Vibing the Night 2.0

AUSTRALIA NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY INDEX 2026



AN INDEX BY VISA

Acknowledgements

Vibing the Night 2.0 is a report written by Visa. This report presents insights from the second edition of the Visa Australia Night-time Economy Index. The Index ranks 88 Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) regions across the country on how their after-dark economies perform. The findings are based on an extensive literature review, a night-time economy index developed by Visa, and data analysis conducted between July 2025 and June 2026. The report was written by a team of Visa employees including Dr Simon Baptist, Minakshi Barman, and Kseniya Papianiuk, with peer review and research contributions from Dr Anna Edwards, a night-time economy expert at the University of Melbourne.



You Are Here, Canberra. Photo by Andrew Sikorski

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City of Night Next Gen. Photo by Amy Allerton

Executive Summary

Australia's night-time economy is no longer a settled race. Melbourne still holds the crown, but Sydney is closing the gap, regional centres are gaining ground, and the national after-dark map is being redrawn.

Based on the second edition of Visa's Australia Night-time Economy Index, this report looks beyond today's top-ranked regions to explain the movement behind the table: who rose, who fell, and why.

Melbourne Inner holds on to the national #1 ranking for a second straight year, but the gap at the top has narrowed sharply: **Sydney City and Inner South** now trails by just 1.4 points (78.03 to 76.65), having closed more than 80% of the distance between the two cities. New South Wales (NSW) has deepened its grip on the top of the table: NSW regions now hold 13 of the top 20 national positions, up from 12 last year. **Sydney South West** jumped eight places from #13 to #5 on the strength of broad-based gains across spending, vibrancy and business environment.

> **What happens after dark tells us a lot about what's changing in Australia,**
>
> said Alan Machet, Group Country Manager, Visa Oceania, on the release of this year's Index. **"These are choices driven by personal interests rather than necessity."**

"Increasingly, the impact of such choices are being captured and felt in the suburbs and regions, not just the CBD."[1]



Adelaide Central and Hills delivers one of the standout breakthroughs of the 2026 Index, entering the national top 20 for the first time after climbing 11 places from #22 to #11. **Brisbane Inner City** also surged eight places into the top 10, underscoring Queensland's growing presence in Australia's night-time economy.

Victorian regions moved down the national rankings this year, even as **Melbourne Inner** retained the top spot. **Darwin** recorded the sharpest fall among capital city areas, down 16 places, with softer results across all four pillars of the Index.

This year's Index results are strongly corroborated by new consumer research[2] which found the average Australian now goes out at night 80 times a year – up 15% on the prior year – while the two biggest obstacles to a bigger night-time economy are both easing. Cost as a barrier to going out fell from 66% to 60% of Australians year-on-year, and safety concerns fell from 45% to 34%. Even so, only 59% of Australians are satisfied with the variety of night-time experiences available in their own local area – a reminder that rising participation has not yet translated into rising satisfaction everywhere, and that there remains real headroom for growth.

1 https://www.visa.com.au/about-visa/newsroom/press-releases/australians-are-going-out-more-at-night-as-sydney-closes-in-on-melbournes-night-time-crown.html
2 Visa Night-time Economy research: Conducted by Lonergan Research, among 1,013 Australians in August 2026 and weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates.

Why Measure the Night-time Economy

The night-time economy offers a unique lens into what Australians care about beyond work. It reflects how people choose to spend their discretionary time and income: the experiences they prioritise, the communities they connect with, and the interests and passions they pursue.

> **In many ways, the night reveals not just how places function, but what makes them meaningful to the people who live there.**

Understanding these patterns matters. The night-time economy brings investment and spending into local communities, and contributes to the social fabric of communities. Measuring it helps move the conversation beyond anecdotes and assumptions, providing a clearer picture of where people are choosing to spend their time, how preferences differ between places and generations, and where opportunities exist to better meet community demand.

This is the second edition of the Visa Night-time Economy Index and the first year in which we can measure change over time. Rather than providing a single snapshot, the Index can now track how local night-time economies are evolving, helping governments, businesses and communities understand whether they are strengthening or weakening across key drivers including spend, safety, vibrancy and business environment.

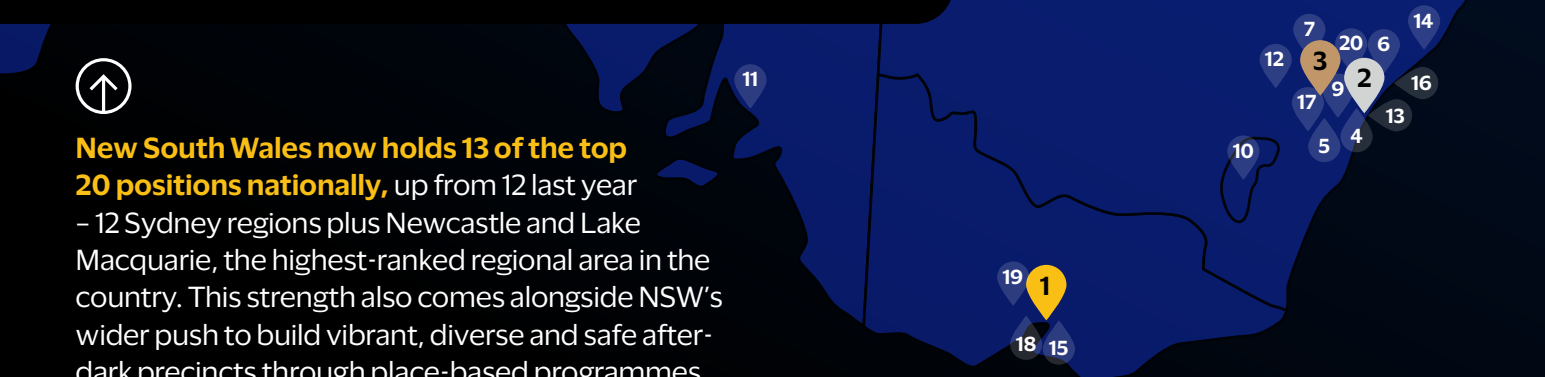


How Australia's Cities Stack Up

The table below ranks the top 20 of Australia's 88 SA4 regions on the 2026 Index.

Rank 2026	Name	Rank 2025	Move	Index score 2026
1	**Melbourne - Inner**	1	0	78.03
2	Sydney - City and Inner South	2	0	76.65
3	Sydney - Parramatta	4	+1	71.74
4	Sydney - Inner South West	5	+1	68.56
5	Sydney - South West	13	+8	67.20
6	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby	7	+1	65.15
7	Sydney - Blacktown	9	+2	63.69
8	Brisbane Inner City	16	+8	62.88
9	Sydney - Inner West	6	-3	62.84
10	Australian Capital Territory	12	+2	60.90
11	Adelaide - Central and Hills	22	+11	60.77
12	Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains	14	+2	60.60
13	Sydney - Eastern Suburbs	3	-10	60.32
14	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	19	+5	60.26
15	Melbourne - South East	11	-4	59.75
16	Sydney - Northern Beaches	21	+5	59.45
17	Sydney - Outer South West	24	+7	59.13
18	Melbourne - West	8	-10	59.02
19	Melbourne - North West	10	-9	57.01
20	Sydney - Ryde	15	-5	56.64

Melbourne Inner retains the national #1 position, but its score fell 4.5 points; night-intensity of spend improved slightly, but business environment, vibrancy and safety weakened. **Sydney City and Inner South** is now within 1.4 points of the top, closing the gap by more than 80% this year.



New South Wales now holds 13 of the top 20 positions nationally, up from 12 last year – 12 Sydney regions plus Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, the highest-ranked regional area in the country. This strength also comes alongside NSW's wider push to build vibrant, diverse and safe after-dark precincts through place-based programmes such as Uptown Districts, Special Entertainment Precincts and Purple Flag accreditation, which now span dozens of locations across the state.[3]

3 https://www.nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/office-of-24-hour-economy-commissioner/24-hour-economy-nsw-place-based-initiatives



Sydney South West and **Brisbane Inner City** recorded the largest climbs inside the top 20, both jumping eight places (from #13 to #5, and #16 to #8, respectively). Both regions registered broad-based improvements: Sydney South West gained across spend, vibrancy and business environment simultaneously, while Brisbane Inner City combined stronger night-intensity of spend with a meaningful 13.3-point improvement in its business environment score. This comes amid significant developments in Queensland's night-time economy policy. These include the Night-Life Economy Commissioner's independent Moonside review and the Queensland Government's subsequent Nightlife Economy Action Plan 2026-2032, developed in response to the Commissioner's recommendations.[4]

One of this year's highlights is **Adelaide Central and Hills**.[5] The region entered the top 20 for the first time at #11, up from #22. The momentum was driven by a strong improvement in night-time intensity, with its score rising 14.12 points, supported by higher after-dark restaurant and transit spend. This suggests that Adelaide Central and Hills is not only attracting more night-time activity, but also building the mix of dining, mobility and urban vibrancy that underpins a more competitive after-dark economy.

Not every mover tells a happy story but the **Eastern Suburbs** may also point to a different story: the strength of Sydney's morning economy, where beaches, cafes, gyms, running routes and outdoor social activity are drawing activity earlier in the day. Eastern Suburbs, which prominently featured as a rising star in last year's report, recorded the sharpest fall in NSW, dropping from #3 to #13. The decline sits almost entirely in night-intensity of spend (down 14.6 points): night spend share, night card share and night-versus-day growth all deteriorated, as daytime activity in the Eastern Suburbs grew faster than night-time activity.

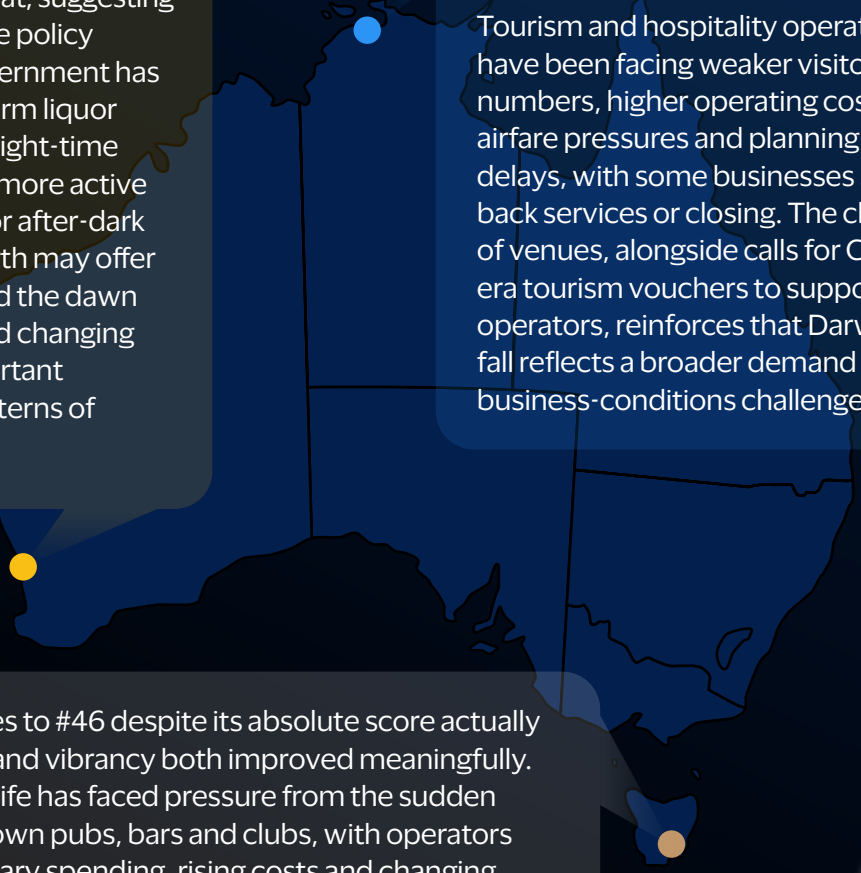
4 https://www.housing.qld.gov.au/news-publications/strategies-plans/queensland-nightlife-economy-action-plan
5 https://www.nlec.qld.gov.au/moonside-the-queensland-night-life-economy-commissioners-report-2026

Room to Grow: Regions to Watch

Three capital city areas remain outside the national top 20, but these stories are not simply about lagging performance.

Perth South East sits at #22 – just outside the top 20 after climbing five places this year. Western Australia's (WA) results point less to underperformance than to a night-time economy in transition: most WA regions improved their national rank even where absolute scores were broadly flat, suggesting a market holding position while policy settings catch up. The WA government has committed $2.9 million to reform liquor laws and begin formulating a night-time economy strategy, signaling a more active phase of state-level support for after-dark activity.[6] At the same time, Perth may offer a complementary story around the dawn economy, with early starts, and changing social patterns providing important context for understanding patterns of activity across the day.

Darwin is a different story this year. It recorded the steepest fall of any capital city area in the country – down 16 places, from #32 to #48 – with declines across night-intensity, vibrancy, safety and business environment alike. Tourism and hospitality operators have been facing weaker visitor numbers, higher operating costs, airfare pressures and planning approval delays, with some businesses scaling back services or closing. The closure of venues, alongside calls for COVID-era tourism vouchers to support local operators, reinforces that Darwin's fall reflects a broader demand and business-conditions challenge.[7]



Hobart also fell five places to #46 despite its absolute score actually rising 2.6 points – safety and vibrancy both improved meaningfully. However, Hobart's nightlife has faced pressure from the sudden closure of seven well-known pubs, bars and clubs, with operators citing reduced discretionary spending, rising costs and changing consumer behaviour, suggesting that the city's improved safety and vibrancy scores sit alongside a more fragile hospitality trading environment, dragging its overall rank.[8]

6 https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/%241.4-billion-investment-to-help-secure-a-future-that-is-Made-in-WA-20250619
7 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-05-23/nt-tourism-hospitality-businesses-struggling-calls-for-vouchers/106693934
8 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-07/hobart-hospitality-impacts-amid-pub-banc-venue-closures/106883668

State of the States

The following section breaks down this year's results, drawing on the full set of 88 regions measured in the 2026 Index.

"Successful night-time economies are the result of long-term investment in planning, transport, safety, and public spaces" said Dr Anna Edwards, Director at Ingenium Research and the Index's methodology partner, on this year's results. "We're seeing stronger performance across regional and urban centres – a trend borne out in this year's data, from **Sydney South West**'s broad-based rise to **Adelaide Central and Hills**' breakthrough into the top 20."



New South Wales

NSW remains the country's night-time economy powerhouse, extending its prominence in the top 20 this year. Inner Sydney is stable at the second spot, with strong performance from Sydney's suburban centres and pockets of regional NSW.

Inner Sydney

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
City & Inner South	2	2	0	3.4	7.1	0.0	-8.4	7.5
Inner South West	4	5	+1	5.6	5.6	0.0	13.0	1.3
Inner West	9	6	-3	2.9	10.8	0.0	-1.5	-11.2
Eastern Suburbs	13	3	-10	-5.6	-4.4	0.0	-6.0	-11.2

Sydney Suburban Centres

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Parramatta	3	4	+1	5.7	12.8	0.0	1.4	-5.0
South West	5	13	+8	10.6	11.4	33.3	6.4	1.3
North Sydney & Hornsby	6	7	+1	6.4	8.7	16.7	-5.5	7.5
Blacktown	7	9	+2	5.2	5.6	33.3	-5.6	1.3
Outer West & Blue Mtns	12	14	+2	5.2	10.2	0.0	-0.9	1.3
Northern Beaches	16	21	+5	9.5	10.9	0.0	6.5	13.8
Outer South West	17	24	+7	11.5	8.7	33.3	11.6	7.5
Ryde	20	15	-5	2.2	0.4	0.0	9.0	1.3
Sutherland	23	33	+10	12.0	17.0	0.0	22.6	-5.0
Baulkham Hills & Hawkesbury	28	17	-11	-1.2	1.6	-16.7	-9.2	7.5

Regional NSW

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Newcastle & Lake Macquarie	14	19	+5	5.9	2.3	0.0	16.3	7.5
Central Coast	30	34	+4	7.5	6.6	0.0	19.5	1.3
Illawarra	31	35	+4	7.4	5.6	0.0	21.7	1.3
Murray	33	52	+19	12.4	16.5	0.0	13.2	7.5
Central West	34	39	+5	8.1	6.8	0.0	15.8	7.5
Far West & Orana	35	38	+3	7.8	9.6	0.0	13.5	1.3
Capital Region	38	48	+10	9.8	12.4	0.0	10.6	7.5
Hunter Valley	39	29	-10	1.6	0.3	0.0	-0.3	7.5
Riverina	41	47	+6	8.2	7.7	0.0	8.1	13.8
New England & North West	50	65	+15	10.2	3.1	0.0	35.6	7.5
Southern Highlands & Shoalhaven	62	62	0	7.7	1.9	0.0	26.0	7.5
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	65	75	+10	9.0	14.5	0.0	13.8	-5.0
Richmond – Tweed	68	46	-22	3.2	5.8	0.0	-5.8	7.5
Mid North Coast	71	74	+3	7.6	3.8	0.0	21.1	7.5

Sydney City and **Inner South** is rapidly closing in on Melbourne Inner, narrowing 80% of last year's gap as stronger night-intensity signals that after-dark spend is growing faster than daytime spend. **Eastern Suburbs**, by contrast, posted the sharpest fall in NSW: a night-time economy that appears to be losing relative ground to a recovering daytime economy while Bondi remains a sought-after spot for the dawn economy.[9] Inner West's fall was driven largely by a safety score collapse, brought upon by deterioration in traffic fatalities at night.

Parramatta's improved scores across both night-intensity and vibrancy come alongside continued investment in the night-time economy by both the NSW Government and City of Parramatta, including Purple Flag accreditation and broader night-time economy initiatives.[10] **Sydney South West**'s eight-place jump was more broad-based, gaining on all three of spend, vibrancy and business environment. The new Western Sydney International Airport represents a major new investment in the region and may be contributing to growing business and investor confidence in South West Sydney.[11]


Sydney City, NSW


Western Sydney International Airport, NSW

9 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-05-25/early-morning-trading-economy-australia/106693248
10 https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/business/night-city
11 https://www.wsiairport.com.au/



Victoria

Victoria's 2026 results point to a broad-based softening. Every Victorian region recorded a lower rank as compared to last year, except Melbourne Inner, which retained the national #1 position despite weaker vibrancy and safety outcomes. The absence of dedicated state-level night-time economy-specific governance may be leaving policy support more fragmented when compared with better performing jurisdictions, while recent safety concerns in Melbourne may also have added further pressure on after-dark confidence and activity.[12]

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Melbourne – Inner	**1**	**1**	**0**	**-2.5**	+3.0	0	-13.9	-6.3
Melbourne – South East	**15**	**11**	**-4**	**3.3**	8.0	0.0	-3.5	-0.1
Melbourne – West	**18**	**8**	**-10**	**0.0**	3.5	0.0	-2.4	-6.3
Melbourne – North West	**19**	**10**	**-9**	**0.1**	9.6	-16.7	-8.6	-6.3
Melbourne – Inner South	**26**	**18**	**-8**	**1.1**	6.0	0.0	9.3	-18.8
Melbourne – Inner East	**27**	**23**	**-4**	**4.6**	8.0	0.0	2.8	-0.1
Melbourne – North East	**32**	**25**	**-7**	**2.2**	9.4	0.0	0.2	-12.6
Melbourne – Outer East	**40**	**26**	**-14**	**1.2**	5.6	0.0	-1.6	-6.3
Geelong	**54**	**42**	**-12**	**4.3**	9.6	0.0	4.1	-6.3
Mornington Peninsula	**66**	**50**	**-16**	**3.4**	0.0	0.0	17.0	-0.1
Hume	**74**	**68**	**-6**	**3.7**	6.3	0.0	9.4	-6.3
Latrobe – Gippsland	**76**	**63**	**-13**	**0.4**	-1.4	0.0	11.6	-6.3
Warrnambool & South West	**77**	**66**	**-11**	**0.0**	3.2	0.0	4.8	-12.6
Shepparton	**78**	**64**	**-14**	**0.4**	5.6	0.0	-5.7	-6.3
Ballarat	**79**	**54**	**-25**	**-1.5**	0.5	0.0	-2.4	-6.3
Bendigo	**83**	**81**	**-2**	**5.0**	11.9	0.0	1.7	-6.3

Melbourne West and Melbourne North West fell strongly, dropping 10 and 9 places, respectively.

Both regions recorded weaker safety scores, pointing to continued crime-related concerns. Even so, recent cultural investment through Creative West could help strengthen the region's longer-term night-time offer.[13]


Melbourne City, Victoria

12 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-08/teenager-charged-arson-attacks-call-the-commission-notes-vic/107012438
13 https://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Community/Creative-West-project/Creative-West-concept-designs



Brisbane City, Queensland



Queensland

Queensland's results show a split story: Brisbane Inner City strengthened its position in the national top 10, while several other regions softened on vibrancy and safety.

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Brisbane Inner City	8	16	+8	9.0	12.4	16.7	2.1	3.5
Gold Coast	21	20	-1	2.4	1.3	0.0	-1.0	9.8
Brisbane – South	24	31	+7	11.5	16.2	-16.7	2.9	22.3
Cairns	36	44	+8	9.2	6.3	0.0	7.7	22.3
Moreton Bay – South	37	70	+33	13.8	24.3	0.0	-1.3	9.8
Logan – Beaudesert	42	30	-12	1.5	3.4	0.0	-10.9	9.8
Brisbane – North	49	37	-12	6.7	12.9	0.0	3.8	-2.7
Brisbane – East	53	53	0	9.6	6.7	0.0	15.4	16.0
Darling Downs – Maranoa	56	76	+20	11.5	11.8	0.0	11.9	16.0
Mackay – Isaac – Whitsunday	57	58	+1	7.5	3.7	0.0	18.3	9.8
Ipswich	58	56	-2	6.2	6.3	0.0	5.4	9.8
Sunshine Coast	59	69	+10	10.3	7.3	0.0	11.0	22.3
Townsville	60	60	0	7.7	11.9	0.0	-1.1	9.8
Queensland – Outback	63	36	-27	0.3	5.6	0.0	-22.1	9.8
Brisbane – West	69	51	-18	5.8	14.5	-16.7	3.9	-2.7
Central Queensland	72	71	-1	5.9	1.5	0.0	9.8	16.0
Moreton Bay – North	75	77	2	4.2	3.2	0.0	3.2	9.8
Wide Bay	88	87	-1	7.5	4.7	0.0	15.7	9.8

Brisbane Inner City is an impressive winner this year, jumping from #16 to #8 nationally. Both night-intensity of spend and business environment improved, the latter's 16.7-point gain indicating a meaningful strengthening of local night-time economy governance.



South Australia

South Australia produced a brighter state-level story in comparison to Queensland and Victoria, headlined by **Adelaide Central and Hills**' breakthrough into the national top 20.

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Adelaide – Central and Hills	11	22	+11	10.4	14.1	0.0	14.6	2.1
Adelaide – West	29	40	+11	12.1	20.0	0.0	8.2	2.1
Adelaide – North	51	43	-8	5.9	8.5	0.0	5.9	2.1
Adelaide – South	52	61	+9	10.3	12.0	0.0	19.2	2.1
South Australia – Outback	61	45	-16	4.1	6.5	0.0	2.3	2.1
South Australia – South East	73	82	+9	9.4	13.9	0.0	16.6	-4.1
Barossa – Yorke – Mid North	80	72	-8	3.4	6.1	0.0	5.7	-4.1

Adelaide Central and Hills is South Australia's headline mover – up 11 places from #22 to #11.

Its night-intensity score strengthened and vibrancy surged. **Adelaide West** also posted an impressive improvement of 11 places, sharing the same pattern of night-spend growth driving the gain.



Adelaide, South Australia


Glenelg Jetty, Adelaide, South Australia



Western Australia

Western Australia (WA) presents a more nuanced picture. While the headline performance is strong, with 9 of 11 regions moving up the rankings, the underlying trends are more mixed. On the positive side, safety scores improved across most WA regions. However, three structural shifts point to softer night-time activity: the proportion of cards active at night declined across the region; night-time spending fell as a share of total spending; and growth in night-time spending at restaurants and transport points weakened across nearly all WA regions. The overarching takeaway is that daytime spending is growing faster than night-time spending across WA.

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Perth – South East	22	27	+5	11.0	10.2	0.0	11.8	17.8
Perth – Inner	25	28	+3	10.4	15.4	0.0	2.0	11.6
WA – Outback (North)	43	73	+30	14.3	11.8	0.0	24.1	17.8
WA – Outback (South)	44	83	+39	18.0	14.8	0.0	35.0	17.8
Perth – South West	45	49	+4	10.8	9.0	0.0	7.5	24.1
Perth – North West	47	57	+10	12.5	15.9	0.0	11.2	11.6
Perth – North East	55	67	+12	12.3	11.6	0.0	8.3	24.1
Mandurah	81	88	+7	16.5	14.0	0.0	23.6	24.1
WA – Wheat Belt	84	84	0	7.4	5.8	0.0	-1.7	24.1
Bunbury	85	86	+1	8.6	6.1	0.0	9.9	17.8
West and North West	86	80	-6	1.2	-6.8	0.0	10.9	12.1



Sunrise over Perth Stadium, Western Australia

As mentioned earlier regarding **Perth**, the region is gaining ground in the national rankings, but its night-time economy remains in transition as policy reforms gather pace and changing lifestyles potentially shift activity from late night to earlier hours.



Launceston, Tasmania



Tasmania

Tasmania's night-time economy story is still emerging. Launceston showed promising signs of improvement in safety and after-dark activation, while results across the state reflect both the early stage of Tasmania's night economy development and the opportunity ahead, particularly as Hobart looks to formalise its night economy governance framework.[14]

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Hobart	46	41	-5	8.7	3.4	0.0	16.4	18.3
Launceston & North East	67	78	+11	11.6	11.1	0.0	5.9	24.6
South East	82	59	-23	-4.3	-15.5	0.0	-1.0	18.3
West and North West	86	80	-6	1.2	-6.8	0.0	10.9	12.1

Launceston and North East is Tasmania's standout performer this year with early signs of night spend growing faster than daytime.

Hobart showed momentum in safety and vibrancy but the night-time spend story is still catching up in the city. The Hobart City Council hosted Night-Time Economy Commissioners from NSW and Queensland in May this year to discuss strategies for revitalizing the city's nightlife.[15]

14 https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/hobart-breakfast/hobart-night-life/106726206
15 https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/hobart-breakfast/hobart-night-life/106726206



Northern Territory

The Northern Territory presents a tale of two economies. Darwin's after-dark energy is softening despite being one of Australia's most vibrant night cities, while the remote Outback is quietly showing early signs of night-time activation.

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
Darwin	48	32	-16	3.5	-0.8	0.0	-5.4	25.0
NT – Outback	64	79	+15	11.8	12.8	0.0	1.8	25.0

Darwin registered a significant decline in the Index, dropping by 16 places.

Night-time spending grew more slowly relative to daytime across restaurants, transport and digital channels. The **Northern Territory Outback** tells an encouraging story this year where night-time spend is now growing faster than daytime in card-present categories, and the region climbed 15 places in the rankings.[16]



Milky Way, Northern Territory Outback



Canberra, ACT



Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) moved up two places, from #12 to #10, driven by stronger night-time merchant activity and faster growth in night-time than daytime card-present spending.

Region	Rank 2026	Rank 2025	Move	Score change	Night intensity change	Business environment change	Vibrancy change	Safety and accessibility change
ACT	10	12	+2	4.5	10.2	0.0	-3.0	0.0

16 Visa card coverage in remote communities is limited and these numbers should be read as directional signals rather than definitive measures.

Five Shifts Shaping Australia's Night-time Future

This year's Index has been complemented by a new consumer research commissioned by Visa.[17]

The headline finding:

Australians are going out more, and concerns around cost and safety and easing slightly, even as clear gaps in what's on offer remain.

Broadening the after-dark menu



Australians overwhelmingly credit small, independent businesses with giving their night-time economy its character: 84% say unique small businesses that give an area its own identity are important to a vibrant night-time economy, and 78% say small businesses staying open into the evening matters.

Looking ahead, 62% of Australians want to see more affordable activities such as festivals, night markets and community events in their local area over the next two to five years; 46% want more food and drink options, and 42% want more live entertainment. This year's sharp vibrancy gains across regional NSW, Queensland and South Australia – more merchants, more diverse offerings – are consistent with this continued diversification of what a night out looks like.

Changing consumer habits



The average Australian now goes out after 6pm for entertainment, fitness, shopping or cultural experiences 80.2 times a year – up 15% on the prior year's 69.6 – with 71% going out at least monthly and 51% at least weekly. Hybrid work and flexible schedules continue to reshape when people go out, and businesses that adjust trading hours accordingly remain best placed to capture that demand. Notably, going-out frequency and location both vary sharply by generation: older Australians are far more likely to stay local (73% of Baby Boomers, 70% of Gen X) than younger Australians (62% of Millennials, just 45% of Gen Z) – a reminder that a single night-time economy strategy will not fit every generation equally.

17 A Lonergan Research survey of 1,013 Australians aged 18+, conducted in accordance with the ISO 20252 standard, fielded 7-11 August 2026 and weighted to the latest ABS population estimates. It replaces last year's McCrindle Research wave.

Keeping it affordable

Cost remains the single biggest barrier to going out at night, cited by 60% of Australians – but that is down from 66% a year ago, and more affordable options remain the single biggest lever available to grow participation further, with 51% of Australians saying they would go out more often if options were more affordable. Looking to the next two to five years, 62% specifically want more affordable activities such as festivals, night markets and community events. As operating costs continue to rise, delivering value-for-money experiences – alongside operational efficiency – remains key to sustaining both consumer engagement and business profitability after dark.

Activating after-dark destinations everywhere

Almost two-thirds of Australians (63%) typically stay within their local area when they go out at night, rather than travelling to a city centre (20%) or elsewhere (16%) – reinforcing the importance of suburban and regional precinct activation highlighted throughout this year's state-by-state results. Yet demand is not fully met: only 59% of Australians are satisfied with the variety of night-time experiences available in their local area, and 28% specifically want more local options to visit. Family-friendly options remain a clear growth lever too, with 39% wanting more family-friendly evening activities over the next two to five years.

Safety remains a top priority

Safety concerns are easing but still matter: 34% of Australians cite safety as a barrier to going out at night, down from 45% a year ago, and 31% say better safety and security would make them more likely to go out. Looking ahead, 40% want to see more security or police presence in their area over the next two to five years – the second most-requested improvement after affordability.



Appendix: Methodology

The Visa Australia Night-time Economy Index was developed by Visa, led by Visa Business and Economic Insights, working in partnership with Dr Anna Edwards, a leading expert in night-time economies. The Index combines global best practice in measuring consumer activity with locally relevant indicators of governance, vibrancy and safety to provide a national benchmark of after-dark economic activity, tracked consistently from year to year.

Geography:
The Index uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard at Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4). These geographies are large enough to ensure robust data coverage nationally, while still aligning with how metropolitan, suburban and regional economies function in practice, enabling structured coverage of the entire country, from urban centres to remote areas.

Indicators and sources:
The Index draws on a wide range of sources. Measures derived from Visa card data provide consistent, comparable measures of consumer spend and transaction patterns at night (6pm to 6am). This is complemented by official labour statistics (ABS Labour Force Survey), transport timetables published by relevant state and territory authorities, safety perceptions from the Report on Government Services, and road safety data from the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics. Some variables are scored via expert judgement provided by Dr Anna Edwards. Together, these sources allow the Index to capture both the economic and social dimensions of life after dark.

Consumer research:
The behavioural findings in this report are drawn from a survey of 1,013 Australians aged 18+, commissioned by Visa and conducted by Lonergan Research in accordance with the ISO 20252 standard. The survey was conducted online among members of a permission-based panel, fielded between 7 and 11 August 2026, with data weighted to the latest population estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This replaces the McCrindle Research survey used in the 2025 edition.

Media release:
This report should be read alongside Visa's media release, 'Australians Are Going Out More at Night as Sydney Closes in on Melbourne's Night-time Crown', published 23 September 2026, which first announced the 2026 Index results and the accompanying consumer research findings summarised above.[18]

A Note on Methodology Changes in 2026

One methodology refinement was introduced in this year's Index.

The new indicator – the proportion of the workforce active at night, across all industries – was added to the Vibrancy category, drawing on ABS Labour Force Survey data.[19] This is the first time the Index has measured the after-dark workforce at this level of granularity, and for many regions it contributed a substantial share of this year's vibrancy score movement.

The category weights underpinning the Index are unchanged from 2025: Night-Intensity of Spend contributes 50% of the total score, Vibrancy and Safety & Accessibility each contribute 20%, and Business Environment contributes 10%. Readers comparing 2025 and 2026 ranks directly should bear this change in mind, particularly for regions with large workforces relative to their population, including remote and outback areas.

Disclaimer
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18 https://www.visa.com.au/about-visa/newsroom/press-releases/australians-are-going-out-more-at-night-as-sydney-closes-in-on-melbournes-night-time-crown.html
19 Personal Safety, Australia Methodology; Australian Bureau of Statistics; 2023; https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/personal-safety-australia-methodology/2021-22

Appendix:
Full National Ranking, 2026

The table below lists all 88 SA4 regions covered by the 2026 Index, ranked nationally, alongside each region's 2025 rank, rank movement, and 2026 Index score.

Rank	Name	State	Index score	Rank movement	Night intensity of spend	Business environment	Vibrancy	Safety and accessibility
1	**Melbourne - Inner**	VIC	78.03	0	83.20	70.83	71.14	75.57
2	Sydney - City and Inner South	NSW	76.65	0	79.94	83.33	52.33	89.40
3	Parramatta	NSW	71.74	+1	77.80	83.33	45.62	76.90
4	Sydney - Inner South West	NSW	68.56	+1	68.37	66.67	55.38	83.15
5	Sydney - South West	NSW	67.20	+8	70.39	66.67	43.53	83.15
6	North Sydney and Hornsby	NSW	65.15	+1	55.97	100.00	46.44	89.40
7	Blacktown	NSW	63.69	+2	65.99	66.67	36.99	83.15
8	Brisbane Inner City	QLD	62.88	+8	74.47	33.33	47.15	64.42
9	Sydney - Inner West	NSW	62.84	-3	69.24	66.67	37.15	70.65
10	Canberra	ACT	60.90	+2	59.32	33.33	52.05	87.50
11	Adelaide - Central and Hills	SA	60.77	+11	68.58	16.67	47.19	76.87
12	Outer West and Blue Mountains	NSW	60.60	+2	57.70	83.33	33.91	83.15
13	Sydney - Eastern Suburbs	NSW	60.32	-10	67.30	66.67	29.36	70.65
14	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	NSW	60.26	+5	48.31	83.33	55.71	83.15
15	Melbourne - South East	VIC	59.75	-4	63.00	4.17	63.61	75.57
16	Northern Beaches	NSW	59.45	+5	51.74	66.67	38.90	95.65
17	Sydney - Outer South West	NSW	59.13	+7	55.07	66.67	35.23	89.40
18	Melbourne - West	VIC	59.02	-10	61.73	20.83	61.04	69.32
19	Melbourne - North West	VIC	57.01	-9	69.33	4.17	40.32	69.32
20	Ryde	NSW	56.64	-5	53.97	66.67	31.79	83.15
21	Gold Coast	QLD	55.35	-1	51.89	50.00	57.62	64.42
22	Perth - South East	WA	54.55	+5	56.92	8.33	57.93	68.35
23	Sutherland	NSW	54.12	+10	54.41	33.33	40.99	76.90
24	Brisbane - South	QLD	53.98	+7	56.26	16.67	43.99	76.92
25	Perth - Inner	WA	53.87	+3	62.73	25.00	31.68	68.35
26	Melbourne - Inner South	VIC	53.84	-8	55.78	37.50	47.90	63.07
27	Melbourne - Inner East	VIC	53.83	-4	55.86	4.17	45.59	81.82
28	Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury	NSW	51.46	-11	50.95	33.33	23.85	89.40
29	Adelaide - West	SA	51.06	+11	58.83	0.00	37.61	70.62
30	Central Coast	NSW	50.58	+4	40.31	66.67	48.13	70.65
31	Illawarra	NSW	50.50	+4	48.37	33.33	50.51	64.40
32	Melbourne - North East	VIC	49.56	-7	55.07	4.17	44.99	63.07
33	Murray	NSW	49.33	+19	54.19	33.33	30.11	64.40
34	Central West	NSW	48.68	+5	48.58	33.33	40.88	64.40
35	Far West and Orana	NSW	48.68	+3	56.65	33.33	26.94	58.15

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The table below lists all 88 SA4 regions covered by the 2026 Index, ranked nationally, alongside each region's 2025 rank, rank movement, and 2026 Index score.

Rank	Name	State	Index score	Rank movement	Night intensity of spend	Business environment	Vibrancy	Safety and accessibility
36	Cairns	QLD	48.25	+8	54.61	16.67	38.22	58.17
37	Moreton Bay - South	QLD	48.00	+33	59.57	16.67	30.82	51.92
38	Capital Region	NSW	47.88	+10	49.12	33.33	35.52	64.40
39	Western Australia - Outback (North)	WA	47.67	+34	58.27	8.33	38.90	49.60
40	Western Australia - Outback (South)	WA	47.60	+43	52.82	8.33	52.17	49.60
41	Hunter Valley exc Newcastle	NSW	47.53	-12	45.52	33.33	36.52	70.65
42	Melbourne - Outer East	VIC	47.41	-16	48.73	4.17	43.85	69.32
43	Riverina	NSW	47.27	+4	46.80	33.33	32.04	70.65
44	Logan - Beaudesert	QLD	47.16	-14	45.17	50.00	39.70	58.17
45	Perth - South West	WA	46.84	+4	42.21	8.33	49.90	74.60
46	Hobart	TAS	46.65	-5	46.12	16.67	36.45	73.13
47	Perth - North West	WA	46.60	+10	45.03	8.33	54.18	62.10
48	Darwin	NT	45.80	-16	58.54	16.67	36.82	37.50
49	Brisbane - North	QLD	45.47	-12	52.34	16.67	36.26	51.92
50	New England and North West	NSW	45.26	+15	40.27	33.33	44.55	64.40
51	Adelaide - North	SA	44.60	-8	42.59	0.00	45.88	70.62
52	Adelaide - South	SA	44.52	+9	42.60	0.00	45.47	70.62
53	Brisbane - East	QLD	44.51	0	37.14	16.67	50.70	70.67
54	Geelong	VIC	44.28	-12	47.64	4.17	37.17	63.07
55	Perth - North East	WA	44.27	+12	41.94	8.33	37.76	74.60
56	Darling Downs - Maranoa	QLD	43.81	+20	46.56	16.67	42.40	51.92
57	Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday	QLD	43.27	+1	47.65	16.67	43.22	45.67
58	Ipswich	QLD	43.19	-2	43.44	33.33	38.78	51.92
59	Sunshine Coast	QLD	42.87	+10	36.22	16.67	44.80	70.67
60	Townsville	QLD	42.72	0	43.92	16.67	31.06	64.42
61	South Australia - Outback	SA	42.69	-16	46.44	0.00	39.22	58.12
62	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	NSW	42.44	0	36.45	33.33	39.97	64.40
63	Queensland - Outback	QLD	42.22	-27	58.93	16.67	9.76	45.67
64	Northern Territory - Outback	NT	41.71	+15	66.40	0.00	17.58	25.00
65	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	NSW	41.36	+10	45.55	33.33	24.34	51.90
66	Mornington Peninsula	VIC	41.32	-16	43.28	4.17	39.50	56.82
67	Launceston and North East	TAS	41.20	+11	44.15	16.67	20.39	66.88
68	Richmond - Tweed	NSW	41.18	-22	40.17	33.33	24.41	64.40
69	Brisbane - West	QLD	40.75	-18	43.74	16.67	34.15	51.92
70	North West	VIC	40.49	-15	50.27	4.17	24.13	50.57

Appendix:
Full National Ranking, 2026

The table below lists all 88 SA4 regions covered by the 2026 Index, ranked nationally, alongside each region's 2025 rank, rank movement, and 2026 Index score.

Rank	Name	State	Index score	Rank movement	Night intensity of spend	Business environment	Vibrancy	Safety and accessibility
71	Mid North Coast	NSW	40.30	+3	33.06	33.33	37.78	64.40
72	Central Queensland	QLD	38.72	-1	37.19	16.67	40.36	51.92
73	South Australia - South East	SA	38.47	+9	42.08	0.00	35.29	51.87
74	Hume	VIC	37.28	-6	38.80	4.17	36.74	50.57
75	Moreton Bay - North	QLD	36.67	+2	37.26	16.67	36.23	45.67
76	Latrobe - Gippsland	VIC	35.90	-13	36.43	4.17	35.78	50.57
77	Warrnambool and South West	VIC	35.61	-11	42.63	4.17	25.06	44.32
78	Shepparton	VIC	35.51	-14	42.88	4.17	17.68	50.57
79	Ballarat	VIC	35.44	-25	38.43	4.17	22.24	56.82
80	Barossa - Yorke - Mid North	SA	35.27	-8	35.48	0.00	35.77	51.87
81	Mandurah	WA	35.21	+7	27.75	8.33	34.19	68.35
82	South East	TAS	35.11	-23	33.66	0.00	30.75	60.63
83	Bendigo	VIC	34.90	-2	39.42	4.17	23.28	50.57
84	Wheat Belt	WA	32.15	0	29.64	8.33	26.62	55.85
85	Bunbury	WA	31.46	+1	30.97	8.33	26.10	49.60
86	West and North West	TAS	31.11	-6	28.09	0.00	30.93	54.38
87	Toowoomba	QLD	29.77	-2	31.21	16.67	23.07	39.42
88	Wide Bay	QLD	29.20	-1	23.06	16.67	34.37	45.67

