

Our Top Ten Tips for Tackling the Winter Season

It might be quieter on the Sapphire Coast during winter, but there's plenty you can do to keep busy and attract a few more customers. Check out our top ten tips for the cooler months and if you want to chat further, our door is always open!

1 Market to locals and the SHORT drive market

Think of winter as a chance to supplement your marketing with a focus on locals, the holiday-in-your-own-backyard crowd. Try some messaging aimed at the up to three-hour drive market and encourage well-priced staycations bundled with experiences. Local social media marketing is also very low cost, so it's a good way to put your toe in the water and see what results you can get.

2 Court the staycation and short-break traveller

Mid-week escapes, one-night stopovers, and "treat yourself" weekenders are winter gold. This is where your offer does the heavy lifting, so frame it around cosy, restorative, and uncomplicated. Think fireplaces, long breakfasts, and empty beaches at sunrise. Lean into the fact that the Sapphire Coast is a mild winter destination with plenty of sunny days.

3 Tap the VFR market (visiting friends and relatives)

The VFR market is one of the largest and most stable segments in Australian tourism (estimated at close to half of all domestic overnight travel) and it's also one of the most overlooked, because operators assume those visitors are already coming and don't need marketing. The trick is that VFR marketing works in reverse. Instead of marketing outside the region, you market inside it, so locals know what to recommend, book, and bring their guests along to. Give residents a reason to walk their visitors through your door, such as a "locals' rate plus one" deal, a "show your Sapphire Coast postcode" offer, or a referral incentive. Partner with other local hospitality businesses on bundled "show your visitors a good time" packages. Make it easy for hosts to be the hero.

4 Run targeted promos and special offers

Winter is the right time for discounts, but be strategic. Tie them to locals, VFR, mid-week stays, campaigns, and of course tap your existing database rather than running blanket price cuts that erode your overall value. Be deliberate about where you place these offers.

5 Work your existing database

This is where the databases you've collected and crafted over the years come into their own. Your past guests and customers are your warmest leads, and a well-crafted EDM (a personalised email with a genuine offer) will outperform paid media every time. Now is the time to really think about how you craft that messaging, who you send it to, and how you follow it up. Your investment in your email database should be ready to pay off.

6 Package and value-add rather than just discount

Encourage packaging and value-add rather than always playing the discount card. Bundle accommodation with a dinner, a local experience, or simply a late checkout. Remember that your tourism colleagues are experiencing the leaner months just like you, so talk to them. Go to chamber meetings, tourism meetings, and do the networking necessary to find some partnerships. Packaging protects your rate, tells a richer local story, and cross-promotes other operators in the region.

7 Hook into signature winter events

Hook into the signature events around this upcoming June long weekend, for example the Merimbula Jazz Festival and Winter Sun. How are you building your promotion around these? How are you leveraging them? Look at building offers, content, and itineraries that tie in. Look further afield too, at events and attractions in neighbouring regions.

8 Make August your project

August is potentially one of our toughest months for visitation and spend, so it's worth treating it as a project. Lean into some of the unique experiences on offer. Whale watching is really revving up, with huge numbers of whales moving down the coast in that period. The first hints of spring are in the air, school holidays are approaching, and we're heading into shoulder season pricing.

9 Get out and enjoy your own backyard

Use the quieter times to come out and experience your own backyard. These weeks are the chance to learn more about the product and experiences around you and to develop partnerships with other operators. Walk the local tracks. Take a tour you've never taken. Eat at the restaurant down the road. Book yourself a night away on your own staycation (everyone deserves a winter holiday). It's good for business and good for you!

10 Invest in your business and get your digital house ready for AI search

Refresh your website, photography, and content. Do the professional development course you've been putting off. Audit your guest experience from enquiry to checkout. And pay particular attention to how people find you now. Generative engines like ChatGPT, Claude, Google's AI Overviews, Copilot and Perplexity are increasingly answering "where should I go on holidays this winter?" before a traditional search result is ever clicked. Make sure your website has clear, structured, factual content about what you offer and what makes you distinctive. Claim and update your Google Business Profile, ATDW listing, and review profiles. This is the new SEO.

