail.

- The majority of visitors to Swan Hill were self-drive (83%), while 11% travelled there by rail; a higher proportion than benchmark destinations.
- Just over half (52%) of visitors to Swan Hill visited other towns before reaching Swan Hill, with Echuca (16%), Lake Boga (12%), Mildura (11%) and Bendigo (11%) common stopping points for both day and/or overnight visitors.
- Half of visitors also continued their journey after Swan Hill with Lake Boga (19%), Echuca (16%), Mildura (13%) and Nyah (10%) common stopping points for both day and/or overnight visitors.

## How long did they stay in Swan Hill?

Repeat visitors stayed longer in Swan Hill but had a slightly shorter total trip length.

- Primarily Swan Hill was an overnight destination (92%), with only a small number of day visitors.
- The average length of stay for all visitors to Swan Hill was 2.8 nights (average total trip length of 20.6 nights)
  - 13% of visitors' total trip length was 30+ nights which contributed to the high average total trip length.
- Those travelling with their partners had longer total trip lengths (26.1 nights) than those travelling with their family (8.4 nights) or friends/relatives (18.6 nights).
- First time visitors stayed for a shorter time in Swan Hill (2.4 nights) but had longer total trip lengths (29.4 nights) compared with repeat visitors (3.0 nights and 15.5 nights respectively).

## Where did they stay?

A high proportion of visitors to Swan Hill stayed overnight in *caravan parks* or *standard hotels and motels*.

- *Caravan parks or commercial camping grounds* (45%) and *standard hotels or motels* (37%) were the most popular types of accommodation.
- *Standard hotels/motels* and *caravan/camping* were more popular forms of accommodation than in the benchmark findings.
- Conversely, *apartments/rental houses* and *staying with friends or relatives* were less popular than in the benchmark findings.

## What did they do in Swan Hill?

Visitors to Swan Hill undertook activities around history, culture and the river. The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement was a key attraction.

- The key activities undertaken by visitors to Swan Hill were:
  - 'General sightseeing' (82%)
  - 'Go shopping' (69%)
  - 'Eat out' (65%)
  - 'Visiting historic/heritage places' (61%)
  - 'Go to the river/swimming' (54%)
  - 'Visit museums or art galleries' (36%)
  - 'Go on a skippered charter boat, cruise or ferry ride' (30%)
- Only a small proportion took side trips from Swan Hill (14%), with Lake Boga being the most popular side trip destination.

## What did visitors expect of Swan Hill?

Expectations for *experiencing Australia's history* and the *chance to discover and learn something new* were higher than the benchmark destinations.

- Visitors expected Swan Hill to have the following attributes:
  - 'Relaxation and rejuvenation' (89%)
  - 'An opportunity to tour around and explore' (88%)
  - 'The Mighty Murray' (85%)
  - 'Experience Australia's history' (78%)
  - 'Quality time with partner/family/friends' (76%)
  - 'A chance to discover or learn something new' (65%).

## Were visitors' expectations met?

*Experiencing Australia's history* is a significant point of leverage for Swan Hill.

- Experiences which were most likely to be rated *much better than expected* were:
  - 'Experience Australia's history' (22%)
  - 'Offers something the kids would enjoy' (22%)
  - 'A place to spend quality time with partner/family/friends' (23%)
- The proportion of visitors who expected and were happy with Swan Hill's offering for *experiencing Australia's history* was higher than the benchmark and higher than all locations in the sub-groups except for Bendigo.

Swan Hill was less effective in delivering on *relaxation & rejuvenation, nature based experiences* and *opportunities for touring around & exploring*, with a lower proportion of visitors to Swan Hill rating these experiences as *better than expected*, compared with visitors to other destinations.

- The proportion of visitors who rated their expectations as *much better than expected* for these attributes were:
  - 11% for 'Relaxation & rejuvenation'
  - 9% for 'Opportunity to tour around & explore'
  - 1% for 'Nature based experiences'

## Were visitors satisfied?

Compared with benchmark destinations, higher proportions of visitors to Swan Hill were satisfied with *attractions, accommodation* and *information services*, and also considered Swan Hill *good value for money*.

- Visitors to Swan Hill were very satisfied with:
  - 'Information services in the region' (63%)
  - 'Personal safety and security' (63%)
  - 'Attractions' (59%)
  - 'Friendliness of the locals' (57%)
  - 'Commercial accommodation' (54%)
  - 'Local atmosphere' (52%)

Satisfaction ratings were generally high and at similar levels to the benchmark and sub-group.

- Visitors were less satisfied with:
  - 'Entertainment and nightlife' (16%)
  - 'Local transport' (17%)
  - 'Tours' (29%)
  - 'Signage' (37%).
- Dissatisfaction was very low across all of these functional aspects of the visit.

## How satisfied were they overall?

There were fewer visitors stating they had a very high level of overall satisfaction with their trip to Swan Hill compared with the benchmark.

- In terms of overall satisfaction, 44% were very satisfied with their visit to Swan Hill; this satisfaction level is lower than the benchmark.
- *Standard hotel/motel* visitors had a lower overall satisfaction rating (33%) compared with other visitors (51%), and were less likely to recommend Swan Hill (32% and 45% respectively).
- For total satisfaction, Swan Hill performed at a similar level to the benchmark.

## Will they visit Swan Hill again?

Despite positive experiences in Swan Hill, visitors were less likely to return to Swan Hill in the future or recommend it as a destination to others compared with visitors to other destinations.

- One third (33%) of visitors were likely to visit again in the next 12 months, while 58% indicated that they were likely to visit again in the next three years.
- The majority (83%) were likely to recommend Swan Hill to others as a destination to visit.
- More *VFR* visitors were very likely to revisit in the next 12 months compared with *holiday* visitors (30% and 11% respectively), and to revisit in the next three years (40% and 21%).

## What is the profile of repeat visitors?

Repeat visitors were more highly satisfied and were more likely to continue to visit Swan Hill.

- Nearly two thirds (63%) of visitors to Swan Hill were repeat visitors. Of these, 11% were *VFR*.
- Repeat visitors had an average of 2.4 visits in the past three years, and an average of 1.3 visits in the past 12 months.
- Repeat visitors had a higher level of overall satisfaction than first time visitors (48% and 38% very satisfied respectively).
- They were also more likely than first time visitors to visit again in the next three years (33% compared with 9%), and within the next 12 months (17% compared with 7%).
- The majority (71%) of all train travellers were repeat visitors.

## What about visitors who only stayed in the Swan Hill region?

Visitors who only stayed overnight in the Swan Hill region chose Swan Hill for specific attractions, events or exhibitions.

- About 37% of visitors only stayed overnight in the Swan Hill region and did not stay in any other towns during their trip (single stop visitors).
- Nearly all train travellers (96%) were single stop visitors to Swan Hill.
- The single main reasons why single stop visitors chose Swan Hill was to visit specific attractions (13%), or to attend specific events or exhibition (11%). In contrast, the single main reason for those who visited other towns as well was because it was a convenient stopover (26%).
- Swan Hill single stop visitors mainly comprised *older non-working married people* (33%) and *families* (30%)
- Nearly three quarters of Swan Hill single stop visitors (74%) were repeat visitors and most were visiting for a *holiday* (70%).

## The Mighty Murray

The Murray River was a key motivator for visitors when deciding to visit Swan Hill.

- Over one third (36%) of visitors reported that the Murray river was one of the reasons why they chose to visit Swan Hill, and 12% stated that it was the main reason they chose to visit.
- Overall, expectations of the Murray had been met for the majority of visitors to Swan Hill (85%).
- The level of the Murray River at Swan Hill was lower at the time of this survey than if it was a non-drought period - 86% of visitors expected the lower water level before they arrived, with the proportion lower in first time visitors (80%).
- Even though the level was lower than non-drought periods, 92% of visitors said this did not negatively impact their visit to Swan Hill.

For a copy of the full Visitor Profile and Satisfaction report, please email [tra@tourism.australia.com](mailto:tra@tourism.australia.com)

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