



Case Study: Spirits of the Red Sand

From small beginnings in 2017 with just two guests, Spirits of the Red Sand has quickly grown into an award winning, internationally recognised tourism experience. Located half-way between Brisbane and the Gold Coast at Beenleigh Historical Village, the company has carved itself a place in the international tourism market owing to its unique and immersive cultural experience.

Key international markets include; the USA, UK, New Zealand, Germany and other German speaking markets. Director of Marketing and Business Management, Ms Kerry Collins said the guest participation was a key driver in some international markets.

"Our new Welcome to Country Aboriginal Experience – where guests participate in all aspects of traditional Aboriginal life – is a huge hit with our eastern market groups and non-English speaking markets," Ms Collins said.

While Spirits of the Red Sand is working to share the history and vibrancy of Indigenous culture around the globe, stepping into international tourism markets has come with plenty of challenges for the company.

"When you are first starting out, it feels like you have to take 10 steps to get one step forward but my advice is to be methodical and just tick it off as you go and use the resources available to you through Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC), Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) and your local and state tourism partners, even your local council," Ms Collins said.

Getting your product right, knowing why your product is unique and being prepared for trade are all important considerations Spirits of the Red Sand worked through in order to enter international markets, Ms Collins said.

Having a clear plan mapped out with contingencies along the way can also help with stepping into what can be a daunting task for any business.

Once trade relationships have been established, there are many highlights to working in the international tourism market, including being able to work with like-minded operators and knowing you have their support.

"Having the trust of all the trade partners globally who believe in what you are doing, support you and entrust you to deliver an amazing experience for their guests – that's an honour.

"We have incredible relationships with our trade partners and such proactive support from Destination Gold Coast, Brisbane Marketing, Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) and Tourism Australia.





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SPIRITS OF THE RED SAND

"We are a Best of Queensland benchmarked experience, the only SE QLD product endorsed by Tourism Australia in their Discover Aboriginal Experience signature program, we hold a Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor and we were recently honoured with Bronze for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander tourism at the Queensland Tourism Awards. This is all thanks to those important trade partners.

"We also have a huge domestic market – which was a big surprise considering the content of our experience – but it has been most rewarding to see so many families from Sydney, Melbourne and locally want to understand and be 'edutained' about our Australian history and Aboriginal culture," Ms Collins said.

With the chance to experience every part of Aboriginal culture through Spirits of the Red Sand, further growth in international markets will continue to provide an authentic, eye-opening account of the world's oldest living culture.

What is Spirits of the Red Sand?

During the day, guests are able to experience the world's oldest living culture by moving through interactive cultural stations, each one offering a chance to become immersed in a different aspect of Indigenous culture.

Experiences include; a welcome to country and smoking ceremony, didgeridoo playing, learning to dance, art and boomerang painting, and bush tucker tasting, to name a few. At night, guests are treated to an Aboriginal live theatre show and dinner filled with traditional songs, dances and chants.

What inspired Spirits of the Red Sand?

"This has been a dream 20 years in the making to move beyond song and dance to an authentic experience that infuses song, dance, chants and ancient Aboriginal traditions, but places it back in its natural setting. This is what inspires us, unfolding Australian history and Aboriginal culture in a first of its kind, live 'moving' theatre experience.

"Our other motivation is the empowerment of Aboriginal people. Through Spirits of the Red Sand, all of our Aboriginal team now hold Cert III in Hospitality and Tourism, RSA, First Aid and Customer Service. The confidence and skill that these non-actors have shown is an incredible testament to the entire team and we are motivated and inspired when our guests say that one of their favourite parts of the experience was the interaction they have with our friendly and warm team," Ms Collins said.

What makes Spirits of the Red Sand Different?

Spirits of the Red Sand pushes the boundaries of cultural education and entertainment to produce a truth-telling experience - as harsh as it may seem. It has been so successful because those working for the business know what they want to achieve with each performance - an expression of culture to help others learn from those who have gone before them.

Why should others be involved in tourism?

"If you have a desire to express your culture and keep it alive for generations to come, then tourism is the way to do it. Just be true to yourselves and your culture - keep it real!" Ms Collins said.

