

## Pastoral tourism case study

# Cheela Plains Station Stay, WA



### Location

90 kms north west of Paraburdoo in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

### Land tenure and primary business type

We are a family owned and operated working cattle station operating a pastoral/grazing lease. Application for a tourism permit has been submitted to the WA Pastoral Board.

### Competitive advantage

An outback cattle station experience in a strategic location between Ningaloo Reef and Karijini National Park. The Station Stay provides an opportunity for travelers to experience the Pilbara off the beaten track.



### Tourism offerings

- bushwalks
- a geological 4WD trail experience made up of a 70km track (requires permit and key access)
- long table dining experiences for special events
- niche tours in partnership with operators, including: bird watching, art and photography
- station hub made up of campground with amenities, restaurant, cafe and bed and breakfast accommodation
- private bush camps
- private commercial group campsites.



## Growth journey

We took over Cheela Plains pastoral lease in 2001. The property already had accommodation available for contractors (mining, road workers etc.) which was generally not in use during the peak tourist season. There was also inconsistent cattle productivity due to weather, so alternative income streams were being looked at.

We opened to visitors in 2014 offering a basic campsite with amenities and rooms. Visitor numbers have grown from 25 visitors in 2001 to 10,000 in 2021.

### During this time we have:

- expanded our station food offerings starting with just coffee and cakes, to where we now employ a full-time chef and offer an all day menu
- provided promotional materials and signage in local towns
- improved and increased available amenities and room types, now catering for tour operators and travellers seeking accommodation
- engaged camp hosts where possible to manage the campground, welcome visitors and keep amenities clean.

### Future growth plans

Tourism permits on pastoral leases in WA are only for five years so we are looking to obtain a commercial lease.

### We are also looking to:

- add basic eco-cabins
- improve existing gorge drive route, including developing new maps and interpretive experiences
- implement an online booking system for self drive tours that reduces staff resourcing
- engage with local Aboriginal people to include visitor interpretation and tours.

## Viability and benefits

During the off season for tourism, accommodation and services are used to cater for contractors. This enables staff retention year round.

We have sustained continued growth in the business (around 30% in the past two years) generating an additional \$1.2M in revenue.

## Advice to others looking to start a tourism business

- be active in advertising and marketing and use an online booking system
- it's good to offer a mix of accommodation types to cater for all
- consider leveraging what you already have e.g. contractor rooms, station cooks and meals
- you need to be dedicated; once you start you can't give up, especially if people are already coming and you have partnerships established
- have a united brand across the offerings, including the way you welcome guests, company shirts and the look and feel of the facilities
- if existing staff are expected to manage, start simple e.g. basic campground
- don't do it all at once. You won't see returns for a while so add product as volume grows and you determine your needs
- it takes time to build commercial relationships; see how other operators can value add to your business and reduce your resourcing e.g. working with tour and events operators.

**Tourism on stations is about sharing the positive pastoral story.**

