

Taronga Zoo: Government developing tourism skills

A Tourism & Hospitality Case Study

Taronga Zoo adopted marketing and entrepreneurial techniques to build commercial activity. Revenue now supports wildlife and environment conservation and research.

Taronga Zoo

Taronga Conservation Society Australia (Taronga) is a successful example of a public-sector conservation and education service that also provides tourist experiences. It is evident that Taronga adopted marketing and entrepreneurial techniques to build commercial activity into their operations. Revenue from these activities supports the Taronga's wildlife and environmental conservation and research.

With over 2 million visitors a year and a growing number of international visitors to its zoos in Sydney and Dubbo, Taronga continues to expand its reputation as a tourist attraction and its relevance in terms of conservation globally.

Changing the focus to welfare and conservation

In acknowledgment that entertainment within the context of zoos has changed over the years and the focus has shifted towards animal welfare and conservation,¹ Taronga views its visitors as crucial in ensuring the future of wildlife. To achieve this, it maintains an ongoing commitment to enhancing the guest experience. Teams are dedicated to delivering immersive, meaningful experiences, which aim to entrench pro-environmental behaviours at home, including:

- Events - Vivid Sydney and New Year's Eve
- Overnight stays in one of 5 accommodation options
- Education programs with keepers
- Interactive activities - *Wild Ropes* adventure course, *Tiger Trek* immersive experience, walk-through enclosures at *Lion Pride Lands*
- Guided behind-the-scenes tours.

Skilling the workforce to support transformation

These transformational activities require skilled workers or volunteers such as tour guides, keepers, vets, educators, adventure activity instructors, event organisers, retail workers, food and beverage attendants, chefs, cleaners, hotel workers, as well as in marketing and fundraising. A variety of targeted employment opportunities and career pathways for Indigenous communities have been developed coinciding with the opening of the Taronga Wildlife Retreat eco-tourism hotel within the zoo's Australia Habitat.²

Ultimately, these experiences are possible because of significant leadership, with a commercial mindset that recognised the importance of tourism products, packaging, and marketing in driving demand and generating return visitors, and in turn furthering Taronga's conservation aims.

Taronga also demonstrates its focus on tourism development through its involvement in training and education. Its Registered Training Organisation, the Taronga Training Institute (TTI), delivers nationally accredited Certificates in Tourism and Animal Studies for Taronga's zoos in Sydney and Dubbo, as well as Zoos Victoria, and the Perth Zoo.

Taronga's commitment to preparing workers of the future is also facilitated by TTI's delivery of Tourism Units of Competency covering Tour Guiding; Work, Health and Safety; and Customer Service to over 400 volunteers at Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoos, Sydney Living Museums, the Anzac Memorial, the Art Gallery of NSW, the Museums Discovery Centre and Transport Heritage. This gives volunteers the skills to transition into paid employment or other community service roles.³

Application in WA

In Western Australia, VenuesLive Management Services is responsible for the for the day-to-day management of event content, catering services and ticketing at Optus Stadium⁴ and works with VenuesWest and Tourism WA to organise events at Optus Stadium. *"VenuesLive is committed to growth and innovation in the areas of venue management, event delivery and catering services; leveraging its team's extensive management and operations expertise to bring to life world-class events, service delivery, and a fans-first live sport and entertainment experience."*⁵

This public-private partnership's success is demonstrated through Optus Stadium presenting 43 major events, over 420 meetings and special events, and 1,450 stadium tours, as well as receiving 32 awards in its first year of operation. Over 2 million visitors, including 122,395 regional, interstate or international visitors attended an event at Optus Stadium in 2018.⁶

Note: The Zoological Parks Board of New South Wales, also known as Taronga Conservation Society Australia (TCSA) is a New South Wales Government authority. The TCSA operates Taronga Zoo in Sydney and the Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo, collectively housing more than 5,100 animals, and welcoming more than 2 million visitors per annum.⁷

References

1. The Guardian; From cage to conservation: the reinvention of Australian zoos; Celina Ribeiro; 19 November 2019
2. Taronga Conservation Society Australia, 2017 – 2018 Annual Report, page 50
3. Taronga Conservation Society Australia, 2017 – 2018 Annual Report, page 35
4. VenuesLive officially named operator of new Perth Stadium, 28 June 2016, Perth Now
5. <https://www.venueslive.com.au/>
6. Ibid
7. Taronga Conservation Society Australia, 2017 – 2018 Annual Report