

Pastoral tourism case study

Bullo River Station, NT



Location

In the Northern Territory, near the Western Australian border, approximately 2.5 hours drive from Timber Creek.

Land tenure and primary business type

Perpetual pastoral lease, with non-pastoral use permit for tourism.

Manage land in partnership with Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC).

Competitive advantage

We are an authentic working cattle station. Our visitors are part of the story, not on a separate tourism experience. The remoteness allows for exclusive access to a number of sites.



Tourism offerings

First and foremost we are a cattle station. We also have an all-inclusive high value luxury lodge where visitors can observe (not participate in) pastoral activities e.g. musters, working cattle yards. We also provide exclusive access to unique natural and cultural features through a range of activities, including:

- rock art viewing
- four wheel driving
- fishing
- electric boat tours
- trail rides, with instructors
- waterfall and waterhole visits.



Growth journey

The property was previously operated by the Henderson family and was made famous by pastoralist Sara Henderson, who started a basic tourism experience at the homestead. In 2017 the property was sold to the Landsmith Collection who have grown and diversified the tourism offering into a high value experience with greater luxury and less 'wild west'. This has seen substantial investment from the owners in refurbished rooms, facilities and staff accommodation. We have started to move into new market areas, for example we have recently purchased telescopes due to visitor interest in astro-tourism.

Future growth plans

- tap into emerging markets including AWC tours with a conservation focus
- grow our corporate incentives market looking to get 'off the grid' for team development
- capitalise on the growing interest and demand from European markets
- expand Aboriginal engagement through guided rock art tours and cultural experiences
- create new hiking tracks and nature based experiences
- for cattle operations, we will be trialling Wagyu crossed with Short-horn Brahman. We want to cease live export and focus on catering for domestic market only (feeding Australians). Also interested in establishing a small abattoir onsite to provide a 'tasting' experience.

Viability and benefits

Tourism pays for AWC activities, to ensure we can protect the unique country into the future. The cattle station activities stand on their own and support the business overall.

Advice to others looking to start a tourism business

- understand what you want to achieve and know exactly what you want to offer, don't try to be all things to all people
- choose your markets and control your product so it doesn't impact the integrity of the pastoral business or environmental values
- resource appropriately. Can't run cattle business and tourism – different skills, experiences and requirements. Need dedicated tourism staff to run these components
- start small, try what is manageable and build from there as you gain success and confidence
- have a tourism mentor or advisor who can support you
- participate and network with the tourism industry, there you will find a wealth of knowledge
- use partnerships to your advantage:
 - travel agents undertake valuable sales and marketing activity, their commission is offset by this
 - HeliSpirit conduct our air tours and transport including to Waringarri Art Tours in Kununurra
 - paid contractual partnership with AWC who support with sustainable farming and land management works (weeds, fire, regenerating land and protection of environmental values).

Everything has to come back to 'we are a working station' – we don't specialise in experiences; we share the story of the authentic station experience.

