

SPOTLIGHT ON HILARY WILKINS

BROOME BASE MANAGER & PILOT,
KAS HELICOPTERS



Aviation has always been in Hilary's genes. Her dad worked in aerospace in the UK and got his fixed-wing aircraft pilot licence the day after she was born. Growing up, Hilary often tagged along when Dad flew on weekends. And while she took a very different course with her career in PR and marketing, she finally found her own pathway into aviation on a camping holiday in the Kimberley.

“It's so special to be up in that vast blue sky sharing those incredible perspectives and panoramas with people!”

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

I'm a helicopter pilot helping people experience their bucket list in the Kimberley. But like every pilot I work with at KAS, I bring many other skills to my role than flying. On the ground, working as the Base Manager, I'm doing everything from admin, tender-writing, communications, sales and marketing to OHS and legislation compliance to managing community, corporate and sales agent relations. All the things that go into running a helicopter business.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

Originally, I studied Modern Languages and European Studies (French and German) at the University of Bath. I just picked the subjects I was good at, but never really knew what I wanted to do. I figured I'd work that out along the way.

I was on the student union at uni, organising and promoting events, and that led me into marketing, working for a friend at an agency, until I was head-hunted and moved over to the client side and then to Perth.

So, how did you get into tourism and helicoptering?

While I was working for the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, I was flying around regional WA quite a bit. I always loved it, but never felt the urge to learn to fly a plane. It was only when I landed the role as LandCorp's Kimberley Regional Manager in Broome and took my first scenic flight in a helicopter that I felt that urge to jump into the pilot's seat. I knew from the moment we took off over the Mitchell Falls, that was what I wanted to do. So, I got my pilot licence and brought my experience in the corporate and government sectors to the helicopter business.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm outgoing. I love the networking, communicating and customer service side of my job as much as the thrill of flying and showcasing what we have here in the Kimberley. I've also got a strong have-a-go, active and adventurous spirit. I signed up for the Clipper 2008 Race – a round-the-world yacht race that took me from Freo to China – and I've cycled in the Gibb Challenge eight times. I love to keep challenging myself.

What do you love most about the industry?

Everyone is so supportive of one another in the tourism industry. We've got the SKAL tourism network group, where you can make so many great connections in the industry. We've also got organisations helping to promote our region, like Australia's North West and the Tourism Council of WA. They all play a significant role in supporting and assisting small businesses like ours.

What's the best part of your job?

The view from my office! The colours are so vibrant and the sheer scale of the Kimberley landscapes is absolutely stunning. You really don't get a sense of that from other perspectives on the ground or very high up in the sky. In a helicopter, you're up in the air, but close enough to see all the amazing patterns in the sandbars, and the crocodiles, dolphins and whales. It's so special to be up in that vast blue sky sharing those incredible perspectives and panoramas with people.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

The aviation industry is quite small, so if you get your pilot licence in WA you'll get to know many other pilots across the state. And good connections are the key when you're newly qualified and building up your flying hours – there aren't many operators who take on newly qualified pilots. So be prepared to move to where the seasonal work is to build your flying hours. I went to fly in the Bungle Bungles (Purnululu National Park) for a season.

And what's next for you?

Broome is home for me, for now. And work-life balance is really important to me – like being able to be at the beach within 15 minutes of finishing work. In the off-season and between flying and managing tours, I also have a side hustle doing freelance PR and marketing. I take my laptop everywhere, so quite often I set up my office in the middle of the Kimberley wilderness, while our guests are off having a swim and a picnic.

Connect with Hilary on LinkedIn

Link: www.linkedin.com/in/hilary-wilkins-43803b16/

WANT TO EXPLORE MORE?
HEAD TO WWW.THECAREERS.GUIDE



FutureNow.