Voluntourism in Tasmania
WHAT IS VOLUNTURISM?

Volunteer tourism, or ‘voluntourism’ is a growing area of the volunteering industry. Simply put, voluntourism is about individuals combine volunteering with holiday or leisure activity.

In 2014 over 4,000 visitors come to Tasmania solely for the purpose of volunteering – spending more and staying longer on average than other tourists (Volunteering Tasmania, 2014).

Volunteering Tasmania wanted to explore this finding further, and understand more about this emerging trends in our volunteering sector.

The report revealed challenges and opportunities for volunteer-involving organisations and the wider tourism industry.

“IT'S MUCH MORE FUN TO BE WEARING A CREW T-SHIRT, AND RUNNING AROUND WITH A BACKSTAGE PASS AND RADIO AND BE RUNNING AROUND HELPING TO MAKE THE THING HAPPEN.”

“FOR PEOPLE FROM MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY THERE'S SUCH CHEAP FLIGHTS, IT'S CHEAPER FOR THEM TO COME HERE AND GET A HIRE CAR THAN IT IS TO GO TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS. WE PROVIDE THAT GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SEE TASSIE FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE. AT THE MOMENT WE GET MORE INTERNATIONAL VISITORS TRAVELLING TO TASSIE THAN AUSTRALIAN OR LOCAL TRAVELLERS VOLUNTEERING.”

“WE ARE PROBABLY RETURNING A 1000-1 RETURN ON INVESTMENT. I WOULD LOVE IT IF THAT WAS A BASIC POLICY FOR FUNDING... THAT THERE HAS TO BE RETURN ON INVESTMENT. BECAUSE WE KNOW WE ARE ABLE TO DELIVER THAT RETURN. THE AMOUNT SHOULD BE TIED TO THE RETURN. SO IF I ACHIEVE A TARGET OF 300,000 VISITORS TO THE EVENT, AND A CONTRIBUTION OF $90 MILLION IN DIRECT SPENDING, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE AMOUNT THE GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTES TO THAT GOES UP AS WELL. THE PROBLEM IS THE EVENT GROWS BUT THE GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION STAYS THE SAME.”

“IT'S A GREAT WAY TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. IMAGINE WHAT YOU COME BACK HOME TALKING ABOUT. IT'S NOT SEEING THE POSTCARD VIEW. IT'S A GROWING INDUSTRY SEGMENT.”
KEY FINDINGS:
WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT VOLUNTURISM IN TASMANIA?

- Voluntourism arrangements in Tasmania have largely grown organically and within existing volunteer programs.
- There are some structured programs to attract international visitors seeking opportunities to see and help preserve Tasmania’s unique environment and wildlife.
- Voluntourists are primarily attracted to Tasmanian opportunities by word of mouth and informal networks.
- There are strong alignments between Tourism Tasmania’s branding of Tasmania as a destination of choice and its’ Go Behind the Scenery campaign.
- There are more opportunities for visitors to have a unique and meaningful travel experience while in Tasmania.
- Motivations of voluntourists differ from other volunteers- this can be challenging when trying to recruit and retain volunteers.
- There are opportunities to scope the economic benefits growing the voluntourism industry in Tasmania.

"There's no way in the world we could run this event without volunteers - that's not just lip service, it's entirely true. That means that we have a big investment in making sure they happy and they return... We would need forty times our budget to pay for this skilled labour and that's not going to happen."

"About 65 per cent of them are recidivists. They'll come back. They've done previous volunteering. There's a great deal of "I'll ask my mate to come with me"... People will ask others to come along and get involved."

"The environmental aspect appeals to people as we go to places that you can't go if you are a tourist. So you can't go to that area because transport is terrible. Or because it's private property. So we give you a real experience of Tassie."

Images, clockwise from back cover: The Falls Music & Arts Festival (Tourism Tasmania & Kim Maisch); volunteer briefing, Australian Wooden Boat Festival, 2017; Dark Mofo (Tourism Tasmania); Hollybank MTB Park, Skills Park (Flow Mountain Bike); Cygnet Folk Festival (Tourism Tasmania & Steven Pearce Photography); Dark Mofo (Tourism Tasmania); Harvest Launceston Farmers’ Market (Tourism Tasmania and Rob Burnett); Volunteers at the Australian Wooden Boat Festival, 2017; O’Neill Coldwater Classic Tasmania, 2009 (Tourism Tasmania & O’Neill Coldwater Classic); and volunteers at the Tasmanian Breath of Fresh Air Film Festival, Launceston.
The average tourist stays for something like 7.8 days and volunteers on average will spend 14 days. They do their volunteering and then they have a holiday. They have stories to tell when they go home. Rather than saying "oh, I went to Mona". Well so did 10,000 other people. "I went to Mona and volunteered to build an exhibit and met these people" – that's a story and that's a pitch for investment.