

Eco Warrior

Barry Davies, Gondwana Guides

One of the most appealing things about working in the ecotourism sector is finding people who are authentic in their vision, their passion and their beliefs, says Barry Davies, proprietor of niche ecotourism business Gondwana Guides.

Gondwana Guides specialises in tour guiding across Australia and is an environmental consultancy that works with developers, miners, government and ecotourism operators. It also provides training for tour guides.

"I subcontract to other tour companies and operate my own bird watching tours," Barry says. "I'm also a director of Binna Burra Mountain Lodge and I also work with an ecotourism group on Norfolk Island designing new tours and training the operators and guides."

Barry believes passionately in the future of ecotourism, but he also acknowledges there are challenges ahead.

"Unfortunately there is a perception that quality equates with luxury and that is not the case," he says. "As an industry we need to offer a consistently high standard of experiences for our customers no matter what the star rating of a property is. In guiding, we need to raise the bar a long way to get good quality experiences."

Barry lists distance as another challenge for ecotourism, with Queensland's natural areas being so vast it makes traveling to these areas financially difficult, time consuming and resource intensive.

"Yet when people arrive at their destination, no matter how enduring the journey, they soon realise how wonderful our natural environment is," he says.

Barry grew up in New Zealand, studied science at the CCAE during the '70s, became a ranger for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and then spent some time abroad backpacking.

On his return to Australia, he made a phone call which changed the course of his life.

"I phoned a friend working at Binna Burra and when I arrived to see him, he offered me a job as a guide," he says. "I discovered I was good at it, I liked it and I learned quickly. Obviously my biology studies, time spent at QPWS and even my backpacking led me to where I am today, but chance did play a part."

Barry's dedication to his job was acknowledged in 2005 when Ecotourism Australia awarded him a National EcoGuide Award for Excellence.

The Queensland 'eco-warrior' says the future of the industry is bright as people become more aware of what products are on offer and the environment becomes more of a focus.

"There are the dramatic events of climate change and dwindling water supplies, but hopefully people will see beyond these issues and instead of despairing about the environment, embrace it and choose to spend their holidays in environmentally sensitive areas, in environmentally sensitive ways," he says.

"In the future I would also like to see quality, affordable nature-based tourism experiences more readily available."

Barry says there are a few things he wants to achieve in the ecotourism sector and that includes satisfying guests and raising the level of standards for tour guides within ecotourism.

"It's not hard to be better and I would really like to see tour guide operators raise the bar both here in Queensland and across the country. To help achieve this operators and guides need to support Ecotourism Australia's EcoGuide certification and the GOA accreditation," he says.

"These programs set minimum standards for guides and I think possession of one or both should be a minimum requirement for all guides, especially those working with Ecotourism accredited businesses. "I also think there should be the opportunity for ongoing professional development within these schemes, as there is in Savannah Guides."



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