

FIELD NOTE · RV FRIENDLY TOWNS · AUGUST 2026

What Makes a Town Truly RV Friendly?

Beyond the signage — the practical decisions that turn a town into a preferred overnight stop.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

| It is rarely one thing. It is the sum of many small decisions.

Australia has almost one million registered caravans, campervans and motorhomes travelling the country. These travellers contribute billions of dollars annually to regional economies, yet many towns still view RV tourism through the narrow lens of providing a dump point and a place to park overnight.

The most successful regional destinations understand a different reality. They are not competing to provide free camping. They are competing to create a welcoming visitor experience that encourages travellers to stop, stay, explore and spend.

The difference between a town that becomes a regular overnight stop and one that is simply driven through often comes down to a handful of practical decisions that require modest investment but deliver meaningful economic returns.

This article outlines five proven actions regional councils can implement within twelve months to strengthen their visitor economy.

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Why RV Tourism Matters

Caravan and self drive travellers represent one of Australia's most valuable visitor segments.

Unlike traditional holidaymakers, RV travellers often:

- Stay several nights rather than a single overnight.
- Travel outside school holidays and peak seasons.
- Spend generously across a wide range of local businesses.
- Prefer weekdays and shoulder periods over weekends.
- Return regularly to towns that treat them well.
- Share their experiences widely through online communities.

Their spending is distributed across supermarkets, bakeries, cafés, wineries, pubs, fuel stations, pharmacies, hardware stores, visitor attractions and local retailers.

Importantly, many travel with flexibility. If a town provides an enjoyable experience, they stay longer. If it doesn't, they move on.

Move 1: Make It Easy to Stop

Many towns unknowingly discourage RV visitors before they even arrive.

Common issues include:

- Confusing or contradictory signage about where caravans can park.
- Narrow streets and tight corners that make access stressful.
- Overnight parking areas hidden well away from the town centre.
- Byways that discourage large vehicles rather than welcoming them.
- Rules that are unclear, inconsistent or heavily enforced.

Successful RV friendly towns provide:

- Clear directional signage on the approach to town.
- Generously sized, level parking that suits caravans and motorhomes.
- Simple, visible information about permitted stays.
- Reliable water, waste and dump point facilities.
- A visible welcome, whether through signage, a visitor centre or friendly locals.

Removing barriers encourages travellers to stop without anxiety.

Move 2: Locate Facilities Within Walking Distance of Local Businesses

The biggest mistake many communities make is placing RV infrastructure well away from the town centre. Convenience drives spending.

When visitors can comfortably walk from their vehicle to cafés, wineries, bakeries, supermarkets and attractions, spending increases naturally.

Langhorne Creek provides an excellent example. Visitors staying at Frank Potts Reserve can easily walk to cellar doors, the local general store and nearby attractions. This simple connection between overnight facilities and businesses helps distribute tourism expenditure throughout the community.

The objective is not simply to provide parking. The objective is to increase local economic activity.

Move 3: Invest in Essential Infrastructure Rather Than Expensive Infrastructure

Many councils believe attracting caravan visitors requires significant investment. In reality, travellers consistently value simple, well maintained facilities over expensive infrastructure.

Priority investments include:

- A reliable RV dump point in a well signed, accessible location.
- Potable water refill points.
- Clean public toilets available 24 hours.
- Rubbish and recycling bins that are emptied regularly.
- Well maintained lighting for safety without impacting residents.
- A short, walkable route into the town centre.

These facilities improve both visitor satisfaction and community amenity. They also create positive online reviews that influence thousands of future travellers.

Move 4: Create Reasons to Stay an Extra Night

The greatest economic opportunity often comes from extending the average length of stay. Adding one extra overnight stay can significantly increase visitor expenditure.

Councils should work with local businesses to create compelling reasons to remain in town.

Examples include:

- A weekly farmers or produce market.
- Live music or trivia nights at the local pub.
- Self guided heritage walks and driving trails.
- Cellar door and brewery experiences.
- Community events, art exhibitions and seasonal festivals.
- Local produce, artisan food and specialty retail.

Every additional activity increases the likelihood that visitors choose another night rather than continuing to the next destination.

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Move 5: Think Like the Visitor

The most successful towns regularly assess the visitor experience from the perspective of someone arriving in a large caravan.

Ask simple questions:

- Is the town easy to find and easy to enter?
- Is it obvious where visitors can stay and for how long?
- Are the amenities clean, working and easy to locate?
- Can visitors walk safely from their vehicle into the town centre?
- Do local businesses know how to welcome and serve RV travellers?
- Would you enjoy staying here yourself?

Small frustrations accumulate quickly. Small improvements create lasting impressions.

Lessons from Regional Australia

Across Australia, successful destinations share common characteristics.

Langhorne Creek, South Australia

Simple visitor infrastructure combined with exceptional cellar door experiences encourages longer stays and supports local wineries, hospitality businesses and the general store.

Warrnambool, Victoria

Strong investment in visitor experiences, coastal attractions and regional events positions the city as both a destination and a gateway to surrounding communities.

Coober Pedy, South Australia

A unique visitor experience, supported by RV facilities and tourism services, has helped diversify the local economy beyond mining.

William Creek, South Australia

Despite its tiny population, strategic positioning on the Oodnadatta Track and access to iconic experiences such as Lake Eyre flights make it an internationally recognised stop for self drive travellers.

Daly Waters, Northern Territory

The Daly Waters Pub demonstrates how memorable experiences and authentic storytelling can transform a remote location into a destination people actively seek out.

The Economic Opportunity

Consider a town that attracts an additional ten RVs each day. If each travelling party spends an average of \$250 during an overnight stay, the result is:

- \$2,500 in additional visitor spending each day.
- Approximately \$17,500 each week.
- Around \$75,000 each month.
- More than \$900,000 across a full year.

For many regional communities, this represents a significant injection into the local economy without attracting large scale development.

The focus shifts from attracting more people to encouraging existing visitors to stay longer and spend locally.

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Key Takeaways for Councils

An RV friendly town is not defined by a dump point. It is defined by the complete visitor experience.

The communities achieving the greatest success understand that caravan travellers are not simply looking for somewhere to sleep. They are looking for welcoming places where they can relax, explore, support local businesses and feel connected to the community.

By improving accessibility, investing in practical infrastructure, supporting local experiences and designing with the visitor in mind, regional councils can strengthen their visitor economy while creating places that residents are equally proud to enjoy.

The most successful RV friendly towns are not necessarily those that spend the most. They are the ones that make it easiest for visitors to stop, stay and become advocates who recommend the destination to thousands of other travellers.

WHERE THIS LEADS NEXT

Turning insight into action.

Every regional community has the potential to strengthen its visitor economy. The difference lies in leadership, planning and a willingness to think beyond individual assets and towards the whole visitor experience.

If you would like to discuss how these principles apply to your council, tourism organisation or region, Argo Advisory & Consulting works with regional leaders across Australia to translate insight into practical, measurable outcomes.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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About the Author

Founder and Principal Consultant, Argo Advisory & Consulting. David advises regional councils, tourism organisations and economic development agencies on visitor economy strategy, RV tourism and regional growth. Drawing on deep marketing expertise, Australian authenticity and extensive travel throughout regional Australia, he helps communities develop practical, evidence based strategies that increase visitation, strengthen local businesses and create more resilient regional economies.