

# ASTROTOURISM PLAN

Astrotourism presents a unique opportunity for the Gascoyne region to drive economic growth, diversify the local tourism industry, and enhance existing attractions. It offers cultural and educational value through Indigenous astronomy and scientific learning while promoting environmental conservation and reducing light pollution.

This plan supports the 2025-2027 Tourism Sector Strategy, and outlines opportunities to advance Astrotourism development in the region as well as highlight the work previously undertaken by the Commission.

## Total Solar Eclipse

The 2023 Ningaloo Total Solar Eclipse sparked growing interest in astrotourism, raising the region's profile and driving further development and local stakeholder engagement. With Exmouth as the prime viewing location, nearby communities such as Carnarvon and Coral Bay experienced a near-total eclipse, attracting over 20,000 visitors from across Australia and the world.

Beyond the spectacle itself, the eclipse served as a catalyst for positioning the Gascoyne region as a premier destination for astrotourism. The event showcased the potential for ongoing stargazing experiences, astrophotography, and night-sky interpretation.

## Role of GDC

The GDC has played a pivotal role in establishing and supporting astrotourism in the region, with a strategic focus on leveraging its dark skies natural advantage. The creation of the Gazing the Gascoyne brand, along with associated marketing activity will further strengthen the Gascoyne's position as a leading astrotourism destination.

## Astrotourism working group

Leading up to the eclipse, GDC led the formation of an informal working group with representatives

from each local government. Since then, the group has driven key initiatives, strengthening the Gascoyne's position as a leading Astrotourism destination.

## Gascoyne target markets

The key market for Astrotourism in WA whilst diverse, primarily consists of individuals with a strong interest in astronomy and nature-based experiences.

This key segment represents the strongest and most immediate opportunity for the Gascoyne tourism industry to promote Dark Sky experiences<sup>1</sup>. The segment aligns strongly with Gascoyne's visitors - where nature-based tourism experiences are a key driver of visitation in the region<sup>2</sup>.

According to research undertaken by Tourism WA<sup>3</sup> the key market segments interested in Dark Sky tourism are:

### Market segments

1. Astro enthusiasts: Represent the highest interest in astronomy, frequent users of astronomy equipment, and most open to astro-related travel. This segment skews younger.
2. Casual stargazers: Interested in astronomy but prefer city travel; own but rarely use camping gear.
3. Nature and travel lovers: Love regional and remote travel, nature, and hiking but have only a surface-level interest in astronomy.

89% of intrastate and interstate visitors show a high interest in Astrotourism with 71% of the key market showing a willingness to pay for Astrotourism experiences<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A Guide to Developing a Dark Sky Experience

<sup>2</sup> GDC Tourism Sector Strategy

<sup>3</sup> Matrix research

# Astrotourism Audit

There is strong domestic demand for Dark Sky Tourism in the Gascoyne, (particularly when combined with nature and wildlife experiences). However, limited tourism offerings create an opportunity to develop high-quality, sustainable experiences that showcase the regions unique environment.



**GAZING THE**  
*Gascoyne*

## Current astrotourism experiences in the Gascoyne

Tour/Attraction/Event	Category	Location	Description
Gascoyne Food Festival	Event	Gascoyne wide	Food and wine festival featuring food and wine dining events.
Ningaloo Stars	Tours	Exmouth	Dedicated astronomy tour provider.
Trek Ningaloo	Tours	Exmouth	Offers overnight hikes in Cape Range National Parks.
Ningaloo Sky Festival	Events	Exmouth	New biennial event held in Exmouth.
Baiyungu Dreaming	Tours	Exmouth/Coral Bay	Offers Indigenous tag-along tours.
Jamba Nyinayi Festival	Events	Coral Bay	Cultural festival featuring dark sky tourism event and activities.
Gwoonwardu Mia - Gascoyne Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Centre	Tour/Attraction	Carnarvon	Offers nighttime tours taking place at Gwoonwardu Mia.
Carnarvon Space and Technology Museum	Attraction	Carnarvon	Museum showcasing the history surrounding the role Carnarvon played in the manned space program and in the Australian communications industry.
Wooramulla Eco Tours	Tours	Carnarvon/Upper Gascoyne	Offers Indigenous immersive Night Sky Tours.
Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures	Tours	Shark Bay	Offers Indigenous nighttime sky tours.
Beats in the Bay	Events	Shark Bay	Annual music festival and night markets event located in Shark Bay.
Shark Bay Fiesta	Events	Shark Bay	Annual festival featuring night markets in Shark Bay.

# Astrotourism Action Plan

## PRIORITY 1: Rejuvenate existing tourism products and create new experiences that drive visitor demand

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Status / Resources	Success Looks Like
2025	Ningaloo Stars/ GDC/DBCA	<i>Outdoor observatory at Milerying Visitor Centre:</i> GDC is collaborating with DBCA to support concept plans for a potential outdoor observatory at Milerying Visitor Centre, Ningaloo.	In progress \$2,000 GDC funded	<b>KPI's:</b> Ongoing creation of new tourism experiences and increased visitor spending. Increase in off season visitation by High Value Travelers.

### Completed priority 1 actions

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Resources
April 2023	Wooramulla Eco Cultural Tours	Purchase of a telescope to support Yinggarda astrotourism in Carnarvon and the Kennedy Ranges.	\$800 from the Shire of Carnarvon's Community Growth Fund
2023	Astrotourism WA Collaboration	<i>Astrotourism Towns:</i> GDC assisted the Shires of Upper Gascoyne, Shark Bay, and Carnarvon in becoming Astrotourism towns by conducting dark sky meter readings, engaging communities on light pollution reduction, and identifying observation sites and astrophotography hotspots.	\$90,000 (State Government – JTSI)
April 2023	Gwoonwardu Mia	<i>Gwoonwardu Mia Astrotourism Project:</i> GDC supported the development of the astrotourism project at Gwoonwardu Mia Aboriginal Cultural Centre.	\$22,750 GDC funded
2025	Ningaloo Sky	<i>Astrotourism in Exmouth:</i> GDC provided connections, advocacy, funding recommendations, and expertise to assist a private operator in establishing a astrotourism product in Exmouth, set to launch in April 2025.	\$5,000 Tourism WA NPTEd program
August 2023	Gascoyne LGA's	<i>Strategic funding support:</i> GDC allocated \$15,000 to the Shires of Carnarvon, Upper Gascoyne, Shark Bay, and Exmouth to support astrotourism initiatives and develop regional branding.	\$20,000 GDC funded

## PRIORITY 2: Leverage existing attractions to strengthen regional itineraries

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Status / Resources	Success Looks Like
June 2025	Promote dark sky observing sites	<i>Astrotourism promotion and branding:</i> GDC supported the Gazing the Gascoyne campaign, featuring a regional astrotourism hotspot map on Australia's Coral Coast and LGA websites.	In progress April 2025 \$10,000 GDC funded	<b>KPI's:</b> Ongoing creation of new tourism experiences and increased visitor spending. Increase in off season visitation by High Value Travelers.

### Completed priority 2 actions

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Resources
2023	Astrotourism WA Collaboration	Astro-Tourism Towns: GDC assisted the Shires of Upper Gascoyne, Shark Bay, and Carnarvon in becoming Astro-tourism towns by conducting dark sky meter readings, engaging communities on light pollution reduction, and identifying observation sites and astrophotography hotspots.	\$ 20,000 GDC funding

### PRIORITY 3: Target Key Demographics with Engaging Marketing Campaigns

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Status / Resources		Success Looks Like
August 2023	Gascoyne LGA's/ Tourism WA/Australia's Coral Coast	GDC is supporting a regional trail map for Astrotourism and astrophotography hotspots.	In progress	As above - \$1,200 GDC funding	<b>KPI's:</b> Ongoing creation of new tourism experiences and increased visitor spending.  Increase in off season visitation by High Value Travelers
April 2025	GDC/Australia's Coral Coast	GDC is supporting the Gazing the Gascoyne marketing campaign, including a dedicated landing page, email campaigns, media releases, and promotion of regional Astrotourism operators.	In progress	\$10,000 GDC funding	
April 2025 - 2026	GDC /Working Group	GDC continues working with the four LGAs to refine their astrotourism priorities and will leverage industry branding through partnerships with WA Trails, Australia's Coral Coast, WA Station Stays, and Tourism WA to promote the Gazing the Gascoyne trail.	Planned	In-kind	

#### Completed priority 3 actions

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Resources
August 2023	Gascoyne LGA's/ Tourism WA/Australia's Coral Coast	GDC led the development of unified regional brand to promote "Gazing the Gascoyne" which is used by all 4 LGAs, supported by industry partners like Tourism WA and Australia's Coral Coast.	\$6,480 GDC funding

### PRIORITY 4: Link Dark Sky Tourism with Popular Regional Events and Attractions

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Status / Resources		Success Looks Like
Ningaloo Sky Festival	Inaugural Festival managed through the Shire of Exmouth	The Festival will feature a range of events including dark sky food and wine dinner and specialised viewing events. GDC has contributed \$25,000 to support the event through Strategic Initiatives budget (includes \$5,000 from astrotourism budget).	Launch June 2025 .2 FTE	\$20,000 GDC funding	<b>KPI's:</b> Financial support for five regional tourism events annually.  GDC creates and evaluates event sponsorship criteria.  Increased capability and sustainability of events.
2025-2026 Gascoyne events and sponsorships	GDC/Event organisers	Funding/sponsorship support of events and attractions supporting Astrotourism experiences.	Planned	Unfunded	

#### Completed priority 4 actions

Timing	Who / What	Actions	Resources
Gazing the Gascoyne Event (2020)	Inaugural Gazing the Gascoyne Event	A successful regional event in Gascoyne Junction, now an annual fixture, to promote astrotourism (part of Gascoyne Food Festival).	Via Gascoyne Food Festival support