

2025-26 State Budget

A tourism summary and analysis



QUEENSLAND
TOURISM INDUSTRY
COUNCIL

Introduction

The 2025–26 Queensland State Budget delivers over \$1 billion in targeted investments across key programs and infrastructure over the next four years, including a \$446 million four-year commitment to kick-start Destination 2045, designed to ignite new visitor experiences, strengthen industry capability, address critical workforce shortages and expand regional tourism offerings, while laying the foundations for world-class events such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

This report consolidates tourism related budget, and we have included all other tourism-relevant Budget measures. This report is presented under the following themes:

1. **Policy & Context** – Strategic direction under Destination 2045 and departmental alignment.
2. **Tourism Programs & Events** – Grants, product development and event-attraction funding.
3. **Workforce & Skills** – New and expanded training, upskilling and returning-to-work initiatives.
4. **Infrastructure & Transport** – Major capital outlays enhancing regional access and iconic projects.
5. **Signature Tourism Infrastructure Projects** – Detailed table of flagship capital investments.
6. **Arts, Culture & Events** – Screen, festival and venue investments to enrich Queensland's visitor experiences.
7. **Eco-tourism** – Targeted funding for iconic nature-based attractions under Destination 2045.
8. **Sustainability & resilience** – Infrastructure and conservation programs safeguarding tourism assets.
9. **Olympic and Paralympic Games** – \$4.7 billion for venues, villages and community sport, supported by a record \$41.7 billion in roads and rail to connect Queensland and deliver the 2032 legacy.

By pairing budget figures with project descriptions and anticipated outcomes, this overview equips stakeholders to plan, partner and advocate effectively in Queensland's evolving visitor sector.

1. Policy and context

1.1 Destination 2045

The Budget dedicates \$446 million over four years to launch Destination 2045, the State's long-term tourism blueprint. Funding streams include:

- **Product Development & Aviation Attraction Fund – \$200 million over four years.** This investment establishes the new Connecting Queensland Fund to open strategic air routes, improve regional airport connectivity and outstrip previous aviation funding. It also backs iconic tourism product development, financing new attractions, rejuvenating existing offerings and launching programs to boost operators' capability, bringing to life Queensland's vision for world-class visitor experiences.
- **\$146 million** to strengthen Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) marketing, events and global representation.
- **\$100 million** to secure marquee sporting, cultural and business events under a refreshed "events capital" agenda.
- Support to deliver **45 new eco-tourism experiences** by 2045, showcasing Queensland's natural wonders.

1.2 Departmental Alignment

From November 2024, tourism functions have been realigned into the **Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation**, ensuring integrated policy across environmental stewardship, scientific research and the visitor economy.

2. Tourism programs and events

2.1 Product Development Grants

- **Growing Future Tourism Program: \$12.8 million** in 2025–26 for capital grants to develop new infrastructure and experiences (e.g. fishing platforms, interpretive trails).
- **Bush Tourism (Bush Boost): \$5.7 million** over three years for co-investment grants (up to \$2 million each) to expand outback tourism offerings (e.g. astro-tourism observatories, river eco-tours).

2.2 First Nations Tourism

- **\$3 million** in 2025–26 (matched by Commonwealth) to support Indigenous-led cultural events, guide training and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned accommodation and galleries.

2.3 TEQ Funding Restored & Regional Tourism Support

The Budget reverses prior cuts, fully restoring TEQ's appropriation after it was set to halve by 2027-28, so it can continue positioning Queensland as "the home of the holiday" and Australia's events capital. In 2025-26, TEQ will:

- Generate **\$900 million** in event-driven spending and **3.5 million** event visitor nights.
- Run high-impact brand campaigns showcasing eco-tourism, First Nations experiences and the Great Barrier Reef.

2.4 Mega Events Attraction Fund – \$100 million over four years

- An additional \$100 million has been committed to establish Queensland's first dedicated Mega Events Attraction Fund, more than doubling the State's prior events investment. This fund will be used to pursue major sporting, cultural and business events, accelerating progress towards Destination 2045's goal of a \$4 billion annual events calendar, comprising \$2 billion in regional events and a \$2 billion business events calendar, by securing the very best large-scale events for Queensland.

2.5 Regional Tourism Network

- Funding preserved for Regional Tourism Organisations under the Tourism Network Fund, maintaining destination marketing support across all 12 regions.
- To bolster regional operators, the Budget also provides a **\$10 million** uplift (an extra \$3 million) to the Tourism Network Fund in 2025-26, maintaining funding for all Regional Tourism Organisations while TEQ and RTOs co-design a sustainable long-term funding model for rollout from 2026-27.

3. Workforce and skills

3.1 Returning to Work Package

- **\$20 million** Back to Work package to remove barriers for women re-entering the workforce after caring responsibilities or illness, helping hospitality and tourism businesses recruit experienced staff.

3.2 Training & Apprenticeships

- **\$203.1 million** over two years for the Queensland Skills Strategy, delivering up to **1 million** subsidised training places (including 70,000 Free TAFE places in hospitality and tourism).
- **\$10 million** over two years to extend Free Apprenticeships for Under 25s, incentivising businesses to take on apprentice chefs, bakers and tourism operations trainees.
- **\$201.1 million** to establish four new TAFE Centres of Excellence (Caloundra, Moreton Bay, Rockhampton, Southern Moreton Bay Islands) with modern hospitality and tourism training facilities.

3.3 Targeted Regional Workforce Support

- Continued funding for Skilling Queenslanders for Work and Regional Jobs Committees to tailor skills solutions for tourism-dependent communities.

4. Infrastructure and transport

4.1 Major Transport Projects

The 2025–26 Budget commits a record \$41.7 billion for new and upgraded roads and rail under the Safer Roads, Better Transport Plan, restoring respect for Queenslanders' money and delivering generational infrastructure to prepare the State for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Key initiatives include:

- **Bruce Highway Upgrade: \$9 billion**

Restoring an 80:20 Commonwealth–State funding split, this program will deliver targeted safety and capacity upgrades along Australia's longest highway. Sixteen projects are already in planning or construction, including new overtaking lanes, intersection improvements and shoulder widening, all designed to enhance self-drive tourism and freight connectivity from Brisbane to Far North Queensland.

- **Sunshine Coast "The Wave" Rail Link**

Accelerated by an additional \$40 million in 2025–26 planning funds, The Wave will provide seamless public transport from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast Airport and Maroochydore CBD. It combines heavy-rail services to Birtinya with a metro-style line to the airport, including the new Mooloolah River Interchange. By 2032, passengers will travel door-to-door from Brisbane to the airport in under one hour.

- **Logan–Gold Coast Faster Rail – \$5.75 billion**

Jointly funded with the Commonwealth, this project receives **\$600 million** in 2025–26 to commence track duplication between Kuraby and Beenleigh. Improved frequency and capacity will better link Brisbane with Gold Coast attractions, theme parks, beaches and the airport, ensuring rail readiness for peak demand during and beyond the 2032 Games.

- **Additional Key Projects under Safer Roads, Better Transport:**

- **Caloundra Congestion Busting Plan and Mooloolah River Interchange** (Sunshine Coast)
- **Barron River Bridge** replacement in Cairns
- **Bribie Island Bridge** upgrade
- **Country Roads Connect – \$100 million** to boost safety and flood resilience on regional unsealed roads
- **Schools Transport Infrastructure Program – \$27.5 million** to improve safety at school bus stops in tourism towns
- **Keeping Our Waterways Safe – \$15 million** for marine safety and enforcement in boating and fishing precincts
- **Disability Parking Permit fee removal – \$2.2 million** to ease access and cost-of-living pressures for visitors with mobility needs

Together, these investments will dramatically improve road safety, reduce congestion, and expand public-transport options across Southeast and regional Queensland, delivering a stronger, more connected tourism industry in the lead-up to 2032.

4.2 Visitor Infrastructure & Connectivity

- **River Reach Walkable Spine:** \$1.8 million to design a pedestrian corridor linking The Gabba, South Bank, Cultural Centre and Roma Street, improving inner-city visitor flow.
- **Protected-Area Upgrades:** \$28 million for visitor facilities in national parks (Dandabah, Wallaman Falls, Springbrook).
- **Land Acquisitions:** \$39.6 million to expand parklands, preserving biodiversity and creating new nature-based tourism sites.

5. Signature tourism infrastructure projects

Project	Allocation	Timing	Location / Details
Wangetti Trail (stage 2)	\$18.3 million	2025–26	Cairns – coastal walking & MTB trails with eco-lodging and Indigenous tours.
Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail	\$15.5 million over 4 years	2025–29	Cairns – 52 km single-track trails, visitor hub and signage.
Whitsunday Skyway	\$5 million over 2 years	2025–27	Whitsundays – elevated reef-lagoon walkway offering unique reef views.
Great Keppel Island Clean-Up & Security	\$5 million	2025–26	Southern GBR – site restoration, pest management and safety works.
Coen Cultural Centre	\$8.2 million over 2 years	2025–27	Cape York – Indigenous arts hub for exhibitions and community events.
Palm Island Ecotourism Development	\$4.9 million over 4 years	2025–29	First Nations-led upgrades to accommodation and cultural tours.
National Park Visitor Facility Upgrades	\$28 million	2025–26	Campground, centre and track upgrades at Bunya, Wallaman Falls, Springbrook.
Wildlife Hospital Network	\$21.2 million over 3 years	2025–28	Five new/expanded wildlife care centres supporting rescue and eco-education.
Protected Area Land Acquisitions	\$39.6 million	2025–26	Purchase of conservation reserves for new nature-based tourism offerings.

6. Arts, culture and events

- **Screen Production Attraction:** +\$28 million to draw major film/TV projects, generating on-location spend and global exposure.
- **PDV Incentive:** +\$8 million for post-production rebates, sustaining creative sector jobs and enhancing on-screen promotion of Queensland.
- **Woodford Folk Festival Upgrades:** \$1.6 million for site infrastructure; \$1.6 million for live-music support grants, ensuring safe, high-quality festival operations.
- **Clancestry & First Nations Events:** +\$2 million to QPAC for Indigenous cultural programming, enriching Brisbane's annual festival calendar.
- **Museum & Gallery Works:** \$500 000 to QAGOMA (Children's Art Centre, Australian Cinematheque) and \$5 million over three years for heritage building upgrades at Cobb + Co Museum and Ipswich Workshop.

7. Eco-tourism

- To kick-start Destination 2045's goal of 45 new nature-based experiences, the 2025–26 Budget allocates a total of \$43.571 million across four key projects:
 - Wangetti Trail (Stage 2): \$19.671 million to progress the coastal walking and mountain-bike trail near Cairns.
 - Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail Upgrade: \$14 million to expand and enhance 52 km of single-track trails and visitor facilities.
 - Palm Island Tourism Development: \$4.9 million to fund a Tourism Development Plan and new infrastructure on Palm Island.
 - Whitsunday Skyway: \$5 million to support planning and delivery of an elevated reef-lagoon walkway attraction.
- This targeted funding unlocks iconic new attractions, rejuvenates existing product, and underpins operator capability—cementing ecotourism as a cornerstone of Queensland's competitive advantage.

8. Sustainability and resilience

- **Disaster Resilience Fund:** \$100 million over three years (joint-funded) for flood, cyclone and bushfire mitigation to protect tourism assets.
- **Fire Management Uplift (QPWS):** \$11.2 million in 2025–26 to enhance bushfire prevention and cultural-heritage protection in national parks.
- **Koala Conservation Strategy:** \$31.3 million over four years (+\$8.4 million p.a.) securing SE Queensland habitat—protecting a key wildlife drawcard.
- **Threatened Species Program:** \$23.5 million over four years (+\$6.3 million p.a.) for recovery of vulnerable flora and fauna supporting biodiversity tourism.
- **K'gari Dingo Management:** \$29.2 million over five years (+\$3 million p.a.) for patrols, signage and visitor education on Fraser Island.
- **OECMs on Private Land:** \$2.8 million over two years incentivising private-land conservation and niche eco-tourism experiences.
- **Cape York World Heritage Nomination:** \$2.4 million over two years (contingent) to advance listing of Cape York Peninsula, elevating its global eco-tourism profile.

9. Olympic and Paralympic Games

- **Record transport investment – \$41.7 billion** for new and upgraded roads and rail under the Safer Roads, Better Transport Plan, laying foundations for a fresh start and the 2032 Games legacy
- **Bruce Highway Targeted Safety Program – \$9 billion** (80:20 funding split restored) delivering safety and capacity upgrades, with 16 projects already in planning or under construction
- **Safer Roads projects** progressing Barron River Bridge, Bribie Island Bridge, Caloundra Congestion Busting Plan and Mooloolah River Interchange to improve access to key tourism regions
- **The Wave Sunshine Coast Rail Link** accelerated with an extra \$40 million for stages 2–3 planning in 2025–26, delivering heavy rail to Birtinya and a metro-style connection through Maroochydore to Sunshine Coast Airport by 2032

- **Logan–Gold Coast Faster Rail – \$5.75 billion** (Commonwealth–State) with \$600 million in 2025–26 to begin track duplication between Kuraby and Beenleigh, boosting frequency to Gold Coast attractions and the airport
- **2032 Delivery Plan initial tranche – \$4.7 billion** in 2025–26 to get on with world-class venues, villages and community sport infrastructure
 - **\$3.8 billion** toward the overall Venues Program (Victoria Park Stadium, Sunshine Coast stadium & MTB centre, Moreton Bay & Logan indoor centres, Barlow Park) with **\$847 million** in 2025–26 to progress five regional venues.
 - **\$950 million** over four years (of a total \$3.5 billion State commitment) for public-private Athlete Villages in Brisbane (RNA Showgrounds), Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast/Rockhampton.
 - **\$308.5 million** over four years to establish the Games Independent Infrastructure & Coordination Authority (GIICA) for delivery oversight.
 - **\$250 million** in 2025–26 for the **Games On!** community-sport program, upgrading grassroots facilities statewide.

Key takeaways

1. **Strategic Investment:** A robust capital program (\$279.4 million) and targeted operational grants ensure momentum behind Destination 2045.
2. **Regional Activation:** Bush, First Nations and regional arts funding spreads tourism benefits statewide.
3. **Workforce Solutions:** Returning-to-work incentives, apprenticeships and TAFE expansion address critical labour shortages.
4. **Enhanced Experiences:** Eco-tourism trails, cultural hubs, festivals and screen incentives refresh Queensland's visitor offering.
5. **Improved Connectivity:** Major road, rail and inner-city projects deliver seamless, inclusive travel.
6. **Long-Term Sustainability:** Resilience and conservation measures safeguard the natural and cultural assets central to Queensland's tourism identity.

This budget report provides tourism stakeholders with the context, budget commitments and project details necessary for strategic planning, partnership development and advocacy across Queensland's dynamic visitor economy.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, QTIC will continue to work with members and government to ensure these investments translate into practical benefits for operators across Queensland. The funding provides momentum, but implementation will require ongoing industry engagement to meet the diverse needs of our sector. We'll continue to keep members informed as further detail emerges around delivery timelines, funding access, and regional opportunities.

For further information or to contribute to QTIC's ongoing policy agenda, contact us at info@qtic.com.au.

Reference links:

[State Budget 2025–26 official papers](#)