

SPOTLIGHT ON RYAN ZAKNICH

TOUR OWNER-OPERATOR,
MATAGARUP ZIP+CLIMB, PERTH



Meet the co-founder and operator of the multiple gold-award-winning walking tour company, Two Feet & a Heartbeat, who's now powering Perth's newest adrenalin adventure. Ryan is heading up the team that's leading the climb up Matagarup Bridge climb and zipping Perth's longest zipline - the 75km/hr flying fox ride over the Swan River. What got him here? A mind that's results-focused, two feet firmly on the ground and a heart that's full of passion for Perth.

“ I'm loving this opportunity to build a brand-new tourism experience from the ground up and turn it into an iconic must-do thing when you visit Perth. ”

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

I'm leading the team that's bringing a new iconic experience for WA and visitors to our great state – the Zipline and Bridge Climb on the Matagarup Bridge. It's my job to ensure a safe and fun experience for our guests and staff. And as owner-operator of a start-up business, that means my role's very hands-on, and no two days are ever the same. I'm responsible for anything from business development to answering the phones, recruitment, training, marketing and taking groups up onto the bridge when we need extra hands on deck.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

I've always been interested in history, geography, culture and travel, but it wasn't part of my original plan to work in tourism. I started off in an entry-level public service role, doing a State Government traineeship, then landed a placement in the HR branch at WA Police.

I worked in HR for five years or so before going travelling and doing a whole host of placements in hospitality, from delivering room service meals to head concierge work in the Canadian Rockies. Then, after I got back to Perth and flopped back into HR, I decided to change course and enrolled at TAFE to study Conservation and Land Management, which got me a job managing land and bush for the state.

So, how did you end up back in Tourism and Hospitality?

While I was working on the Perth Metropolitan Region Scheme (legislation that dictates how Perth will grow), I hit on an idea and partnered with a friend to start a tourism business that became Two Feet & a Heartbeat Walking Tours.

Then a few years ago, when I saw the Government tender to run activities on the Matagarup Bridge, I took another leap of faith and pulled together a strategy and a dream team of industry professionals to win that tender. We started operating in January 2021 and I slid over here to Zip+Climb, bringing my eclectic mix of HR, management, marketing and customer service skills to head up operations.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm a practical and pragmatic kind of person – optimistic, with a good dose of realism. If I decide that I want to do something, I go ahead and do it. I'm very results-driven and happy to roll my sleeves up, get hands on and lead. In fact, I never ask anyone to do something that I haven't already done or wouldn't do myself. What do you love most about the industry?

It's fun. Yes, it's stressful and a lot of hard work, but there's such a good spirit and plenty of fun vibes here to keep you bouncing and energised.

What's the best part of your job?

I'm loving this opportunity to build a brand-new tourism experience from the ground up and turn it into an iconic must-do thing when you visit Perth. Having your fate in your own hands. Turning every guest into an avid advocate who can't stop talking about it and sharing it.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

First, I'd say take an entry-level job. The lower you start, the more you're going to learn, the more skills you'll pick up, and the better your resume's going to look. You'll also get to understand how the industry works. Make connections, get to know how one part of the tourism machine talks to another part, and who you need to talk to to get ahead.

Second, don't let others talk you out of something, but certainly take on their advice and feedback. Make a list of the goals you want to achieve and tick them off one-by-one till you get where you want to be.

And what's next for you?

I just want to continue putting WA on the global stage and on the must-see list.

Connect with Ryan on LinkedIn

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