

TOURISM TRAILBLAZERS

EXCEPTIONAL KANGAROO ISLAND



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About Exceptional Kangaroo Island

Craig Wickham and wife Janet started Exceptional Kangaroo Island 31 years ago with the aim of sharing Kangaroo Island's nature and community. Prior to COVID, experiences focused on small-group and private bus touring to balance wild-life and sustainable encounters with high standard hospitality. Post-COVID, their offering is continually evolving. Exceptional Kangaroo Island now has an e-bike and walking tour and experiences have diversified in collaboration with local businesses including Kangaroo Island Olives.

Challenges faced

- Bushfires and COVID-19 challenged the business, requiring a change of operation and positioning.
- No international and limited interstate visitors shifted the marketing strategy and product offering to cater to the domestic market with a need to be flexible due to constant and late cancellations.
- COVID density restrictions meant operating a tour bus was no longer viable – so the business created an e-bike and walking tour as an outdoor and socially distanced solution.

Overcoming adversity

- Asked 'what can we do?' to fulfil visitors' needs – analysed strengths and weaknesses of the business to optimise resources and value add in new ways. i.e. using e-bikes means visitors see a smaller part of the island, but in more depth so Craig ensures visitors still see rock formations and wildlife – quite often in unique locations, and off-the-beaten track.
- Identified new gaps in the market – restaurants were shutting down so there was a need for a food service experience. Craig started offering private catering at outdoor locations such as Emu Bay and a Shearing Shed on Cygnet River. More self-touring visitors needed laundry services, so he acquired a commercial laundry.
- Collaboration with the community – helping local operators build their business and share their stories to offer unique experiences that are not available on a self-guided tour i.e. visiting Kangaroo Island Olives to tell the story of owner, Dom Esposito and sampling the olive product at the farm.

Lessons learnt

- Opportunity in change – upskilled digital marketing to reach new markets online, enhanced current offers to add value for new markets and strengthened community connections.
- Communicate clearly, frequently and positively – kept staff, distribution partners, commercial partners, industry connections, local community, and visitors up to date with what was on offer.
- Seek out the markets – offered wildlife experiences to those who had already planned an overseas nature-based trip through travel agents, social media and publicity.
- Sell the region, not just your business – celebrated what the region can offer to drive visitation to – and spend on – Kangaroo Island, benefiting all local businesses.

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Tourism is the glue that holds us together... together we are able to provide a diverse range of experiences and reasons for people to come back.

Craig Wickham,
Exceptional Kangaroo Island

Advice

- Adapt to the changes – adapting from a tour bus to e-bikes to uphold COVID restrictions meant Exceptional Kangaroo Island now access more natural assets and destinations, enhancing the experience.
- Find the needs – remain relevant by finding what you can do, where you can meet the market and add value to those exploring the region.
- Take time to reflect and learn – document the good and bad feedback from staff and customers to create an action plan to constantly improve and grow.
- Stay positive – for your business, for your community and for yourself.

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