

BRIDGEPORT

TOURISM TRAILBLAZERS

BRIDGEPORT HOTEL



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About Bridgeport Hotel

Having opened its doors just 12 months ago amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bridgeport Hotel has overcome many challenges to become a drawcard for the Murray River, Lakes & Coorong. The 100-room hotel boasts a restaurant, bar, gaming lounge and infinity pool, and has already won top national awards including Australian Hotel Awards Overall Hotel of the Year – Regional 2022.

The hotel employs 96 staff from the local and surrounding area. When it opened, 65 team members were part of the hotel's traineeship program – a unique initiative developed to overcome the national skills shortage and support the local community.

Challenges faced

- National skills and labour shortage meant staff in all departments were difficult to recruit and retain, especially for a new business.
- Construction during the pandemic caused a shortage of materials and trades due to logistical issues from border restrictions.
- Opening a new hotel when travel demand was low saw a change in marketing strategy to educate consumers about the new offering and detailing safety practices in place.
- Changing rules around travel created uncertainty for potential guests – particularly for interstate travellers – reducing lead times to two to three days.

Overcoming adversity

- Created a traineeship program with TAFE SA to hire local youth, offering certificates in hospitality and operations, commercial cookery and commercial cleaning. Filled gaps in all areas of the hotel including housekeeping, front of house, kitchen, food and beverage and front office. To date, the traineeship program has been a success with two thirds of the original 65 trainees still on board and due to complete their training in late 2022.
- To complement the traineeship program, the Bridgeport Hotel partnered with Generation Thrive to deliver a 12-week life and work skills program to set trainees up for success.
- Persevered and constantly adapted plans to work around trades and material shortages to complete the hotel and open to the public in July 2021.
- Point of difference to other regional accommodation as a new offering, so appealed to pent up travel demand of local market to try something new and stay in the region.

Lessons learnt

- A bit of hard work goes a long way. The traineeship program took time to get up and running but is incredibly beneficial for both trainees and the business as workers are passionate about their job and intend to remain at the hotel.
- Guests love to hear from locals. By hiring from the region, employees build authentic relationships with guests by offering tailored travel advice and telling personal stories about the region.
- Local community is everything. The diversity on offer in the region attracts a variety of visitors and provides a reason to make the getaway more than a day trip – including Monarto Safari Park, the Langhorne Creek wine region, The Bend Motorsport Park and nearby tour operators such as Juggle House Experiences.



It gives me a great sense of pride seeing the youth in our community go through our traineeship program and grow. We're playing a small part in helping set their lives on a positive path through employment.

Ian Muller, Bridgeport Hotel

The Bridgeport Hotel approach

- **Look after your people as they are worth more than the bricks and mortar.** Giving opportunities to help employees shine incentivises staff to stay as they enjoy their job and see that they are making a difference.
- **Take the leap.** If you are considering doing something different, like a traineeship program, give it a go.
- **Research what marketing opportunities are out there.** Taking part in initiatives such as the Great State Vouchers and applying for major awards helps get the business name 'out there'.

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