Tourism partnership pathways

opportunities to work together



TOURISM & EVENTS NORTHERN TERRITORY

About this guide

Tourism partnerships can connect operators, businesses, Aboriginal corporations, not-for-profit organisations, government agencies and other entities to strengthen visitor experiences and create shared economic, social and cultural benefits. In this guide, learn:

- What is a tourism partnership?
- Who can be a partner?
- How can partners work together?
- What are the principles for successful collaboration?
- What is the pathway to building the right partnerships?
- Where can I learn more about partnerships?

More information

For more information on partnership opportunities and for additional industry resources developed by Tourism and Events NT, visit www.tourismandeventsnt.com.au or contact the Tourism Development Team on PH: 08 8999 3859
E: Development.tourismeventsnt@nt.gov.au



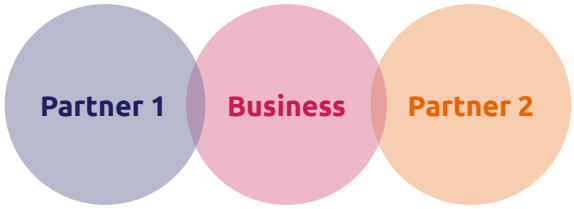
What is a partnership?

Building a successful partnership is a journey that partners take together - aligning values, strengthening the offer, sharing benefits, communicating openly, measuring success and continually improving to combine strengths. Partnerships can enable innovation and learning and achieve greater impact and value than would be possible alone.

Tourism partnerships

Many people assume that a partnership involves a 50/50 commitment or 'buying into' a business as an owner or shareholder. In the tourism industry, a partnership can be so much more than this.

Traditional partnership – where two or more people own and manage the business jointly and share any income or losses:[1]



Agreement to work together – when two separate businesses collaborate to provide goods or services, attract clients, or jointly deliver a tourism product or experience.



1 www.business.gov.au Partnership | business.gov.au

Who can be partners?

Connecting small and large businesses

Partnerships are an opportunity to connect businesses no matter their size or market share.

Microbusinesses employ fewer than five people. In Australia, 85% of all businesses are considered microbusinesses; more than half are owner-operated, home-based or sole-trader businesses and do not employ additional staff.[2]

Small business 5-19 employees.

Medium business 20-199 employees.

Large business 200 or more employees or annual turnover of $250 million.[3]

Enterprise businesses may have thousands of employees and be a multi-national enterprise with staff and bases worldwide. Publicly listed companies with multi-million/billion-dollar annual turnovers.

2 Chapter 2 - Understanding small business – Parliament of Australia – www.aph.gov.au
3 www.abs.gov.au

Types of partnerships

As a business owner, you can maintain your independence and ownership while working with a partner to strengthen your tourism experience and product offering. Partners can contribute something your business may not have, such as transport, accommodation, tours, skills, access to special places, experience, networks or clients.

> Every partnership is unique in its composition, its objectives and its way of working.'
> 'Why Partner?', Partnership Brokers Association Video 1, Belinda Gorman PBA Associate, May 2020



Partnership principles

Successful partnerships are underpinned by open and transparent engagement, recognition of different perspectives, a focus on mutual benefit, and a commitment to innovation, adaptability and continuous learning.

The Partnership Brokers Association provides guidance on key principles that encourage partners to value different perspectives and contributions, work fairly and transparently, create benefits for everyone involved, and be willing to navigate uncertainty and try new approaches.

Learn more about partnership principles at www.partnershipbrokers.org

Partnership models

Partnerships can take many forms, from straightforward commercial agreements to deeper arrangements involving shared investment, decision-making or delivery. The right model depends on the partners' goals, desired benefits, level of risk, resources and preferred commercial arrangement.

Work together

Contract agreement for products or services – one partner agrees to supply specified products or services under set terms. It can provide reliable income, business independence and growth, exposure to new markets, builds experience, identifies clear responsibilities and provides access to complementary expertise.

Preferred supplier arrangement – a buyer selects a business as a preferred provider for agreed goods or services. This can create repeat bookings, stronger buyer relationships and more predictable demand.

Trade distribution partnership – a business agrees for a trade partner, such as a travel agent, wholesaler or online travel platform, to market, promote and sell its products and experiences to domestic and international visitors in return for a commission. It can build brand awareness and trust, provide exposure to the right markets and secure consistent, longer-term bookings of 12 months to two years.

Grow together

Capability building – partners provide mentoring, training, systems or resources to strengthen each other's skills, knowledge, experience and capacity. It can improve service quality, business resilience and create unique products in readiness for new markets.

Strategic alliance – independent organisations collaborate toward shared long-term goals without merging ownership. Alliances can extend market reach, strengthen advocacy, share knowledge and support joint marketing or product development.

Co-management – partners share responsibility and decision-making for a place, asset, service or experience. It can combine local and cultural knowledge with operational expertise, strengthen stewardship and build shared ownership of outcomes.

Invest together

Co-investment – partners jointly contribute funding, assets or in-kind resources to develop an opportunity. Sharing costs and risks can make projects viable sooner and create benefits for all investors.

Joint venture – two or more parties combine resources for a defined project or business activity and share control, risks and returns. It can bring together capital, capability, market access and specialist knowledge.

Access opportunities

Lease – a landowner or asset owner grants another party the right to use land, premises or facilities for an agreed period and payment, including on national parks, Crown land or in accordance with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. It can unlock tourism opportunities for both the leaseholder and lessee, generate income and support long-term investment.

Licensing – an owner or government agency permits another party to use specified land, national parks, venues or sites to operate a commercial activity under agreed conditions. It enables controlled access, increased visitation, new tourism product and business development opportunities and can generate fees or expand market reach.

Working with Aboriginal partners

When working with Aboriginal people, partners need to consider cultural protocols and cultural authority as part of their agreement. The Walking together/working together – Protocols for Aboriginal cultural tourism in the Northern Territory helps provide an understanding of the importance of cultural protocols, protecting culture, right way tourism, acknowledgement and integrity. www.tourismandeventsnt.com.au

Practical pathways for establishing partnerships

Successful partnerships require more than a shared opportunity. They need alignment on commercial expectations and values, together with a clear understanding of the challenges that could affect delivery. Developing a partnership action plan provides an opportunity for partners to identify these issues early, agree on practical ways to mitigate risks, clarify responsibilities and establish how they will work together to support a successful and sustainable partnership.

Build the right tourism partnership: action plan

Use this action plan to move from defining the opportunity and finding the right partner through to agreeing how the partnership will operate, be monitored and, if necessary, end.

Step	Action	What to work through	Status / notes
1	**Define the opportunity**	Identify the tourism product, service, place, experience, skills, networks or market access you can offer a partner.	
2	**Describe the type of partnership**	What type of partner are you looking for – what can they offer?	
3	**Set the purpose and desired benefits**	Determine why a partnership is needed. What goals and benefits will the partnership provide? What problem will the partnership solve?	
4	**Connect and test alignment**	Who are the partners who can best support you on your business journey? What methods can you use to connect with your partners?	
5	**Choose the partnership model**	Select the arrangement that best fits the opportunity – a contract, lease or joint venture?	
6	**Agree roles and ways of working**	Define each partner's roles, responsibilities, contributions, decision-making authority and communication arrangements. Agree practical flexibility, support for constraints and how the partners will work together day to day.	

Step	Action	What to work through	Status / notes
7	**Confirm benefits, payments and resources**	Document financial and non-financial contributions, payment terms, benefit sharing or other support. Ensure payment arrangements reflect the cashflow needs of micro and small businesses.	
8	**Manage legal, cultural and operational risks**	Confirm legislative requirements. Allocate liabilities and risk controls. Establish mechanisms for protecting intellectual property, including Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property and cultural protocols where relevant.	
9	**Prepare and sign the agreement**	Record the purpose, roles, contributions, payments, decision-making, confidentiality, dispute resolution, review triggers, variation process, duration and exit arrangements. Seek legal advice where needed.	
10	**Launch and communicate**	Confirm the implementation schedule, key contacts, operating procedures and internal and external communications. Ensure everyone responsible for delivery understands the agreement and next steps.	
11	**Monitor performance and relationships**	Set practical measures, targets and review dates. Track delivery, visitor and business outcomes, partner benefits, risks and relationship health. Address issues early using the agreed communication and dispute-resolution processes.	
12	**Review, improve, renew or exit**	Review what is working, what needs to change and whether the partnership should continue, expand, be varied or conclude.	

Tourism partnership case studies in the Northern Territory



Journey Beyond – The Ghan + local partners

Multi-national enterprise + microbusinesses, small businesses, medium businesses, Aboriginal Corporations, attractions, Government agencies

Journey Beyond is one of Australia's leading experiential tourism groups. The company owns and operates more than 35 tourism brands across 80 destinations, with a wide-ranging portfolio of iconic luxury trains, remote lodges, marine cruises and major tourist attractions in Australia and New Zealand. In the Northern Territory, Journey Beyond operates the Ghan rail journey and Outback Spirit and has recently acquired the Kakadu Crocodile Hotel and Voyages Tourism Australia, which operates Ayers Rock Resort. Journey Beyond continues to seek local partners that can provide products, experiences and services for its 2.7 million guests each year.

Presently, The Ghan partners with small and medium-sized businesses and government managed attractions including Nitmiluk Tours, Red Centre Adventures E-bike Tours, Alice Springs Reptile Centre, Alice Springs Desert Park, Angkerle Standley Chasm and holds the lease for Alice Springs Telegraph Station. These partners add value to Journey Beyond by offering unique 'off train' tours and experiences. Journey Beyond drives reliable bookings and business development opportunities for small businesses, who in-turn foster experience enhancement for Journey Beyond's visitors, resulting in broader regional visitor economy growth.



Ethical Adventures + Territory Wildlife Park + Cruise lines

Microbusiness + Government agency attraction + multi-national enterprise

Small NT tour operator Ethical Adventures has partnered with the Territory Wildlife Park to create a tour product for cruise visitors.

There are significant opportunities to partner with cruise lines and ground handlers as a preferred supplier to offer shore excursions, dining, retail and pre and post tour itineraries to other parts of the Northern Territory.

As the cruise season occurs during a traditionally quieter time of year for visitors, Ethical Adventures and the Territory Wildlife Park benefit from additional visitation, and cruise lines and guests benefit from unique Northern Territory products and experiences.



Olive Pink Botanic Garden + The Bean Tree Café

Not-for-profit + private small businesses + events

The Olive Pink Botanic Garden is a 16-hectare botanic garden in Alice Springs, specialising in plants native to the arid Central Australian region. The Garden is operated by a not-for-profit charitable trust.

A small café in the Garden operates through a sublease arrangement with a commercial tenant. The arrangement creates a small-business opportunity, generates revenue that supports the Garden's ongoing management and care, and enables The Bean Tree Café to provide dining services for visitors, local people and events.

The Garden also partners with local Aboriginal tour operators Kungkas Can Cook, Tjarnintja Birdwatching & Cultural Tours and No Fixed Gallery and events like the NT Writer's Festival, providing a venue for these activities to develop tourism products and grow their microbusinesses.



Venture North + Injalak Art Centre

Small private business + Aboriginal Corporation

Venture North Safaris is a small NT business offering boutique, micro-group tours, showcasing the Top End's exceptional natural and cultural heritage.

Venture North partners with many local businesses and communities to offer a range of tours, services, accommodation and products. One partner is Injalak Art Centre, an Aboriginal owned organisation that offers Venture North guests a private tour of Injalak Hill to learn about cultural heritage from Aboriginal people as part of the art centre experience.

Through this preferred supplier arrangement, Venture North visitors benefit from a local on Country cultural immersion, and Injalak Art Centre Aboriginal Corporation and members benefit from tour bookings, sales and visitor awareness.

'Venture North's relationship with Injalak spans around 30 years and is something we value greatly. Partnerships take time, respect and a genuine commitment to working together. For operators interested in developing similar experiences, it's essential to listen, follow the community's lead and ensure the benefits are mutual. This can't be taken for granted. It's about things being genuinely done the right way for the success of all involved.' Hugh Gange, Owner/Operator Venture North

'Injalak Arts has been working in partnership with Venture North for many years. The partnership is based on mutual respect and a desire to highlight and promote First Nations art and culture across the Top End. Working with a respected tour company like Venture North has helped Injalak Arts and Craft to grow its product and showcase traditional art to an audience interested in learning about Indigenous people and culture. Our partnership, along with all our partnerships, is integral to the success of Injalak Arts and Crafts and will continue into the future.' Dennis Stokes, CEO Injalak Arts

Partnership support and advice

There are a range of resources, business advisors and support programs that can assist you with building the right tourism partnership pathway.

Tourism & Events NT

Tourism & Events NT markets the Northern Territory as a desirable destination and facilitates the sustainable growth of the Northern Territory visitor economy.

To learn more about building tourism partnerships and opportunities contact

development@tourismandeventsnt.gov.au

For Aboriginal operators and those looking to develop partnerships with Aboriginal people, the NT Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Framework provides guidance on cultural protocols, product and business development and appropriate ways of working together.

www.tourismandeventsnt.com.au

Further information on partnerships

www.business.gov.au

This government website provides information on business structures, partnerships, preparing contracts, legal compliance and consideration of copyright and protection of intellectual property.

Partnership Brokers Association

The Partnership Brokers Association is an international professional body for those managing and developing collaboration processes. A range of resources, learning modules, white papers and videos are available on their website to support partners in co-creating partnerships.

www.partnershipbrokers.org

References

Photo credits

Front Cover – E-bike tour with Red Centre Adventures – Tourism NT/Shaana McNaught

Page 1 – Larapinta trail with World Expeditions – Tourism & Events NT/Tourism Australia

Page 3 – Middle – Full Moon Dinner, Kakadu – Tourism & Events NT/Helen Orr

Page 3 – Top – Parrtjima 2026 – Tourism & Events NT / Lisa Hatz

Page 3 – Top Right – Full Moon Dinner, Kakadu – Tourism & Events NT/Helen Orr

Page 3 – Right – Mercure Kakadu Crocodile Hotel – Tourism & Events NT/Kakadu Tourism Mercure Kakadu Crocodile Hotel

Page 3 – Bottom Right – Larapinta trail with World Expeditions – Tourism & Events NT/Tourism Australia

Page 3 – Bottom Left – Admiring items at The Local, Parap – Tourism & Events NT/Elise Derwin

Page 3 – Left – Working at the Youth Shack – Tourism & Events NT/Kane Chenoweth

Page 3 – Top Left – Injalak Arts tour with Venture North – Tourism & Events NT/James Fisher

Page 7 – E-bike tour with Red Centre Adventures – Tourism & Events NT/Shaana McNaught

Page 8 – Top – Relaxing at The Bean Tree Cafe – Tourism & Events NT/Shaana McNaught

Page 8 – Bottom – Ranger and owl with students – Tourism NT/Shaana McNaught 2021

Page 9 – Injalak Arts tour with Venture North – Tourism & Events NT/James Fisher

Back Cover – Larapinta trail with World Expeditions – Tourism & Events NT/Tourism Australia



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