



Pudakul Aboriginal Cultural Tour

Case Study



Purpose

This case study provides information on the daily operations of a successful Aboriginal owned and operated tourism business in the Northern Territory. It has been developed to provide information and guidance to other existing aboriginal businesses and up-coming entrepreneurs. This includes the business challenges of commencing a business and the pitfalls and rewards of establishing a sustainable aboriginal tourism product. It includes suggestions for Aboriginal Tourism Business development in the Northern Territory.



Description of Pudukul Aboriginal Cultural Tour

Pudukul is the name of the Macaranga Tree (freshwater hibiscus). Pudukul Aboriginal Cultural Tours is owned and operated by Graham Kenyon, traditional owner and custodian of Limilngan-Wulna land and his wife Lynette Kenyon. It is a 100% Aboriginal owned and operated family business that commenced in 2008.

The tour is an authentic Aboriginal culture and nature based engagement experience providing an experience rich with information, knowledge and culture. The tour guide talks about bush medicine and bush tucker including local traditional stories. They demonstrate traditional basket weaving, spear making and throwing including a number of other activities relating to their traditional culture such as learning to play the didgeridoo.

Pudukul Aboriginal Cultural Tours operate in the Aboriginal owned and operated Limilngan-Wulna Land which is adjacent to the world heritage listed Kakadu National Park. Adelaide River Wetlands is a huge area bursting with wildlife and plants and is located 45 minute drive from Darwin the Northern Territory's capital city. The wetlands include great local attractions Fogg Dam, Windows on the Wetlands Visitors Centre, Jumping Crocodile Cruises, Djukbinj National Park, Leaning Tree Lagoon and Mary River National Park.

Pudukul Aboriginal Cultural Tours are a Tourism Accredited Business and proudly one of sixteen Tourism Australia "Indigenous Tourism Champions". This elite group of product suppliers represents the best of the best of Indigenous experiences in Australia.

Early Days

A key motivator towards starting Pudukul was the desire to create local Indigenous employment opportunities and to share Limilngan-Wulna culture with visitors to the Top End. In 2011 an opportunity became available for the Limilngan-Wulna Land Holding Corporation and the Wairuk Community signing an agreement with the Northern Territory Government granting management of Windows on the Wetlands Visitor Centre. This opportunity to operate Windows on the Wetlands allowed Graham and Lynette to test and develop their business skills and progress towards setting up their own tourism operation.

Graham was employed by NT Parks and Wildlife for many years which contributed to his interest in the tourism sector. This early experience provided the community with a testing ground for business skills. Pudukul started out with 10 Indigenous employees working in key aspects of the business such as tour guiding, land management, equipment maintenance, production of arts and crafts, kiosk sales and general administration.

The early days of the business had challenges despite support programmes made available through Government agencies. The complexities of operating a business whilst learning business

processes and managing a huge workload meant that it was difficult to complete all applications for the various support programs and stay on top of all business requirements.

In 2011 Pudukul Aboriginal Cultural Tours moved to independency offering a range of tours. This was a challenging period with limited time to prepare due to the management commitments of the growing business. During this time of transitioning into an independent entity Pudukul sought assistance from a number of sources including:

- Tourism NT for a broad range of support relating to the tourism industry
- Tourism NT's Indigenous Mentoring Program to assist with developing a business plan and providing business knowledge and funding using consultants from Auslink Management Consultants
- Employment and Workplace Relations now known as The Office of the Commissioner of Public Employment to assist with professional development of staff members including training in first aid and additional Chemsart training for the land management team.
- Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) who also contributed to mentoring the business

Challenges faced during the commencement periods included the lack of knowledge of support available and comprehensive ongoing assistance to access the support. To address this issue, Graham suggests that a Northern Territory Aboriginal Tourism Businesses support organisation be developed which would provide vital resources to successfully start up a business and comprehensive ongoing support. He believes that establishing an Aboriginal tourism representative organisation would better assist Aboriginal tourism operators especially in the developing period of the business, and provide continual support. This would in turn give confidence to Aboriginal entrepreneurs to pursue tourism business goals and aspirations. As Pudukul's business expanded into

tours their prime source of business came from Adventure Tours Australia (ATA) under an exclusive agreement which guaranteed ATA would deliver up to three tours a day and gave Pudukul priority over other operators. ATA was the main source of clients on the tours during this period. Pudukul's main product was a 1.5 hour Cultural Experience.

Consolidation of the Business

Pudukul relies on their business experience and dedicated staff to keep it flourishing. Their business plan clearly defines their vision, mission, sustainable competitive advantage, key objectives & strategies and an action plan to ensure the nominated strategies are implemented. The business plan has seen Pudukul go from strength to strength with positive results as the business is still growing in all aspects.

Pudukul established packaged products at the Adelaide River Flood Plains; they now offer three tour packages including jumping crocodile cruise, corroboree billabong cruise along with a cultural experience.

Pudukul was initially functioning as a business to business operation, relying on ATA and other group market sources. In the third year of operations, they decided to tap into the self-drive FIT (Free Independent Travellers) market. This was a market Graham was confident would grow his product in terms of visitor numbers and financial gain, but did not expect it to cultivate as quickly as it did forcing him to turn away visitors to other companies when overbooked at times.

When entering the self-drive and FIT visitor markets, Graham noticed that, based upon his experience operating for three years mostly in the group market that Pudukul did not need to promote or market too extensively. Visitors automatically started to book providing even more confidence in their product.

In the first three years Pudukul saw 39,000 visitors and has now provided tours for between 120,000-130,000 visitors since beginning operations. Pudukul tours average 20-40 visitors per tour in the months May to October. Visitors are 50% international 50% Australian (Domestic).

In mid-2016 Tourism Infrastructure Development funding from the NT Government of \$110,000 was granted to improve the physical appearance and infrastructural value of Pudukul's operation site. A new deck was constructed in October 2016, along with a generator, power outlets, lights and fans.

In 2017 Pudukul has up to 22 employees, many of whom are part time and come from the Wairuk Community. Graham and Lynette are dedicated to their staff they are pleased to enable community members to have a constant opportunity for employment. The groundwork undertaken to ensure the stability of the employment arrangements will enable Pudukul to grow and be sustainable in the future.



Pudukul is effectively a "stepping stone" to other employment opportunities. Graham is seen as a strong role model in his community and enables positive community engagement with the business. Graham's teaching of employees ensures that cultural knowledge is strengthened and will help to ensure culture is preserved for future generations. Pudukul's employment is ensuring a broad range of skills development for the community.

Future Business Development

Graham and Lynette would like to see a NT organisation for Aboriginal tourism operators. The organisation would assist in developing sustainable and prosperous Aboriginal enterprises. This organisation would support knowledge sharing and business ideas which directly benefit the economic development for communities and encourage partnership or a collaborative approach in promoting Aboriginal tourism in the NT.

Tarizma and Selina Kenyon (daughters of Lynette and Graham) are guides for Pudukul are passionate and motivated in growing the business. They also have a strong understanding of the importance of creating the best experiences for every single visitors to Pudukul. Tarzima has improved her communication skills, and expanded her tourism knowledge by travelling to other places in the Territory and Australia.

In 2017 Pudukul's tours are mostly run by young people from Wairuk Community, including young men as Danny Benjer and Shannon Charlie who are passionate and very knowledgeable about their culture and the tourism business. Pudukul is a prime example of an Aboriginal tourism business involving young people to grow with the enterprise to help ensure the longevity of the business.

The important role these young people play in Pudukul's operation is the concept Graham hoped for when starting the business. Wairuk Community and Pudukul sees a bright future working together to ensure a flourishing business and culture.

With a strong tour product after operating for almost nine years, Graham is now focusing on adding other products to expand the business into other markets. This is possible due to his employees taking charge with tour guiding giving him the freedom to pursue his long held aspirations.

Graham advice for up and coming business entrepreneurs is to be committed and serious about it before going ahead. Also the importance of understanding people from all backgrounds. Strongly said in his own words - "No shame job – We all bleed the same blood".

Graham and Lynette believe in staying loyal and maintaining a strong relationship with their business partners and other professional influences. This is an important aspect that has contributed to the success of their business in providing a high quality product matched with sound business philosophies.

Graham provided an example of how he involves young people in his community - "Graham's nephew asked if he could buy him a new phone. In response Graham asked the young boy to work for him for a couple days to provide the young boy with the opportunity to earn it. Upon completion of his experience Graham bought the young man his phone as promised for working for Pudukul. The result was exactly what Graham was looking for; the boy went on for weeks talking about how he got the chance to work with Pudukul and everything he learnt during his experience."



Further Information and Key Contacts:

Tourism NT
tourismnt.com.au
08 8951 8584
Tourism.Development@nt.gov.au

Department of Trade, Business and Innovation

1800 193 111
businessnt@nt.gov.au

Tourism Top End

1300 138 886
info@tourismtopend.com.au

Tourism Central Australia

1800 645 199
info@discoverca.com.au

Information supplied by Graham and Lynette Kenyon

- <http://www.pudukul.com.au/> and <https://www.facebook.com/Pudukul-Aboriginal-Cultural-Tours-296398817124896/>
- Pudukul ATAP Accreditation Application