

CULTURE *in the parks*





Australia is home to the world's oldest living culture, which is as fascinating as it is ancient. In 2016, *Culture in the parks* was launched to help facilitate the running of cultural events and experiences throughout the State by traditional owners. Since then, the program has gone from strength to strength, offering business and employment opportunities to Aboriginal people, providing quality cultural experiences to visitors, value-adding to existing businesses and celebrating and preserving a rich and ancient culture.

by Rhonda Murphy and Tracy Shea

For more than 60,000 years, Aboriginal people have lived on our vast and unique country. They have passed their lore and extensive knowledge about the lands and waters, plants and animals from generation to generation through song, dance, music, stories and art. Today, many people are familiar with the stirring sounds of the didgeridoo, have heard Dreaming stories and are aware of the rock art that has weathered thousands of years in remote locations. However, the depth of Aboriginal culture is endless, and the thirst of locals and visitors to Australia to learn more about it is insatiable.

CATERING TO THE MASSES

Cultural tourism provides a range of benefits to Aboriginal people, including employment opportunities; the opportunity to preserve culture and heritage; to educate and inform the wider community of Australia's ancient culture; and to provide visitors with unique experiences. However, a survey conducted in 2015–16 by Tourism WA indicated that of the visitors to WA who wanted to have a cultural experience, only 24 per cent had the opportunity to do so. This identified an unfulfilled demand and highlighted the potential for developing opportunities to facilitate and support Aboriginal people to provide cultural experiences through tours and events.

In a step to mitigate this, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (then the Department of Parks and Wildlife) launched *Culture in the parks* in 2016, which encourages Aboriginal people to conduct cultural events and tours on land managed by the department, either by obtaining a commercial operations licence, or by linking up with another tour operator or lessee to provide add-on services. Department staff have presented at many community and industry forums to provide information on the licensing process and to encourage Aboriginal people to take advantage of these opportunities.

DBCA works in partnership with the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism



Previous page

Main Hamersley Ranges.

Photo – Stephen van Leeuwen

Inset left Visitor experiences are enriched by culture.

Photo – DBCA

Inset right The stirring sounds of the didgeridoo are popular among visitors.

Above Josh Whiteland runs cultural tours at Wharncliffe Mill.

Photos – Koomal Dreaming

Right Derek Nannup takes visitors through traditional stories and dances on cultural tours at Yanchep National Park.

Photo – DBCA

Operators Council (WAITOC) and other tourism stakeholders to support the development of Aboriginal tourism on WA's conservation estate.

A recent example of this support is sponsorship provided by WAITOC and Tourism WA to enable Aboriginal operators, who are participants of the Aboriginal Tourism Development Program, to attend a course delivered by Global Gypsies, a training and tour company, at Yanchep National Park.

The success of *Culture in the parks* in its first year was evident by the increase in the number of licensed Aboriginal tour operators from nine in 2015–16 to 17 in 2016–17.

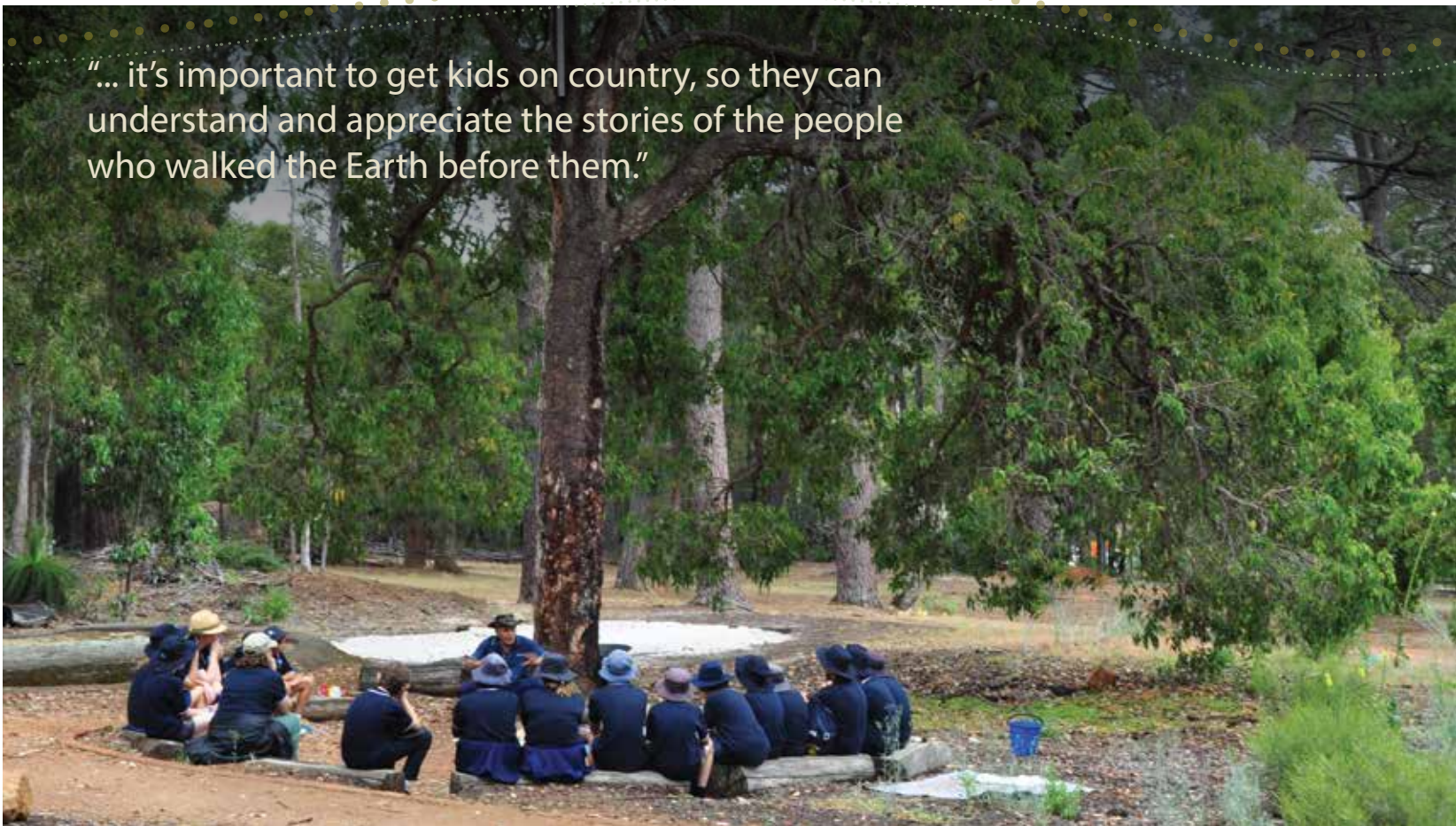


REALISING POTENTIAL

For Troy Bennell of Ngalang Wongi Aboriginal Cultural Tours in Bunbury, the *Culture in the parks* initiative provided him with the additional confidence and information he needed to expand his tour from the Bunbury city precinct into the Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park. Troy plans to take visitors to the park as part of his tours with the Dolphin Discovery Centre. He is also considering other parks where he can establish tours to enable him to share his Nyoongar culture.

Troy revels in the opportunity to share his family history of the area, especially the river and estuarine landscape. He

“... it’s important to get kids on country, so they can understand and appreciate the stories of the people who walked the Earth before them.”



Discover more about Aboriginal cultural tours in WA

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife’s ‘LANDSCOPE’ playlist on YouTube.



Above School groups enjoy a cultural lesson at Beelu National Park.
Photo – DBCA

Far left Troy Bennell runs cultural tours in the south-west.
Photo – Troy Bennell

also believes it’s important to get kids on country, so they can understand and appreciate the stories of the people who walked the Earth before them. And now, through the partnership he’s developed, he takes hundreds of school groups on tours year-round.

One significant advantage of the program, especially for tour operators starting out, is the opportunity to team up with existing businesses to make use of established infrastructure, such as online booking platforms, rather than having to start from scratch.

At Wharnccliffe Mill in Wooditjup National Park, near Margaret River, Josh Whiteland from Koomal Dreaming

has partnered with DBCA lessees Claire and Adrian Prendergast to provide cultural experiences for their visitors.

According to Claire, Josh’s programs offer visitors a unique and exceptional experience. The partnership has also provided an opportunity to create corporate programs and experiences for schools and other groups.

“Nature and culture are closely aligned, and by working together with Aboriginal tour operators in national parks, we have greater opportunities to reach socially aware, eco-conscious visitors who have a keen interest in Aboriginal culture,” she said.

For Josh, working with Wharnccliffe Mill is a win-win.

“What we have set up allows me to offer a range of cultural programs tailored to suit group or individual interests at Wharnccliffe Mill,” he said.

“The feedback from these programs has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly about the opportunity visitors have to participate in an immersive cultural experience in comfortable accommodation so close to Perth.

“Wharnccliffe Mill handles most of the administration, which makes it easier for me to focus on the delivery of the cultural and touring components of the program.”

Aboriginal cultural tours and experiences

North West

1. Luridgii Tours
2. Home Valley Station
3. Girloorloo Tours Mimbi Caves
4. Darnku Heritage Cruise
5. Black Van Food
6. Imintji Campground
7. Bungoolee Tours
8. Plum Oak Pty Ltd
9. Windjana Tours
10. Oongalkada Wilderness Camp
11. Bundy's Cultural Tours
12. Goombaragin Eco Retreat
13. Kooljaman at Cape Leveque
14. Whalesong Cafe & Campground
15. Mercedes Cove Coastal Retreat
16. Narlijia Cultural Tours
17. Uptuyu Aboriginal Adventures
18. Broome Coastal Tours
19. Ngurrangga Tours
20. Karijini Dreaming
21. Karlayura Tours

Coral Coast

22. Wula Gura Nyinda

Experience Perth

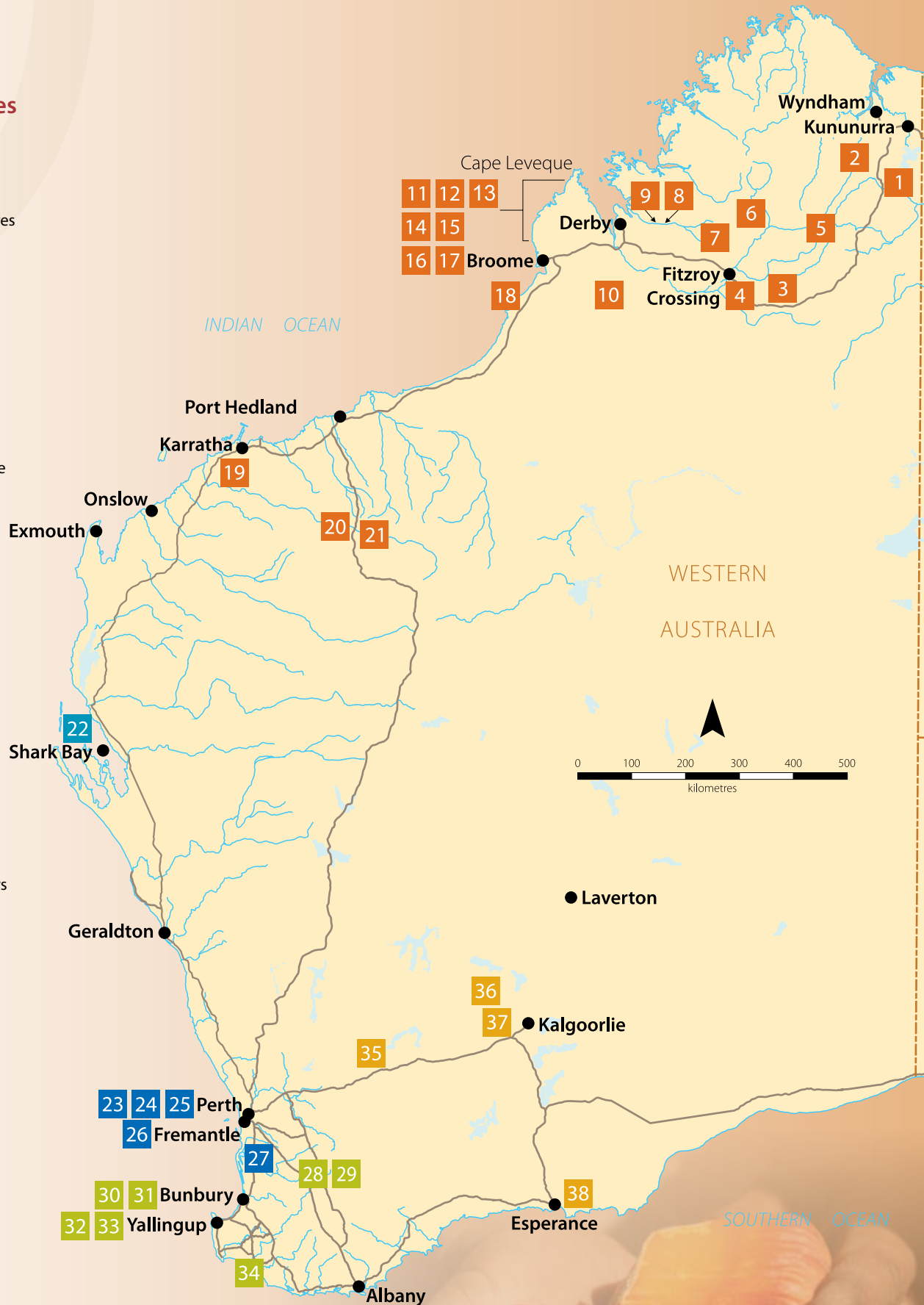
23. Indigenous Experiences Australia
24. Djurandi Dreaming
25. Go Cultural Aboriginal Tours and Experiences
26. Walyalup Cultural Centre
27. TK Stack Consultants

South West

28. Wuddi Cultural Tours
29. Nyoongah Ranger Tours
30. Ngalang Wongi Aboriginal Tours
31. Roelands Village
32. Cape Cultural Tours
33. Koomal Dreaming
34. Poornarti Aboriginal Tours

Golden Outback

35. Njaki Njaki Aboriginal Cultural Tours
36. Morapoi Station
37. Bush Ghoodhu Wongutha Tours
38. Lucky Bean Café



A big picture

Encouraging and facilitating Aboriginal people to take part in the tourism industry is just one way that the department is working to build better relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider community while fostering greater social, cultural, economic and conservation benefits.

In 2012, the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* was amended to incorporate Aboriginal culture into the department's management objectives including the facilitation of joint management and to provide for Aboriginal customary activities carried out on department-managed lands and waters.

That same year the department also developed a *Reconciliation Action Plan*, which outlines the measures it is taking to:

- acknowledge and respect the unique role and expertise Aboriginal people have as traditional custodians;
- recognise the valuable contribution Aboriginal people make to the department;
- foster strong working partnerships and community relationships with Aboriginal people;
- improve the department's cultural awareness; and
- provide employment and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The involvement of Aboriginal people in the work of the department has been further bolstered by the recent announcement of a \$20 million, five-year *Aboriginal Ranger Program*. This will help provide jobs, training and community development opportunities for Aboriginal people throughout WA. It builds on existing Aboriginal ranger programs throughout the State with the aim of ensuring long-term cultural, conservation and tourism opportunities.

The first round of recipients was recently announced. For more information, visit DBCA's website at dbca.wa.gov.au.

Top right Goldfields Land and Sea Council completing work at Rowles Lagoon.

Above right Launch of the Aboriginal Ranger Program. Members of Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation.

Photos – DBCA



 To hear more about the Aboriginal ranger program

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Of course, the benefits of the program extend well beyond the Aboriginal tour operators themselves. Cultural tours and events add value to the locations in which they are conducted. Connecting with Aboriginal tour operators also helps all 'E' class licensed tour operators (which are restricted in number for environment and safety reasons) to fulfill the requirements of their licences, which require them to

engage with Aboriginal people through equity, training and/or employment. The department is also providing cultural awareness training to tour operators, so they can provide their customers with cultural enrichment where possible.

For the visitors who experience these cultural activities and events, the benefits last a lifetime. It is impossible to

quantify the impact of learning about the ancient practices of Aboriginal people, while immersed in a natural setting, or experiencing stunning natural features with a guide who recounts the area's history, which has been passed down from generation to generation. But, with more than 100 language groups throughout the State, visitors have access to a vast array of experiences across WA to enjoy.

Opposite page

Left There is a range of cultural experiences throughout the State.

Courtesy of WAITOC

Below left Fruit of the screw pine.

Photo – Tourism WA

Right NAIDOC celebrations at Yanchep National Park.

Photo – DBCA



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