

Pastoral tourism case study

Banka Banka West Station and Tourist Park, NT



Location

Located on the Stuart Highway 100km north of Tennant Creek in the Barkly region of the Northern Territory.

Land tenure and primary business type

In 2010 the pastoral lease was purchased by the Australian Government's Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) on behalf of Aboriginal people. In 2020 the Federal Court of Australia recognised that the Kunapa, Kangawarla, Kanturrpa, Marntikara, Ngarrka and Pirrtangu groups hold native title to Banka Banka West Station.

Multi-use pastoral lease with pastoral and tourism enterprises, managed in collaboration with Native Title holders. Non-pastoral use permit for the tourist park.

Competitive advantage

Located on the Explorers Way drive route, connecting Darwin to Adelaide. We're outside of a main township and have access to natural assets and a spring water source. The character of our location, with features including communal campfire, bar, entertainment, waterhole, lookout, WWII campsite, farm animal feeding and petting provides a unique offering for visitors.



Tourism offerings

- tourist park with powered and unpowered campsites
- cabins and cottage accommodation
- licensed bar in the original mudbrick homestead which also offers a small range of merchandise
- station walks
- animal feeding
- night time communal campfires.



Growth journey

Since 2018, ILSC has been working with Native Title holders to improve business viability through infrastructure upgrades, system improvements and marketing, with the ultimate goal of divesting the pastoral lease and businesses to Native Title holders in the future. Recent works include: refurbishment of air-conditioned cabins and three bedroom cottage, providing off season options and market diversity

- online booking system implemented enabling forecasting and ensuring sufficient on site resources
- development of tourism marketing materials
- investments across the business including fencing, water security and powered campsites
- contractual agreements for agistment on the property.



Future growth plans

- in collaboration with Traditional Owners, we're working towards development of cultural tourism products on the station to provide employment and micro-business opportunities for Traditional Owners
- implementing signage and visitor interpretation at visitor sites
- creating an environment where people stay for more than one night and make it a base for enjoying the region
- engaging with tourism operators. We're interested in discussing partnerships and possible tourist park management agreements in collaboration with Traditional Owners
- looking to expand pastoral tourism offerings e.g. have lots of queries and requests to observe and tour the station and musters. Need to understand and develop an appropriate business model.

Viability and benefits

Neither business is viable alone. There are synergies in running two operations from the property and sharing ongoing costs (staffing, fuel etc.). Pastoral property's profitability is marginal presently; ILSC is working to establish a viable foundation prior to divesting to traditional ownership.

Advice to others looking to start a tourism business

- understand your markets by talking to your visitors and identify what they like and don't like; undertake market research
- reputation is key, one bad review can negate 10 good ones!
- work with all staff to build their capacity and skills in tourism
- more tourists that come, more staff you need, more resources (power / water) required. Trial and adapt to get the balance right
- Regional Tourist Association membership assists with distribution of marketing materials
- capital investment needs to produce returns; you need to do an analysis to see where investment is best. Do you put it into pastoral or tourism?
- it is important to build capacity and capabilities, to ensure a sustainable foundation that fosters growth and benefits into the future.

There are benefits to acknowledging and collaborating with Traditional Owners to understand significance of country and appropriate sharing with visitors.

