

TOURISM TRAILBLAZERS

OYSTER FARM TOURS



OYSTER FARM TOURS

About Oyster Farm Tours

- Oyster Farmer, Ben Catterall, began Oyster Farm Tours with his partner Kim in 2015. They ran a restaurant in Coffin Bay and noticed diners were interested in learning more about oyster farming.
- Tours are based out of Oyster HQ, a café and restaurant on the water's edge at South Australia's iconic Coffin Bay.
- Only tour in the world where you put waders on, walk through water to a floating pontoon to eat oysters and drink wine while sitting in the sea.
- Pre-pandemic, 40 per cent of all business was from the international market, with about a quarter being visitors from China – requiring a full-time Chinese interpreter.

Challenges faced

- COVID-19 lockdowns and uncertainty meant Oyster Farm Tours didn't know what would happen or if they would ever re-open.
- Lost staff during 2020 lockdown. Most staff were international backpackers who left the region and returned home. Local staff found other jobs during the pandemic so Ben and his partner, Kim were left to run the business.
- Didn't know what to expect when opening back up given international borders were shut for so long or if domestic visitors would want to travel again.

Overcoming adversity

- Heavy social media marketing during lockdown to promote domestic travel helped bring in bookings when opening back up so Oyster Farm Tours was top of mind for intrastate visitors looking for somewhere to go when lockdown was lifted.
- Tapping into the domestic market during lockdown while people were at home, thinking of places to go, paid dividends.
- Despite being closed for three months in 2020, the business grew with an additional 2,000 tour bookings made compared to 2019.
- Upgraded booking system to be more streamlined and give more options as they noticed in the months after lockdown, people were wanting to treat themselves with extra oysters and upgrade to top-end champagne.

Lessons learnt

- Keep an eye on trends and tap into them, Oyster Farm Tours gave its customers more value-add options after they noticed people wanted to spend more after lockdown. They also added on extra tours per day to meet demand, particularly as people embraced travelling again and wanted to engage in more tours and experiences post-lockdown.
- Promote your region, keeping the Eyre Peninsula and Coffin Bay top of mind during lockdown through their social media channels boosted Oyster Farm Tours' bookings. It also had a flow on effect to other businesses in the region including eateries, accommodation and other experiences.

“

It's an exciting industry to be in – South Australia has such diverse regions. There are so many good operators so it's great to be part of that family.

Ben Catterall, Oyster Farm Tours

Advice

- Be flexible, look at what does and doesn't work, try new things and continue to adapt until you find the key offerings that work.
- Recognise trends, people wanted to treat themselves and spend more money after lockdown, so adding offers to meet the needs of a new market increased income.
- Be excited by what's happening in South Australia and take advantage of initiatives such as the Great State Voucher program. South Australian tourism is diverse and people want to travel in their own backyard.