

SPOTLIGHT ON RICHARD YOUNG

GENERAL MANAGER AT HARVEY DISTRICT
TOURIST BUREAU

EX-CEO AND FOUNDER OF WA'S LARGEST BACKPACKER BUS TOUR COMPANY



Richard describes himself as a tourism and hospitality journeyman and, so far, his 16+ years in the industry has been quite a ride. Starting out as a one-man start-up tour guide/operator and growing his business into WA's largest backpacker bus tour company, Richard now brings his energy, passion and masses of destination marketing expertise to the challenge of putting Harvey on the map and must-see list.

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Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

I take care of the destination marketing and strategic tourism development for the Harvey region. We have nine tourist towns and 28,000 local residents to keep happy, and I work with the Shire to help deliver the best outcomes for local tourism.

I also oversee the management of two visitor centres, including the Harvey Tourist Precinct and its gardens, displays, tearooms, shop, and an amazing customer service team who take good care of visitors and day-to-day operations there.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

Initially, I fell into IT after school and qualified as an IT engineer. But every weekend I was out with my mates, doing what I love most – four-wheel-driving, camping, bushwalking and exploring our amazing state.

So, how did you get into tourism and hospitality?

My mum was hosting international students, and I started taking them out at weekends in my 4WD. They started telling their friends. And they started paying for my fuel and food. And I thought, hang on a sec, I can turn this into a bit of a business. So, I put together a little brochure and put it out to schools for international students. Next thing you know, I'm running tours every weekend.

Then a local travel agent said to me, look, if you want to start doing this for real, start a day trip to the Pinnacles. That was back in 2006. And the rest is history! By 2018, I had bases in Perth, Broome and Darwin and a team of 30 carrying over 5,000 passengers a year around WA, with multiple international contracts, an annual turnover in the millions, plus a nice little collection of state and national tourism awards. It was quite a ride!

How would you describe yourself?

I've got heaps of energy. A lot of passion for sharing all that I love about WA. A keen eye for finding what the market wants. Plus a strong drive for delivering outcomes and getting results - whether that's a happy passenger on a bus tour, or a great tourism budget at the end of the year.

What do you love most about the industry?

The people in WA tourism. They are amazing. I came into the industry completely green and learned from some of the best, most knowledgeable and talented people in the industry. They took me under their wing and gave me some great advice when I was starting out.

What's the best part of your job?

Being able to deliver tourism experiences that make a real difference. Not just to visitors, but to the local businesses, growers, artists and artisans of my community too. Reinvigorating country towns and regions. Bringing the change and seeing people enjoying what we deliver is a fantastic feeling.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Number one: Understand there are lots more opportunities for career development and progression in this industry than the public face of tourism you see. I'm living proof of that!

Two: Tourism is a 24/7 business. It's the industry that never sleeps. Especially on weekends, school holidays, Easter and Christmas. So you've got to have a lot of energy, drive and passion. When you have that, it will always come through and your customers will see it and truly appreciate it.

And three: Get yourself out there, attend every industry event you can and make connections. Tug on the coat tails of every senior person you meet and ask for five seconds of their time. There are amazingly talented and knowledgeable people in WA tourism, who know the industry and know better than you. Find those people and surround yourself with them and learn from them. Come and find me, and I'll introduce you to some good people!

And what's next for you?

I'm channelling some of my energy and creativity into developing a couple of new local tourism ventures that will hopefully come to fruition in the not-too-distant future. Watch this Harvey space!

Connect with Richard on LinkedIn

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