

14

Conclusion

This volume has explored Indigenous tourism in Australia and New Zealand. Both countries have seen tourism grow in importance for their First Peoples. In Australia, Indigenous tourism is an important niche segment of the broader tourism product. However, for the Indigenous people and communities involved in tourism, it is so much more. The same can be seen in New Zealand where tourism continues to be an important socio-economic development tool for Māori people. Some of the chapters have highlighted this importance for a wide spectrum of Indigenous people; from those engaged in family-based businesses to broader joint partnerships and collaboration across multiple stakeholders. The chapters in the book have also shown the innovation and entrepreneurial approaches being led by those engaged in Indigenous tourism in Australia and New Zealand.

The editors are particularly delighted that two of the leaders in Indigenous tourism in Australia and New Zealand respectively accepted our invitation to offer their thoughts on the way forward for Indigenous tourism in the two countries. The insights of Tahn Donovan from Australia, and Johnny Edmond from New Zealand, provide a forward looking platform for us to move ahead with a tourism sector that is appropriate to the needs and wants of the Indigenous people in these two countries.

Indigenous tourism in Western Australia

Tahn Donovan, Chair, Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC)

Aboriginal tourism in Western Australia is still considered an 'extra' experience and not part of the primary motivation to visit the State. This is in spite of the fact that research shows 78% of visitors to Western Australia would like an Aboriginal experience and only 22% are able to access one. This might be because Aboriginal tourism is often the 'family member' that industry invites after the core (required) 'family' have attended to key policy development issues and/or have initiated significant access strategies to tourism in Western Australia.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal tourism in Western Australia is very much a vehicle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain culture and country, while providing non-Indigenous people with insight into Aboriginal culture and society via a range of tourism opportunities, where they can learn about and explore the complexities of the culture. Currently the focus for visitors is around art and dance, however international visitors are seeking more opportunities to explore the deeper intricacies of traditional cultures that are being maintained within a western context on traditional lands.

Over 30 years within the tourism industry, I have seen some changes to the Australian tourism landscape, which continues to undervalue the service industry that is key to successful tourism development. In particular, investment in the skilling of quality service staff who know the products and are skilled in communication to exemplify the visitors' experience continue to be undervalued by the Australian community.

Aboriginal people in Western Australia are well informed about the type of products that could be developed to enhance the visitor experiences. Some products are very much focused on Aboriginal culture while other experiences are based around luxury accommodation and transportation. In Western Australia we have a number of issues impacting on the opportunity for Aboriginal people to develop world class experiences. For instance, land tenure is a major issue impacting on Aboriginal tourism development in Western Australia. Although some areas have received Native Title,

the opportunity for investment of major infrastructure is impacted by the very nature of the land tenure and the opportunity to gain capital for development.

WAITOC is a membership driven council of Aboriginal tourism operators that works with State Government departments including Tourism Western Australia, as well as Regional Tourism Organisations and the Tourism Council of Western Australia to further develop authentic Aboriginal tourism experiences in the State. WAITOC is the only Australian organisation to receive the prestigious DRV, German Environmental Tourism Award. The German Association of Tour Operators and Travel Agencies nominated the WAITOC submission from a total of 31 projects from 22 countries. WAITOC was recognised for its objective of recognising and integrating one of the world's oldest living cultures into the tourism industry with conservation and sustainability issues being the core emphasis.

WAITOC is a marketing and advocacy council representing Aboriginal tourism operators across Western Australia. WAITOC is a membership driven council and our focus is marketing the State's Aboriginal tourism products to the intrastate, interstate and international markets. WAITOC continues to work at a State level and at times, engages on a national level in discussions and initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism.

WAITOC's engagement with Indigenous tourism globally has led to WAITOC's membership of the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance and the formation of the Larrakia Declaration. The Larrakia Declaration sets out the principles of Indigenous tourism and recognises that Indigenous people are the ones that own and deliver Indigenous tourism products.

Key to WAITOC's success has been strategic investments in governance processes to ensure that each tourism region in Western Australia has Aboriginal representation on the WAITOC board. There are five tourism regions in Western Australia and the WAITOC board has one Aboriginal tourism operator from each region, three state positions held by Aboriginal tourism operators and the opportunity to secure two experts that may or may not be Aboriginal persons. WAITOC board members are not paid sitting fees however expenses for attending meeting is reimbursed to members but not loss of time within their own business. Board members take significant time away from their businesses to ensure that we collectively continue the growth of authentic Aboriginal tourism in Western Australia.