

TOURISM TRAILBLAZERS

# MURRAY RIVER TRAILS



[TOURISM.SA.GOV.AU](https://www.tourism.sa.gov.au)

## MURRAY RIVER TRAILS

### About Murray River Trails

- Tony Sharley created Murray River Walk six years ago to showcase the unique and diverse wildlife of the Riverland. Prior to COVID, Murray River Walk offered a single multi-day tour, popular with mature, experience seekers from interstate. Now, the business has entered a new generation as Murray River Trails, offering several multi-day tours and new luxury houseboat accommodation to fully immerse visitors in the beauty of the Riverland.

### Challenges faced

- Losing interstate visitors, which made up the majority of Tony's market due to border restrictions prevented customers from completing booked tours. This meant no cashflow into the business.
- The timing of lockdowns meant the loss of the entire walking season from April to September 2020 – which was set to host 40 fully-booked guided tours. Tony's team rescheduled the tours to 2021-22, without knowing if the future dates could go ahead.
- Market uncertainty meant customers were hesitant to book ahead or reschedule.

### Overcoming adversity

- Looked through feedback forms over past years to get ideas from customers to determine what the market wanted.
- Based on this customer feedback, diversified offering to include two new, multi-day tours featuring kayaking, bird watching on spectacular outback lakes, an off-river tour of local wineries and distilleries and a chef aboard dinner all with overnight stays on a houseboat. This extended Tony's operating season from just five months to a full year. This also helped Tony cater to the intrastate market as more locals were looking for nature-based experiences in their own backyard.
- Designed and built a new, luxury houseboat with the support of a Tourism Industry Development Fund grant. The houseboat was designed with the COVID normal environment in mind, featuring six bedrooms all with ensuites. Removing shared bathrooms has helped boost appeal in their existing markets, allowed Tony to tap into the luxury market and increase appeal in the international market.

### Lessons learnt

- See adversity as opportunity. With all tours on hold, Tony was able to make the changes that he had been thinking about but never had time to do previously.
- Listen to your market and respond accordingly. Tony was able to extend his operating season from five to twelve months by developing two new tours based on customer feedback.
- Certainty is key. Ensuring customers and staff feel confident in what the businesses is doing to support them and striving to adapt builds trust, optimism, and loyalty.



*As an eco-tourism operator, I love what we have to offer in SA. We've got the most amazing natural landscapes which are incredibly diverse, giving us the opportunity to work with operators across the state to offer unique experiences to visitors.*

Tony Sharley, Murray River Trails

### The Murray River Trails Approach

- Work to create an exciting future. Constantly review your business and run any changes by staff and stakeholders to ensure everyone is on board and motivated to make it happen.
- Be optimistic about what the business can do and the opportunities out there. Ask your stakeholders questions and listen to the market to adapt your business, marketing, and operational plans to allow for continual growth.
- Work with local businesses to offer multi-day packages to keep visitors in the local area and the state to help boost the local economy and share the love throughout the region.
- Package your tours to link with other regions so that South Australian visitors enjoy a longer stay here. Tony's experiences, Ranges to River incorporates walking in the Flinders Ranges, and Safari to River's End incorporates the Coorong and Southern Ocean.

Published May 2022. Information is correct at time of publication.

DISCLAIMER: This document is not business advice. It is intended only to inform and illustrate. You should not act on the basis of any matter contained in this document without first seeking appropriate professional advice that takes into account your own particular circumstances. For further information visit: [tourism.sa.gov.au/disclaimer](https://tourism.sa.gov.au/disclaimer).

