

Case Study Moonlit Sanctuary

Moonlit Sanctuary is located 50 minutes south-east of the city and was named the state's best Eco Tourism business at the 2014 Victorian Tourism Award. About half of their visitors come from overseas, while most domestic visitors are from the local area [Moonlit Sanctuary is based in Pearcedale in the City of Casey].



A focus on Accessibility

When Moonlit Sanctuary opened in 2001, management were aware of obligations to provide visitor aids like ramps into buildings and disabled toilets, all of which were incorporated into the design of the Moonlit Sanctuary Visitor Centre. Beyond that, concepts such as accessible facilities were all a bit scary for a new small business struggling to establish itself and with limited funds available.

It took a while for management and staff at Moonlit Sanctuary to realise that accessibility was not about providing expensive equipment to assist a minority of the population. It is about making your attraction as easy to visit as possible for as many people as possible. That can only be good for business, and with a little thought it is possible to do a lot for little money.



Promoting Moonlit Sanctuary's Accessibility Provisions

One of the easiest tasks for Moonlit Sanctuary to implement was to create an accessibility page on their website. The language on that page is honest and upfront, including practical information such as the pan height in the disabled toilet, which can be an issue for some people. Most of the paths onsite are largely compacted stone, which is fine for most people in wheelchairs but can be an issue for some. Just by letting people know what their facilities are like, enables visitors to plan in advance and overcome any potential difficulties.

The accessibility page is easy to find from a link on the Moonlit Sanctuary home page. It is also in plain text and not in a downloadable file format like PDF nor presented as an image. This means it can be read by text to voice software making it accessible to the visually impaired. The entire Moonlit Sanctuary website is formatted that way.



Turning Good Practices into Policies

Another thing Moonlit Sanctuary did – at no cost to the business – was to formalise these current good practices as policies. “For instance,” as Michael Johnson, Director at Moonlit Sanctuary, says, “our visitor centre was built with ramps, while our reasonably flat topography meant that our paths have been built without steps. We instituted a ‘no steps’ policy so that steps do not slip in as part of a future project. We now advertise our ‘no steps at Moonlit Sanctuary’ policy on our accessibility page”.

“We realized that many of our overseas guests were older, some with restricted mobility,” Mr Johnson continues. “This is obvious; people with the money to travel are often more mature in years while the population of many countries continues to age”

“We are lucky Moonlit Sanctuary is relatively flat and not exceptionally large, making it easy to get around. However we realised that many people would still look to rest their feet as they walk around the Sanctuary. We instigated a program of simple, durable, yet inexpensive bench construction and now no visitor has to walk more than 30 metres down a path before coming across a bench”.

Reaping the Rewards of being Accessible

Features that benefit one group of visitors often increases a business’ attractiveness to other demographics. Moonlit Sanctuary has a policy of installing large full height glass windows in their enclosures. Of course this makes it easy for people in wheelchairs to see in, but it also makes it easy for tiny-tots to see as well. With young families a key demographic in the Sanctuary’s domestic market, this in particular is important.

“We recently completed a signage program around the park,” Mr Johnson says, “which assists the hearing impaired. In fact, the owner of a tour company has started using us as a result of this signage”.

The Future

Moonlit Sanctuary is not planning to rest on its laurels when it comes to Accessibility and the wider concept of Vistability. “Now we are looking for further ways to increase our Visitability,” Mr Johnson concludes.

“We are investigating hearing loops to assist the hearing impaired when they arrive and during some of our presentations. We still have to find a solution for non-English speakers. Unlike our major competitors we are not eligible for government grants or subsidies, so everything we do has to come out of our profits. But finding cost effective ways to increase the presence of Visitability has made excellent business sense.”

Contact information

Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park

**550 Tyabb-Tooradin Road, Pearcedale
(03) 5978 7935 | moonlitsanctuary.com.au**