

The Queensland First Nations Strategy 2026-2032



QUEENSLAND
TOURISM INDUSTRY
COUNCIL

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Queensland.

We pay our respect to Ancestors and Elders, past and present. We recognise the generations rising who will inherit our responsibilities to Country.

We acknowledge those who shared stories, welcomed guests on Country, and were stewards of the earth for millennia before us, and their continued connection to land, waterways, seas, skies and culture.

Malungu Yangu Wakay – The Voice from the Deep – The Masig Statement

We acknowledge the importance of the Malungu Yangu Wakay (The Masig Statement) for Torres Strait Islander operators, as follows:

To establish principles and parameters on behalf of the peoples of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area to act together in unity, in order to pursue and achieve self-determination and regional autonomy and, in so doing, preserve our distinctive and diverse spiritual, material and economic relationship with the lands, territories, waters, coastal seas and other resources with which we have a connection under Ailan Kastom and Aboriginal tradition.

Acknowledgement of Funding

The Queensland First Nations Tourism Plan 2026 – 2032 is proudly supported by the Queensland Government and the Australian Government.

It also builds on key enabling programs that have strengthened the First Nations tourism sector and Queensland's broader visitor economy, including the Our Country Advisory Service within the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, and QTIC-led capability and industry development initiatives. These investments have supported operator growth, cultural capability, and sector coordination, creating a stronger foundation for sustainable First Nations tourism across Queensland.

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Queensland First Nations Tourism Strategy 2026–2032

Introduction

Queensland is home to the world’s oldest continuous cultures, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples representing around 5% of the state’s population (approximately 273,000 people). Living across urban, regional, and remote communities, they reflect diverse cultural landscapes and traditions. Since 2020, strong progress has been made in First Nations tourism. With the Brisbane 2032 Games ahead, the refreshed Queensland First Nations Tourism Plan 2026–2032 sets a clear, community-led direction to showcase culture globally.

Vision

By 2032, Queensland is recognised globally for authentic, First Nations-led tourism that protects culture and Country while delivering intergenerational economic, cultural and social benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This vision positions First Nations tourism as a core strength of Queensland’s visitor economy and identity.

Purpose of This Strategy

This document is a strategic framework rather than an operational plan. Its role is to set direction, guide investment and policy, and provide a reference point for industry and government. Detailed program design and delivery planning should sit in rolling action plans developed by implementation partners. Queensland’s broader visitor economy extends beyond tourism experiences alone and includes the arts, fashion, events, cultural institutions, creative industries, food, retail, and other sectors that contribute to why people visit, stay longer, and spend more.

Implementation responsibility will sit across industry, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) and recognised First Nations tourism leadership bodies. Detailed actions, lead agencies and resourcing requirements will be defined in regional action plans aligned to state and regional priorities.

Strategic Context

Globally, demand for cultural and experience-based tourism is accelerating, with around 40% of travellers engaging in cultural experiences and 73% seeking immersive, local connections. Visitors are increasingly drawn to meaningful, culturally grounded experiences, positioning Queensland strongly through the depth and diversity of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This presents a major opportunity for Queensland's visitor economy to diversify its offerings and strengthen its competitive position.

In Australia, First Nations tourism reached a record 3 million trips in 2023–24—doubling over the past decade—with 82% of international travellers expressing interest, yet only 12% aware of available experiences.

In Queensland, 220,000 trips include First Nations experiences within a broader tourism sector that supports 156,000 jobs and generates significant daily visitor spend. However, unmanaged growth presents risks, including cultural misrepresentation, uneven quality, and unsustainable business models. This strategy responds by prioritising cultural authority, sector maturity, and sustainable growth, while aligning with Destination 2045 and major event frameworks to embed First Nations tourism across the broader industry.

Consultation process

This Plan is grounded in the cultural authority and rights of First Nations peoples, shaped by lived experience and a shared responsibility to protect Culture, Community and Country. It builds on the strong foundations of the 2020–2025 Plan, which delivered key milestones including the Year of Indigenous Tourism, a \$7 million infrastructure fund, the Our Country Advisory Service, and the establishment of the Queensland First Nations Tourism Council.

Extensive statewide engagement—led by QTIC and guided by a First Nations Strategic Advisory Group—occurred through forums, workshops and consultations across urban, regional and remote Queensland. Feedback reaffirmed the original goal areas while strengthening actions. Communities consulted are as follows:

- Mount Isa
- Longreach
- Barcaldine
- Mackay
- Airlie Beach
- Maroochydore
- Brisbane
- Gold Coast
- Thursday Island
- Toowoomba
- Townsville
- Port Douglas
- Bamaga

The refreshed Plan introduces 25 targets, 18 objectives and 65 actions, with clear delivery responsibilities. It sets a bold pathway to 2032, positioning Queensland as a global leader in authentic, sustainable First Nations tourism.

Strategic Outcomes 2026 – 2032

By 2032 Queensland will demonstrate:

- A stronger pipeline of market-ready First Nations tourism experiences
- Increased First Nations leadership in tourism decision-making
- A skilled and stable workforce
- Greater visibility in domestic and international markets
- Measurable growth in First Nations business participation

Performance Approach

Recent data from Tourism Research Australia highlights strong growth in demand, high-value international engagement, and regional economic impact from First Nations tourism—reinforcing that progress of this Plan will be guided by clear targets aligned to each Priority Area, including:

- Growth in number of sustainable First Nations tourism businesses
- Increased First Nations participation in tourism governance (measured through board/committee representation tracking and partner reporting)
- Workforce participation and retention benchmarks (measured through employer reporting, program data, and longitudinal tracking where available)
- Increased inclusion in state and regional destination marketing

Detailed metrics and annual targets will be outlined in regional action plans, including the development of consistent data collection methods in partnership with industry.

Priority 1 – First Nations Leadership & Cultural Authority

Intent

Ensure sector growth is guided by First Nations leadership, cultural authority and community priorities.

Strategic Focus

- Strengthen recognised First Nations tourism leadership bodies by supporting governance capability, succession planning and long-term institutional stability.
- Embed cultural protocols and ICIP safeguards as standard practice across the sector so that cultural engagement is consistent and respectful.
- Support regional leadership where it reflects genuine cultural authority and local governance realities, avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- Increase First Nations representation in mainstream tourism governance to ensure early influence on decision-making.
- Tailored micro-credential training to build the skills and capacity of First Nations peoples in areas such as cultural tourism, environmental management and leadership.

- Supporting First Nations women in tourism across all sectors.

Priority 2 – Sustainable Business Growth & Capability

Intent

Support First Nations tourism businesses to become stable, commercially viable and investable over time.

Strategic Focus

- Shift from grant dependence to business maturity by emphasising revenue generation, repeat visitation and scalable offerings.
- Leverage existing Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and tourism systems rather than duplicating programs, ensuring culturally appropriate access.
- Reduce structural barriers such as insurance affordability, compliance complexity and access to capital.
- Strengthen commercial capability in pricing, governance, digital marketing and financial management.
- Focus on quality and readiness to build market credibility and protect cultural integrity.

Priority 3 – Workforce & Pathways

Intent

Build a skilled workforce with clear pathways into long-term tourism careers and leadership roles.

Strategic Focus

- Create clear career pathways from school engagement through to leadership and ownership roles.
- Align with existing workforce and training systems while ensuring culturally safe delivery.
- Strengthen mentoring and leadership development to build confidence and governance capability.
- Focus on retention through culturally safe workplaces and career progression.
Link workforce initiatives to real demand and regional opportunities.
- Working in collaboration to support tourism and guiding capability development for Indigenous organisations, including training programs such as the Emerging Field School under SITP.

Priority 4 – Market Presence & Demand

Intent

Grow demand for First Nations tourism in a respectful and sustainable way.

Strategic Focus

- Integrate First Nations tourism into mainstream destination marketing to position as central to Queensland's identity.
- Focus on quality over volume to maintain reputation and authenticity.
- Leverage Brisbane 2032 as a catalyst by preparing operators ahead of time.
- Strengthen trade readiness while supporting domestic market development, education and community-led storytelling
- Implementing First Nations Welcome experiences into international entry points in Queensland.

First Nations Tourism Strategy Phased Delivery Framework | 2026 – 2032

2026 — Foundation & Alignment (mapping to regional action plans)

Focus: Set structural foundations and align systems

Leadership & Cultural Authority

- Confirm recognised First Nations tourism leadership bodies and governance arrangements
- Expansion of cultural competency training and strengthen Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) guidance
- Clarify roles and responsibilities between state, regional and First Nations bodies to ensure coordinated delivery.

Business Capability

- Map existing SME and tourism support programs to improve culturally appropriate access and reduce duplication.
- Commence targeted advocacy to address insurance, regulatory and compliance barriers impacting First Nations business sustainability

Workforce

- Align tourism pathways with TAFE and VET providers to ensure culturally safe training delivery.
- Establish pilot mentoring and leadership development programs.

Market Presence

- Embed First Nations tourism strategy and action plans into core state marketing narratives with Tourism and Events Queensland.

2027 — System Integration (mapping to regional action plans)

Focus: Embed First Nations tourism in mainstream systems

Leadership

- Increase First Nations representation on relevant boards
- Clarify regional engagement models and action plan outcomes

Business

- Establish clear engagement mechanisms between agencies and First Nations businesses to increase awareness of, and readiness for, mainstream funding opportunities
- Support transition from grant dependency toward sustainable, revenue-generating business models.
- Increasing the number of First Nations businesses who are Quality Tourism Framework accredited

Workforce

- School-to-tourism pathways operating and youth program delivering successes
- Mentoring programs scaled to ensure a 5% increase of First Nation participants

Market

- Expand on targeted trade-readiness initiatives for market-ready operators
- Engage with stakeholders for initial discussions and planning to introduce First Nations Welcome experiences to international points of entry to Queensland by 2032

2028 — Capability Lift (mapping to regional action plans)

Focus: Strengthen maturity

Key Outcomes

- More viable operators evidenced by increase in listings in the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse
- Increased workforce participation by numbers
- Stronger domestic visibility via marketing and education
- Mid-term strategy review
 - Formal strategy review to assess progress, refine targets and confirm priorities for 2029-2032

2029 — Consolidation & Scale (mapping to regional action plans)

Focus: Scale what works

Key Outcomes

- Growth in repeat visitation evidenced by data
- Higher workforce retention
- National recognition for Queensland's strength in First Nations tourism
- Welcome signage in 50% of Queensland's international airports

2030 — Pre-Games Positioning mapping to regional action plans

Focus: Prepare for global exposure

Key Outcomes

- Increase in export-ready operators
- Workforce aligned to demand

- Strong brand positioning with key stakeholders including Brisbane 2032, the International Olympic Committee, tourism and events retailers and wholesalers and the visitor economy.
- Mid-term strategy review
 - Strategic readiness review to align industry capability with Brisbane 2032 opportunities and legacy planning

2031 — Global Readiness mapping to regional action plans

Focus: Final readiness

Key Outcomes

- A strong cohort of sustainable First Nation businesses
- Confident trade-ready operators active in national and international markets
- Stable workforce pipeline and strong demand
- Welcome signage across all of Queensland's international airports

2032 — Showcase & Legacy mapping to regional action plans

Focus: Leverage global platform

Key Outcomes

- Strong First Nations leadership visibility
- Strong commercial gains for operators
- Transition from event-driven demand to sustained long-term growth

Concluding Statement

Queensland has a significant opportunity to lead in First Nations tourism. Success will depend on focus, cultural integrity and realistic delivery. A disciplined, priority-driven strategy will deliver stronger outcomes than an overly complex action list.