

MEMBERSHIP GUIDELINES

2016-17

**HELPING YOU TO MAKE
THE MOST FROM
YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

**YOUR
MARGARET
RIVER
REGION**





MRBTA MEMBERSHIP GUIDELINES

The Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association (MRBTA) is committed to offering a high quality tourism experience for all visitors to Your Margaret River Region, as well as helping valued members to grow their business.

These guidelines are designed to assist you to design, prepare, implement and manage your business or tourism product to help attract and meet the needs of potential visitors. It will also help you to get the most from your MRBTA membership!

If you're concerned that you may not be able to address some of the criteria outlined below, please speak to the MRBTA Membership team about the options available to assist you.

Definitions:

MRBTA means Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association

Short Stay Accommodation constitutes premises ordinarily used for stays of no more than three consecutive months in a 12 month period

Member refers to a financial member of the Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association

DO YOUR HOMEWORK AND KEEP BENCHMARKING!

Operating a tourism business can be a 24/7 commitment. Before you start, save time and money by being aware of what's involved in running a business. Business.gov.au provides some great online resources to help you prepare.

The Membership team can also point you in the direction of a number of services and specialised resources or research to help you develop and operate a sustainable tourism based business in Your Margaret River Region and beyond.

We also provide access to a wealth of information on the [MRBTA corporate site](#) to help along the way such as industry research, visitation statistics on marketing resources.





GETTING READY

Rules and Regulations

When starting out or expanding your business, it is important to find out what registrations and licenses apply to your business. Here are some of the most common areas of regulation to consider:

Setting Up the Business –

When starting a business, you will need to [register a business name](#) for your company. To register the business you also need to have an Australian Business Number (ABN) which will allow you to comply with Australian taxation regulation. It is also a requirement for MRBTA membership.

Legislation & Licensing –

A business license refers to any form of government regulation, registration, permit or approval which applies to a business. E.g. Short term holiday rentals must often be registered with your local government authority due to zoning regulation. Because the tourism industry covers an extraordinary range of products and services, we suggest using the online [Business Licence Finder](#) to investigate licences or regulations that may apply to your individual business.

Liability Insurance –

Public liability insurance protects you, up to a stated limit if a third party (customer, employee, supplier) sues you for personal injury, death or property damages resulting from an occurrence connected to your business for which you are legally liable. A valid Certificate of Currency to the amount of \$10,000,000 is a condition of membership and should include: the name of the insured business, expiry date, coverage of activities being undertaken and location of business or operating area.

Tourism Accreditation –

For quality assurance purposes, members are strongly encouraged to obtain tourism specific accreditation through the [Australian Tourism Accreditation Program](#). There are a number of additional tools and benefits available to businesses through this framework.

Privacy Policy –

Did you know that customers must generally ‘opt-in’ to receive regular communications from your business? It is good practice to be aware and adhere to the [Privacy Act](#) when collecting data about your guests or screening potential clients.





Tourism Distribution & Understanding Commissions

There are two general ways of reaching potential clients:

1. Directly – advertising, brochure distribution, website, social media, client referrals, word of mouth
2. Indirectly – Using third party distribution channels such as retail travel agents (visitor centres, Expedia, Wotif), wholesalers and inbound tour operators.

Understanding tourism distribution systems, recommended commission rates and the roles of third party booking agents is essential for a sustainable tourism business.

Why are commissions charged?

Online travel agents (OTA's), wholesalers and inbound tour operators (ITO's) can help expose your business to markets and customers you may otherwise have difficulty reaching on your own, or to markets that would cost you a great deal to access yourself.

They also offer potential customers the comfort and security of booking with a well-known brand. Customers who do not know you directly may be less willing to book with you if they can't book with someone they know or trust.

Commissions are charged to cover the cost of these companies promoting your product, sometimes online and also by brochure. Companies like wholesalers and ITO's also distribute product via a multi-level network of agents. This increases your distribution but they also need to take a portion of the commission themselves.

Commission is only paid on bookings you receive, so this is a no-risk cost of doing business.

What are the options?

Online travel agents (OTA's) - generally charge between 10 and 15% commission

Wholesale travel agents - generally charge 25% commission or more

Inbound tour operators - generally charge 30% commission or more

What does MRBTA offer?

Accommodation, touring, ticket and event booking services are offered via the MRBTA (acting as a third party agent) as a free visitor service to encourage longer stays, increased dispersal and repeat visitation to the region.

The association provides suppliers the opportunity to:

- Showcase their product and prices online with extensive coverage
- Be part of newsletters and promotional material distributed to a wide audience through the MRBTA newsletter subscription
- Display printed material in Visitor Centres for direct exposure
- Opportunities to participate in ad hoc promotional and advertising campaigns supported and developed by MRBTA
- Access to potential travel agent and media opportunities such as familiarisation tours and visits coordinated by MRBTA
- Opportunity to participate in events supported by MRBTA
- Opportunity for your product to be presented to international wholesalers and ITO's at events and trade missions attended by MRBTA e.g. Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE), Ni Hao etc.

Costs may be involved for some of these opportunities.

What commission rate does the MRBTA charge?

- 10% to accommodation and tour operators offering real time (Gold) availability and rates
- 12.5% to accommodation and tour operators offering on request (24 hour) availability and rates

With many distribution channels charging between 10-30% commission as standard, the MRBTA rates are designed to be very competitive. Any profit earned from this service is then re-invested into visitor servicing and destination marketing of Your Margaret River Region. For this reason, any booking made via MRBTA provides additional value for your business compared to bookings made via other channels.

Learn more about the [Tourism Distribution](#) network.



Accepting Bookings & Payments

Operator payments from MRBTA -

The MRBTA will collect payments on any bookings facilitated through Margaretriver.com or the region's accredited visitor centres using Bookeasy, a real-time booking and secure payment platform. Monies collected are held in Trust by the association until the goods/ services are received by the customer. Operators will receive any outstanding net payments twice monthly by electronic funds transfer (EFT) into their nominated account registered in their Bookeasy console.

Direct payments -

You will need to also decide what type of payment options you would like to offer your guests if they need to pre-pay for your goods or services directly. With advances in technology, customers are accustomed to user-friendly, online secure payment options. Payment options include:

- **Credit card** – To accept payments directly by credit card, you must first have a merchant account. Most major banks can help you set up a merchant account that accepts bankcards, VISA or MasterCard. You must deal directly with American Express or Diners if you wish to accept these cards also. The bank may also assist with the best way to process payments for your size of business.
- **Online gateway payment systems**– You will need to investigate a secure payment gateway service if you wish to take payments online via your e-commerce site. E.g. Securepay, Paypal etc.
- **Cash** – Always provide a receipt for cash payments, detailing: date of payment, name of product or service, amount paid and the name of your business and ABN.
- **Cheque** – Make sure you get the client's residential address and phone number as follow up in the event the cheque bounces
- **Direct transfer** – Provide guests with your account details so the sum may be directly deposited. Ask for a transaction receipt number to reference.

Bonds & Security Deposits –

Accommodation providers are advised to consider taking a security deposit such as a credit card pre-authorisation or a [bond](#) to safe guard against theft, loss or property damage. Please note that the MRBTA does not administer bond collection so this will have to be arranged directly with the client. Visit the Western Australian Department of Commerce website for detailed information about bond collection, registration and release.

Cancellations & Refunds –

Before a booking can be accepted through MRBTA, guests must agree to the booking terms and conditions as outlined in your cancellation and indemnity policy as entered in your Bookeasy console. This policy will also appear on the guest's itinerary. We suggest setting a simple, standardised cancellation policy. As a third party agent, the MRBTA will administer and adhere to the cancellation policy of the tour or accommodation provider (at their discretion). It's important to note that the standard rate of commission will be apply to bookings that attract a cancellation fee.





Guest cancellation, change and indemnity policy

A booking or sale is a binding contract between a consumer and the operator or supplier. Therefore a cancellation policy and its associated fees are designed to cover you against any financial loss but must be fair to both you and the customer.

Make sure guests are aware of both your cancellation policy and general terms and conditions of your product or service. For accommodation and tour operators, the MRBTA will adhere to the cancellation and indemnity policy as entered in your Bookeasy console and consumers have to accept these conditions before payment can be collected.

Your cancellation and/or indemnity policy should be succinct but take the following into consideration dependent on your business operation: Cancellation conditions & fees; House rules & compliances; Indemnity; Occupancy policy (max. group size); Damages; Pet Policy; Smoking; Permits and Registrations; Parking; Noise complaints; Emergency Plans

We suggest also referring to the Department of Commerce information about [cancelling a supply or service](#) so that your policy adheres to guidelines.

Building your brand – your business profile

It is essential that any promotion of your product or service through the MRBTA or any other promotional channels be an accurate and true representation of the experience you are offering. It will not only speak to your business but the guest experience in the region. Expectation management will be key to your success, so make sure your branding and price point reflects the facilities, standard and service you can deliver or exceed.

- **Photos** – Images sell and are one of your most important marketing tools. We recommend hiring the services of a professional to make sure your images really stand out and are suitable for both print and digital formats. Also consider styling your images with talent (people having a great time) or props (surfboards, fresh fruit bowl, toiletries pack etc) if suitable to your product offering.

If you are an accommodation operator with a Bookeasy listing, at a minimum include shots of: the exterior, kitchen, living area, main bedroom, bathroom, additional bedroom and/or outlook. MRBTA can assist you to arrange photography of your business if required.

- **Product pricing & rate parity** - Potential guests will evaluate the value of your product or service by comparing it with similar offerings. Set a price that not only balances guest expectations with what standard, location and facility you can offer but allows you to distribute your offering via third party sales channels and have commission built in.

If you are not sure, review similar products in the market and benchmark your product. Don't forget to set pricing to seasonal trends, attract increased visitation during off-peak periods (e.g. midweek bookings) or offer better rates for longer stays or multiple travelers. If you are selling your product or service across multiple platforms or channels, rate parity ensures business integrity and good working relationships as well as avoiding consumer frustration or confusion. Many third party agents (including MRBTA) have a price match policy as part of your contract agreement.

Learn more about considerations as well as a checklist for [pricing your tourism product](#).

- **Accuracy of business description, facilities & amenities** – Visitors need to get a sense of who you are and what you offer before they make an enquiry. Celebrate your unique selling points and highlight the services or facilities your offer. Equally make it clear what isn't available to guests. If you are promoting an amenity (like a welcome hamper) or facility (hot tub), that has become unavailable or non-operational since they booked, communicate this in advance.

If you are an accommodation operator with a Bookeasy console make sure you describe: property features and unique selling points; who it suits (families, couples, groups or accepts pets); location (what amenities it's close to or points of interest); number of bedrooms/bathrooms.





DAILY OPERATIONS

Customer Communications

- **Responding to booking enquiries** – With frequent advances in technology, potential guests now expect a quick response rate and timely responses show that you are attentive and professional.
- **Arrival and departure** – Unless your customer is a repeat guest, they will be unfamiliar with your check-in or arrival process. Put them at ease by providing them with clear directions to your business or tour meeting point and communicate the arrival/check-in process in advance. Make sure guests know how to contact you in the event of a travel delay or last minute query. There are fields in your Bookeasy console which help communicate all the above. Make sure their departure is as simple as their arrival and provide them with a potential outlet such as a guest book, or suggestion to leave a review on Tripadvisor so they can share their experiences with the world.
- **Feedback, reviews, complaint or dispute resolution** – Treat positive feedback, constructive criticism or complaint as an opportunity to make improvements to your product or services. Any receipt of complaint or feedback should be acknowledged as soon as possible and responded to within three days in a professional manner.

Guests booked via the MRBTA will be advised to supply any feedback or complaint in writing for the MRTBA to liaise with the associated operator. Any unresolved disputes will be directed to [Department of Commerce, Consumer Protection](#).

Managing rates and availability

It is a condition of membership that accommodation and tour operators accept bookings through the MRBTA. Our booking and secure payment system, Bookeasy gives operators access to an online console with complete flexibility as to managing rates and availability of their tour or accommodation inventory as well details about confirmed and tentative bookings made by MRBTA.

Keeping your rates and availability calendar up to date (bookings can be made up to two years in advance) is an ongoing commitment so that you don't receive frequent requests that you can't accommodate and also avoid double bookings.

Bookeasy offers three ways in which operators can manage their availability:

1. **24 hour confirmation (on request)** - When a client makes a booking they will be advised that the booking will be confirmed within 24hrs. The operator will receive an email (and SMS if the operator selects this service) to notify them that a booking has been made and the booking can be confirmed by the operator from their reservation screen on the Bookeasy console. Booking centre staff can also view this booking and contact the operator to request confirmation. Operators with a 24 hour confirmation period will not be prioritised in the search listing and are identified by the 24 hour medal symbol. Commission fee is 12.5%.
2. **Gold Medal (real-time booking confirmation)** - When a client makes a booking it is instantly confirmed and payment can be made instantly. This means that the operator guarantees that availability and pricing is 100% accurate and all bookings must be honoured. These operators will appear at the top of availability searches through margaretriver.com and each of the regional visitor centres, and will be identified with a gold medal. Commission fee is 10%.
3. **Gold Medal (real-time booking confirmation) EXCEPT FOR BOOKINGS DUE TO ARRIVE WITHIN 24HRS** - When a client makes a booking it is instantly confirmed and payment can be made instantly EXCEPT if the booking is due to occur within 24hrs (in this case the operator reverts back to 24 hour confirmation period). Operators guarantee that availability is 100% accurate for all bookings except for bookings due to arrive within 24hrs. Clients booking for a date more than 24hrs in advance will not have to wait for confirmation. These operators will appear at the top of availability searches and will be marked with a gold medal. Commission fee is 10%.

To avoid double bookings it is strongly recommended that operator direct bookings are only confirmed once the room or tour has been marked as unavailable on the operator's online console. Operators that choose to offer Gold Medal real-time availability will be 100% responsible for any bookings they cannot honour.



Property Manager Response Times

Terms and conditions of MRBTA membership state that guests and our agents must have access to a 24 hour emergency contact (name, mobile number and email address) of an accommodation manager or caretaker. The manager/caretaker is the first point of contact for the guest when reporting issues during their stay and should either live on-site or be able access the property within a 30 minute drive.

The choice of manager/caretaker must be appointed carefully as they must be skilled communicators to liaise with guests and be able to clean/maintain properties to high standards. A number of local professional managers, cleaners and contractors can also be hired to assist with such services. Please contact the MRBTA membership team for a list of local providers.

Cleaning, Presentation & Facility Standards

In our general experience, the better a property is showcased or presented, the better chance of occupancy and guest satisfaction. Anticipate the needs of your paying guests with standards and facilities to match your offering. For example, to attract families, ensure the property is child-proofed or provides additional child-friendly facilities (cots, toys, plastic crockery, board games). If you allow smoking in outside designated areas, provide ashtrays. If you are pet-friendly, provide details of near-by dog parks or beaches and educate around local customs (cleaning up after your dog).

- **Cleaning Standards** - The property should be cleaned to a professional standard after each guest. If the property has been vacant for more than 2 weeks, a light clean for cobwebs and dust may need to be considered. A heavier clean and maintenance review should also be carried out prior to peak periods of use or seasonally. If you don't offer a daily room cleaning service, encourage your guests to look after the property during their stay (especially if no onsite management available), consider providing basic cleaning equipment and materials such as detergent, mops, brooms and vacuum cleaners.
- **Facility & Equipment Inventory** - Keep a regular inventory of provided facilities and equipment and check it regularly





Accommodation Property Checklist for Members/MRBTA staff:

- Car Parking** – Adequate off street parking relevant to the maximum guest capacity provided and local government regulations
- Fire Safety:**
 - Extinguisher/Fire Blanket** – Easily accessible, clearly marked, and certified with service date and current working order.
 - Smoke Alarm(s)** – [Compliant smoke alarms](#) in working order and permanently connected to mains supply
 - Emergency Response Plan** – Prominently displayed with local emergency contact numbers (000, Police, Ambulance, Fire, Hospital, SES)
 - First Aid Kit** – Provided and replenished
- Water** – Provide potable water supply either connected to appropriate water authority's reticulated water supply or serviced by a rain water tank of at least 20,000 gallon capacity in keeping with [Department of Health guidelines](#).
- Gas** – Must be available in working order (if applicable) with a spare bottle available on site for BBQ or hot water if not connected to a mains supply.
- Lighting** – Adequate interior lighting throughout the property and outside entrances in working order
- Window Treatments** – Must be clean, provide sufficient privacy and protection from light. Fly screens checked and maintained.
- Security** – Property must have ability to be fully lockable via external doors and windows. Spas and pools also be secure according to regulations. All personal effects of owners (if applicable) should be in a lockable cupboard or shed.
- Heating/Cooling** – Ensure proper ventilation and provide climate control in working order to suit building size. Sufficient dry wood/gas supplied for use in fire places (if applicable) outside fire bans with flues cleaned regularly.
- House Rules** – Or 'Code of Conduct' should be displayed within the property and include matters such as noise curfews, maximum occupancy of guests, visitor policy, entertaining or parties, a fire or emergency response plan, policy on damages/breakages, departure arrangements and emergency contact details of manager/caretaker.
- Caretaker/Manager** – Phone number of caretaker displayed in the property for emergency requirements. Must be available within 30 minutes of property, 24 hours a day.
- Furnishings** – Should be clean and in good working order.

- Instructions** – A full instruction list/user manual available for all equipment (ie, changing gas bottles, hot water system, dishwasher, washing machine, television, Foxtel, wifi internet passwords, etc) and clearly displayed.
- Floor Coverings** – Regularly cleaned and maintained
- Bedrooms** – High quality beds/mattresses with pristine mattress/pillow protectors and sufficient pillows for max. occupancy. Bed linen (if applicable) should be clean and adequate to ensure warmth. Bedrooms should feature: lamps; clothes hanging space; and clothes hangers with luggage storage available. Cot/cot mattresses available if listed as a facility for bookings with infants
- Kitchen :**
 - Sufficient crockery, glassware and cutlery in working order to match max. occupancy of property as well as inclusion of adequate kitchen appliances and cooking utensils. Kitchens should be free of food stuffs (spices acceptable) and contain:
 - Clean oven, stovetop, exhaust fan, refrigerator, unmarked bench tops
 - Sufficient cleaning products such dishwashing liquid, general purpose cleaner and cloths/scourers
 - Clean cupboards internally and externally and inspected regularly for rodents/water damage
 - Bathrooms** – Tiled with clean, unmarked sink, shower screen/recess, bath, toilet, and mirror. Bath mats to avoid slipping and towel rails provided. Extraction fan provided in good, working order
 - Lounge/Living/Dining areas** – Sufficient clean seating and furnishings to match max. occupancy of guests
 - Outdoor areas/gardens** – BBQ (clean with sufficient fuel and utensils), outdoor seating. Gardens to have reticulation in working order, maintained and lawns mowed regularly.
 - Spas/Swimming Pools** – Regulation compliant and maintained to a clean condition and correct treatment
 - Balcony/Stairs** – Regularly maintained with railings and free of hazards
 - Gutters** – Clear and in working order
 - Garbage and Recycling** – Information provided as to collection days and correct disposal of waste materials or excess waste
 - Visitor information** – Local guides and maps made available or directions to local visitor centre for information