



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Blind and low-vision travellers explore Victoria's High Country through a sensory tourism experience

Australian accessible tourism operator Cocky Guides and founder James "Buck" McFarlane will visit the Victorian High Country this weekend with five blind and low-vision travellers and two guide dogs — experiencing the region through sound, texture, aroma and taste rather than sight.

The four-day familiarisation trip — Cocky Guides' first to the region — has been developed in collaboration with Tourism North East to demonstrate that accessibility in tourism is often about engaging more senses, not adding more infrastructure.

"Blind and low-vision travellers don't experience less — we understand that we can deliver experiences at destinations differently," said Buck. "Destinations like the High Country are naturally sensory. You can hear the landscape, smell the bush, feel the trail surface and taste local produce. We are excited to visit the region for the first time with our travellers and show businesses how accessible and inclusive they already are"

The long weekend centres around a flagship accessible event at King Valley winery **Red Feet Wines** — *A Taste of the Senses: A Wine Sensory Journey of the King Valley* — designed specifically for blind and low-vision guests.

Created by owner Megan Star with support from Tourism North East and Vision Australia, the experience challenges traditional visual-based tastings by placing **touch, aroma and sound at the heart of wine appreciation**.

Guests will explore three wines paired with small dishes, while physically interacting with grape skins, oak and soil types. The environment incorporates tactile wayfinding, anti-glare settings, professional orientation and mobility support, and braille and large-print materials.

"Wine has always been sensory — we're simply removing the visual barrier," said Megan. "When people slow down and focus on smell, texture and flavour, they connect more deeply with the wine and the place it comes from."

The Cocky Guides group will be based in Mansfield and extend the sensory approach throughout the region, including:



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- walking the Mansfield Rail Trail and feeling the changing trail surfaces
- experiencing the botanical gardens through scent and texture
- visiting local food producers and tasting regional flavours
- exploring distilleries, breweries and wineries through guided sensory descriptions

Tourism North East's Gina Elliott said the visit highlights how naturally inclusive regional experiences can be. "Many operators are already inclusive without realising it," she said. "A few thoughtful adjustments can turn a good experience into one that's genuinely welcoming and memorable."

Australia's accessible tourism market includes more than 4.4 million people when travellers with a disability, seniors and companions are considered — representing a major opportunity for regional destinations.

Cocky Guides hopes the visit will encourage operators across Victoria to confidently engage with accessible tourism.

"Inclusive tourism doesn't mean special treatment," Buck said. "It means inviting people to experience a place in ways they may never have considered before."

For more information about Cocky Guides and its inclusive tourism programs, visit www.cockyguides.com.au

CONTACT

For further information, please get in touch with James (Buck) McFarlane at james.mcfarlane@cockyguides.com.au or call 0403 827 666.

Interviews and filming opportunities are available during the visit, including the Red Feet Wines sensory experience on Saturday, 21 February.

ABOUT COCKY GUIDES

Cocky Guides is Australia's leading creator of multi-sensory adventures for blind and low-vision travellers.

Through guided group tours, community programs, and innovative social events such as the White Cane Mingle, Cocky Guides connects people with places and experiences designed to build confidence, independence, and a strong sense of community.

With destinations across Australia, Cocky Guides is committed to inclusion, accessibility, and meaningful connection.

For more information, visit www.cockyguides.com.au