

# TASTES OF GREATER GEELONG

2024 EVENT  
REPORT

# Summary

Our Greater Geelong region is one of Australia's most renowned food, wine, and hospitality destinations. Following on from the success of past Tastes of Central Geelong events, we had the opportunity in 2024 to open the 13th annual food festival to the whole region, renaming it 'Tastes of Greater Geelong'. Tastes of Greater Geelong showcased the flavours our region has to offer, from delectable local ingredients, farm-fresh produce, wine and dine events to gourmet tasting trails.

Tastes of Greater Geelong encompassed more than 100 events spanning 74 kilometres across our region. The 2024 event saw the largest events program to date, showcasing local food, drink and hospitality like never before. From Friday 21 June until Sunday 14 July 2024, the program featured special menus, themed dining, unique outdoor experiences, celebrity chefs, intimate masterclasses and more.

The 2024 Tastes program kicked off with a community 'Winter Warm Up' celebration in Little Malop Street followed by three weeks of food and drink focused events hosted by venues across our Greater Geelong region. Events and special menus highlighted the plethora of gourmet delights within our region and invited locals and visitors alike to go out throughout winter, support the local hospitality scene and discover the delectable offerings that can be found in our own backyard.

Cover: Malayan Era Menu  
at Baah Lah! Photo by Jane  
Fitzgerald.

This page: Culinary &  
Conversation event at The  
Arborist. Photo by Amy Evans.



## Background

Tastes of Greater Geelong (formerly Tastes of Central Geelong) was established in 2011 to showcase and celebrate the central Geelong food and hospitality scene and support local businesses.

This annual food festival is commonly held during the winter months when hospitality visitation is generally quieter than usual. Early 2024 saw an additional hardship for hospitality venues with the rise of interest rates and subdued spending making for a challenging economic outlook. June to July was therefore a crucial time to hold the Tastes of Greater Geelong event to support hospitality venues with marketing and promotion, increase visitation and make the public more aware of Geelong as a culinary destination.

Tastes has continued to expand and evolve with the introduction of new events, offerings, themes, partnerships and collaborations year on year.

Since the first Tastes event in 2011 more than 100,000 visitors have come to central Geelong to participate, attend or dine in the city. Ambassadors included Master Chefs alumni and Celebrity Chefs such as Maggie Beer and Adrian Richardson.

Tastes has transformed into a much-loved cornerstone of the local food and hospitality industry and Geelong's thriving events calendar.

The food festival is a testament to the region's culinary talent and a celebration of Geelong's vibrant food culture.



## Attendance and economic impact

Tastes of Greater Geelong 2024 recorded 7,749 attendances at events across the 24-day program. This was an increase of 42.59 per cent from the first food festival in 2011 (5,400). Since most special menus and restaurant offerings did not require bookings or sign-ins, not all Tastes of Greater Geelong attendees could be captured. The 'Winter Warm Up' free community event in central Geelong was the most visited event, obtaining the majority of the attendances (2,521). The post event survey found that the average hospitality spend per person during Tastes of Greater Geelong was \$109.21. This makes for a calculated economic increase in the hospitality sector of \$846,268. High-level estimates using the REMPLAN economic modelling platform suggest that the Tastes of Greater Geelong program contributed to an injection of \$1.681m revenue into the local economy over the 24-day period.

# 117

events or special menus formed the program

# 102

locations across the Greater Geelong region

# \$109

average spend per person

# 135

businesses were involved, either as hosts, services or suppliers.



Winter Warm Up attendees  
at the Fat Cookie stall.  
Photo by Pam Hutchinson.



Brendan Hill at  
The Culinary  
Academy's  
Sugar Demonstration

## Highlights

For the first time in 2024, Geelong's annual food festival expanded to include the whole Greater Geelong region. Made up of more than 100 events, the program spanned 13 postcodes and 74 kilometres across our region. Tastes 2024 showcased our largest events program to date featuring local food, drink and hospitality like never before. From Friday 21 June until Sunday 14 July 2024, Tastes celebrated special menus, themed dining, unique outdoor experiences, celebrity chefs, intimate masterclasses and more. Events were accessible to the whole community, ranging from free to low cost while also including high-end dining experiences.

A VIP event in partnership with Holiday Inn & Suites offered the chance for a cross division of industry experts to hear from a hospitality panel, network and find opportunities to collaborate. The 'Winter Warm Up' winter solstice celebration kicked off the Tastes of Greater Geelong program in Little Malop Street. The event was free

for community to attend and resulted in positive outcomes for businesses within the Little Malop Street precinct. The 'Winter Warm Up' was inspired by a whimsical European winter wonderland. Highlights included snow fall, live music, marshmallow toasting over firepits, Carla O'Brien neons, projections, fairy lights and delicious sweet treats and mulled wine for purchase.

Masterchef alumni, plant-based cook and sustainability advocate Simon Toohey took guests on an exclusive farm to table experience at Give Where You Live's 'The Paddock'. As a Greater Geelong local, Simon Toohey was also the official 2024 Tastes of Greater Geelong ambassador.

Celebrating our First Nations culture and highlighting Indigenous flavours, an Indigenous Tasting Event at Murran First Nations Hub invited patrons to savour a range of native delights. Troy and Cerisa Benjamin, the founders of Blak Brews Tea and Gordon Ramsay's Food Stars winner,

shared their story at Murran First Nations Hub and took part in a Q&A.

An Indigenous High Tea with native ingredients was held at The Davidson, celebrating delectable Indigenous flavours.

Tasting Trails took attendees of all ages to unique hospitality venues around central Geelong to taste the exquisite flavours of our city, finding hidden gems, meeting local makers and encouraging kids to experience a range of tastes.

Venturing out into nature, a special mussel tour by Portarlington Mussel Tours featured mussel farming with cooking demonstrations, a seafood lunch, wine tastings and cruise around Port Phillip Bay.

A range of multicultural restaurants and events made up this year's program. Gourmet delights from across the world were available for purchase at the National Wool Museum's Global Craft Bazaar which also included free entry to the Cultural

Bridges exhibition.

Free informational events also formed an important part of this year's program, educating attendees about edible plants in our gardens and showing how to plan and prepare meals on a budget.

Two stand-out events brought together the best of Tastes and Geelong's UNESCO City of Design designation: The Arborist put on a special dinner with a talk by North Building Group architects discussing the design of the renowned restaurant with the ash tree at the core of its build. Celebrating 170 years of refrigeration, a special event was organised by the National Trust Geelong Branch for World Refrigeration Day: a demonstration of James Harrison's ice-making machine was held at the Geelong Showgrounds Museum.

# Audience data

Interest in the Tastes of Greater Geelong program continues to grow and see more diverse audiences attend. Most attendees came from the Greater Geelong region with an increase in metropolitan attendances and international travellers recorded.



## Place of residence

The reach of the Tastes of Greater Geelong program is evident when seeing that 5 per cent of attendees came from interstate and another 5 per cent from overseas. Nineteen different postcodes were recorded from participant survey responders indicating their place of residence. The partnership with Tourism Greater Geelong & the Bellarine formed an essential part of the promotion of the Tastes program. Building on this collaboration along with other tourism partnerships will be important for the future growth of Greater Geelong as a culinary destination.

65% from Greater Geelong  
10% from Melbourne metro  
10% from regional Victoria  
5% from Surf Coast  
5% from interstate (NSW)  
5% from overseas (New Zealand)



## Demographic

The program predominantly engaged middle-aged women. More can be done to build on this trend while also diversifying food offerings and events to involve an audience of all ages, a more male and non-binary audience with a special focus on attracting a more multicultural audience.

### Age groups

35 - 49 50%  
50 - 59 18%  
25 - 34 12.5%  
60 - 69 12.5%  
18 - 24 5%  
70 - 84 2%

### Cultural identity

53% Australian  
12% Caucasian  
11% European  
9% Indian  
9% Asian  
3% Indigenous  
3% Other

### Male / Female

77% Female  
23% Male  
0% Unspecified



## Participation

While more than half of the attendees stated that they went to one event, more than a third of attendees engaged in two to four events. Five percent of attendees attended five or more events. This shows how popular the Tastes of Greater Geelong program has become and the interest of the public in attending food-related events or experiencing special menus that highlight our region.

56% of people attended 1 event  
39% of people attended 2 – 4 events  
5% of people attended 5 or more events



## Key events

There is a real appetite for the program to feature unique experiences as well as tasting trails and special menus. Family-friendly events and masterclasses also received high interest. Other respondents expressed their interest in events related to plant-based cooking, education about food planting and more cuisine highlighting the culturally diverse communities of Geelong.

### Events of interest

64% Experiences  
61% Tasting trails  
54% Special menus  
50% Family-friendly events  
34% Masterclasses  
32% Events for kids  
20% Drink events  
11% Other

# Digital engagement

Social media reached 121,938 accounts through City of Greater Geelong owned, paid and influencer social posts.



## How did people find out about the event?

Organic social media posts drew in the largest amount of people, followed by word of mouth and email newsletters. Social media continues to form an important part of the Tastes of Greater Geelong marketing plan with the opportunity to grow visitation through paid social advertising to reach further audiences. Word of mouth as second most important promotional avenue highlights the community's interest in sharing in culinary experiences with friends and family.

- 45% Social media
- 34% Word of mouth
- 14% Email newsletter
- 12% Print advertising
- 11% Previously attended
- 9% Website
- 5% Print newspaper
- 5% Posters/billboards



## Social media data

Social media had an organic reach of 122,252 through our City of Greater Geelong owned social posts.



## Email marketing

Ten email newsletters were distributed to an overall database of 24,651 receiving 10,670 opens, which equates to an open rate of 43.28 per cent.



## Website data

Web users: 7,352  
Web page views: 16,207  
Sessions: 10,905



Kids Tasting Trail  
attendees at Cakesmith

# Media coverage

Tastes of Greater Geelong events were covered in 76 local media pieces across 57 days, reaching an estimated audience of 468,100.



Dervilla McGowan from Anther Distillery, June O'Brien from Epic Taste Experiences (front), David Choi from Leega Korean BBQ and mayor Trent Sullivan (back). (supplied)

## A festival of tasty food



### A GROWING PASSION

SIMON TOOHEY CAME TO PUBLIC ATTENTION WITH A TOP THREE FINISH IN SEASONS 5 OF MASTERCHEF. SINCE THEN HE HAS CONTINUED HIS PASSION FOR PLANT-BASED COOKING. SOMETHING HE WILL SHARE NEXT MONTH AT TASTES OF GREATER GEELONG. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

"I'M NOT ONE TO GO FOR THE VEGAN WORLD DOWN PEOPLE'S THROATS. THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M AFTER. WHAT I REALLY WANT TO DO IS HIGHLIGHT THE BEAUTY OF VEGETABLES AND PLANTS."



## Get on the horn: Winter (feast) is coming

### Food festival expands

Geelong's favourite food festival is branching out into the Bellarine Peninsula. Formerly Tastes of Central Geelong, the food fest is now known as Tastes of Greater Geelong, but will still encompass the best in food, drink and hospitality from across our whole region.

Now in its 18th year, the festival aims to showcase everything the region has to offer, from delicious local ingredients, farm fresh produce, wine and dine events to gourmet taste trails.

The program, spanning Friday June 21 to Sunday July 14, will highlight the gourmet delights within the region and invite locals and visitors to support the local hospitality scene.

The Sharp Group co-owner and director Lyndsay Sharp said Tastes of Greater Geelong was a great opportunity for people to explore and celebrate the incredible array of gastronomic experiences our region had on its doorstep.

"We really are blessed with a bounty of amazing food, wineries, breweries, distilleries and artisan producers," she said.

"I am super excited to be a part of Tastes of Greater Geelong to help tell the stories of local growers and producers and to showcase what a great food scene we have here in Greater Geelong, from great venues, pubs and cafes onto to rural and major city. The Arboretist's executive chef Anthony Hammel said:

Head pastry chef and owner of That Place Patisserie Ashlea Allen said it was so important in the current climate to support small and local businesses.

The 2024 Tastes program kicks off with 'The Winter Warm-Up' luncheon event on Friday June 21 in Little Malap. Central Saturday June 22 will see Taste Trails guiding guests to discover hidden hospitality gems.



Mayor Trent Sullivan, The Arboretist's Anthony Hammel, Sharp Group's Lyndsay Sharp and That Place Patisserie's Ashlea Allen are looking forward to Tastes of Greater Geelong. (supplied)

FOOD DRINK EAT

21.06.2024

## Tastes of Greater Geelong kicks off today. Here's our guide to the eating event



<https://fortemag.com.au/tastes-of-greater-geelong-kicks-off-today-heres-our-guide-to-the-eating-event/>



## A culinary adventure awaits: Annual Geelong food festival to return

May 31, 2024 BY Ellie Claringbold (<https://timesnewsgroup.com.au/geelongtimes/author/ellie/>)



Geelong's annual food festival is set to return this year with a program of events celebrating the best of food, drink and hospitality from across the region. Pictured here from L-R are: That Place Patisserie's Ashlea Allen, The Sharp Group's Lyndsay Sharp, The Arboretist's Anthony Hammel and Mayor Trent Sullivan. Photo: SUPPLIED



## Comments from our audience:

*Discovering delicious food locally.*

*It was great to try new places.*

*Great events with good value offered in the program.*

*Experienced more venues.*

*Was great to see it move beyond the CBD.*

*Experiencing places I didn't know were in Geelong!*

*Just a great event for the city.*

*We loved learning about food businesses we wouldn't have known about otherwise. We will definitely support them going forward. We've already been back to some!*

# Community satisfaction and connection

An online survey was available via our City of Greater Geelong Have Your Say platform. It was sent to registered event attendees and shared across social media. The survey included 26 questions with a mix of closed-ended (rating scales) and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 67 surveys were completed. Overall, 88 per cent of attendees rated their Tastes of Greater Geelong experience as "excellent" or "very good."

## What we did well:

Our survey results showed that attendees agreed/strongly agreed (74 - 89 per cent) that:

- Tastes is an important event for the Geelong community
- Tastes encouraged them to visit and experience new hospitality venues
- Tastes made them feel welcome and included
- Tastes made them feel proud of the municipality
- Tastes made them feel connected to others in their community.

## Open answers celebrated:

- Discovering new venues
- Trying new food
- Meeting local makers and chefs
- Attending free events
- Learning about edible plants
- Enjoying catering to their dietary needs.

## Areas of improvement:

Survey participants asked to focus on more culturally diverse cuisines and events as well as involving more hospitality venues that haven't been part of the program previously. It was also asked repeatedly for the Winter Warm Up to be made an annual event and food trucks expanded on.

# Hospitality satisfaction and connection

More than 124 businesses participated in or were promoted in the Tastes program. There were 817 individual experiences/events/offers/special menu items on offer during the 24-day program, 117 of these offerings were unique.

An online survey was available to hospitality venues through our City of Greater Geelong Have Your Say platform. It was sent to all hospitality venues involved in the Tastes of Greater Geelong program. The survey included 27 questions with a mix of closed-ended (rating scales) and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 27 surveys were completed. Overall, 69 per cent of businesses rated their overall experience taking part in Tastes as excellent/very good. 75 per cent of businesses were participating for the first time. This is due to the broadening of the program to the whole region. 75 per cent said they would like to be part of future Tastes events, 22 said they were unsure at this point. 75 per cent also said that Tastes should ideally be delivered at the same time next year.

## What we did well:

- 65% said Tastes enabled them to reach new audiences and customers
- 44% said Tastes raised the profile of their business and offerings
- 31% said Tastes provided an opportunity to test a new event/activity/product/service.
- 19% said Tastes increased their overall visitation/trade during June/July
- 15% said Tastes encouraged collaboration with other hospitality venues/businesses.

## Areas of improvement:

Hospitality venues have asked for more lead time to submit their events and special menus. They would like to organise and deliver more exceptional offerings for the program. Businesses have also asked to receive promotional materials earlier and expand the program to go for 4 to 6 weeks to gain more momentum under the Tastes umbrella.



Tastes of Greater Geelong VIP launch event at Holiday Inn & Suites Geelong

## Comments from event hosts:

*Tastes of Greater Geelong is a fantastic initiative, thank you.*

*The people that came were all new customers that wanted to try our special menu, which was fantastic to see especially during winter.*

*Our special menu generated significant excitement among our customers and highlighted the potential to showcase more diverse flavours and menus across Geelong during the food festival. The Tastes food festival provided an excellent opportunity for us to experiment and innovate, inspiring us to consider special menus more frequently.*

*Looking forward to see how Tastes evolves, bringing people into the region.*

# Recommendations

Following the community and hospitality surveys, the following recommendations are made to ensure a strong Tastes of Greater Geelong program for the future.

## Resourcing and funding

To guarantee the future of the food festival, ongoing resourcing and funding are key. The development of a three-year plan for Tastes of Greater Geelong will be crucial. To ensure financial sustainability, partnerships and sponsorships should be considered. Funding from governmental and non-governmental organisations should be sought.

## Cornerstone highlights

Community and hospitality businesses have suggested a range of cornerstone Tastes highlights to consider, spreading out community events to keep people engaged during Tastes. Ideas for consideration include making the Winter Warm Up an annual event, hosting a hospitality and makers market, organising a Tastes hub to showcase the best of the region, and more activations such as a roaming Spiegeltent or food truck festivals.

## More lead time for hospitality

To ensure the delivery of a high-quality program of upcoming Tastes events, organisations and hospitality venues require significant lead-time. They have asked for 2 to 6 months of lead time to come up with exceptional ideas to elevate the program and organise their events.

## Earlier promotion

It was requested to promote the event as early as possible, which included hospitality venues receiving marketing materials in advance.

## Expanding the program

In order to gain momentum under the Tastes umbrella, hospitality venues have asked to expand the program to go for 4 to 6 weeks.

## Attracting greater audiences

Tastes of Greater Geelong has the perspective to put the Geelong region on the map as a culinary destination to attract national and international audiences. More partnerships should be sought ongoing to elevate and promote the program.



Attendees ordering at  
Armstrong BBQ

# Acknowledgements

Tastes of Greater Geelong 2024 was managed and delivered by our Place Activation team at the City of Greater Geelong.

Tastes was supported by multiple teams at the City of Greater Geelong with contributions from Events, Health Equity & Planning, Marketing, Arts and Culture, Tourism Greater Geelong & The Bellarine.

A wide range of local organisations, businesses, mostly from the hospitality and event sector, delivered the Tastes program.

A VIP event for all partaking hospitality venues was held in partnership with Holiday Inn & Suites Geelong.

Two \$100 vouchers were kindly donated by Tempo Kitchen & Bar to two randomly selected event survey participants.

We would like to thank the following businesses and organisations for their involvement and support of the 2024 Tastes of Greater Geelong program.

- 1915
- 17by4
- 18th Amendment Bar
- Aleisha Stilt Walker
- Andy Pobjoy
- Anther Geelong Distillery
- Archive Wine Bar
- Armstrong BBQ
- At The Heads
- Baah Lah
- Bao Place
- Barwon Edge Restaurant
- Barwon Heads Market
- Batman Investment Group
- Bay Fisheries
- BBQ Legend
- Beavs Bar
- Beckley Park Market
- Belmont Market
- Bennetts on Bellarine
- Bistrot Plume
- Black Sheep Geelong
- Blackmans Brewery
- Blak Brews
- Born in a Taxi
- Brown Deli
- Cakesmith
- Carla O'Brien
- Caruggi
- Cecilia Cabalquinto
- Chung Vinh Phat Asian Groceries
- Claribeaux
- Club Chin Chin
- Cocktail Cart
- Creative Geelong
- Curious Cabinet
- Das Bierhaus
- Drunken Dumplings
- Eastern Spice
- Eat Well, Live Well
- Epic Taste Experiences
- Fat Cookies
- Feast Geelong
- Felix Restaurant
- Fleet Wines
- Flying Brick Cider Co.
- Fresh Creative Entertainment
- Fresh Food Merchant
- Geelong Entertainment Services
- Geelong Showgrounds Museum
- Geelong Waterfront Makers & Growers Market
- General Public
- GenU's James St Gallery
- Gerry's Seafood
- Give Where You Live
- Griggs Creek Providore
- Hecho en Mexico
- Hue & Cry Gallery
- I Ragazzi
- Jack Rabbit Vineyard restaurant
- Ket Baker
- La Cachette Bistrot
- Leega Korean BBQ
- Leura Park Estate
- Lisa Hanley
- Little Creatures Geelong
- LOCAL Geelong
- Lucy Riddett
- Maestro Bar - Holiday Inn & Suites Geelong
- Malt Shovel Taphouse
- Market Square Shopping Centre
- Matt Bonner, BonArt Multi Media
- Mavs Greek Restaurant
- Meet Me At Mary's
- Mel Bald, The Passionate Nutritionist
- Mt Pleasant Rd Taproom + Bar
- Murran First Nations Hub
- National Wool Museum
- Nautica by Rydges Geelong
- Nectar Geelong
- Newcomb Library
- North Building Group
- Nova Balinese Kitchen
- Oakdene
- OK Smash
- OMG Decadent Donuts
- Organic Larder
- Pam Hutchinson Photography
- Pinot and Picasso
- Point Lonsdale Market
- Portarlington Grand Hotel
- Portarlington Mussel Tours
- Provenance Wines
- Public Cafe
- Recess Bar and Eats
- Red Hill Wrought Iron
- Roxie Bennett
- Royal Geelong Yacht Club
- Scotchmans Hill
- Shinto Tattoo Gallery
- Simon Toohey
- South Geelong Farmers Market
- Splatters
- Tacos y Liquor
- Tempo Kitchen & Bar
- That Place Patisserie & Cafe
- That's So Melbourne
- The Arborist
- The Brewery Geelong
- The Carousel
- The Culinary Collective
- The Davidson
- The Deck Geelong
- The Dunes Ocean Grove
- The Geelong Club
- The Gordon
- The Hot Chicken Project
- The Q Train
- The Range @ Curlewis
- Visit Victoria



Portarlington Mussel  
Tour. Photo by Nikole  
Ramsay.

# TASTES OF GREATER GEELONG

We Acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Land, Waterways and Skies. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We Acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.

In the development of this report, we employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, aimed to gather diverse perspectives to evaluate Tastes of Greater Geelong 2024.

The integration of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of Tastes of Greater Geelong's success, areas for improvement, and insights crucial for future iterations or similar initiatives. Methods and tools for this evaluation included:

Data collection via surveys

Qualitative analysis

Benchmarking

Data visualisation

[geelong.link/Tastes2024](https://geelong.link/Tastes2024)