

INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

AWAKENING DOWN UNDER

A new tourism initiative in Australia increases the visibility of Aboriginal travel experiences.

by Katie Lockhart

Aboriginal people have traversed Australia for more than 60,000 years, suggesting theirs may be the world's oldest living civilization. But the indigenous population there, like those in many other countries, has suffered tremendously at the hands of colonizers.

In 2018, to empower indigenous entrepreneurs and showcase their rich culture to travelers who are eager to learn, the tourism board of Australia launched the Discover Aboriginal Experiences (DAE) campaign. "[Sharing] these Aboriginal experiences with visitors offers the kind of life-changing, immersive memories that last for a lifetime," says Phillipa Harrison, managing director of Tourism Australia.

DAE now works with and promotes 47 businesses—many of them Aboriginal owned and operated—offering more than 140 experiential tours led by Aboriginal guides. For small businesses, the campaign presents an unparalleled opportunity. "I started my company due to the demand for more Aboriginal experiences and the realization that Aboriginal tourism is a great way of maintaining culture and language," says Bart Pigram, a Yawuru man and the owner of Narlijia Experiences Broome (toursbroome.com.au) in Western

Australia's Kimberley region. Pigram's company offers four experiences to travelers. His most popular outing for families is the adventurous "Bagul Bagul Mangroves Tour" because it engages with Broome's low-tide marine life. "Sometimes we even stumble across a nice big mud crab!" he says.

Over in Queensland, the new company Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel Cairns (dreamtimedive.com) is offering Australia's first Aboriginal-guided trip to the Great Barrier Reef. In between snorkeling sessions at Moore or Flynn reefs, members of the area's Gimuy Walubara Yidinji, Gunggandji, Mandigalpi, and Yirrganydji communities share ancestral stories about aquatic life and play the didgeridoo.

In Tasmania, the only DAE experience is the four-day "Wukalina Walk" (wukalinawalk.com.au) through the *larapuna* (Bay of Fires) and *wukalina* (Mount William) areas on the island's northeast corner. A *palawa* (Tasmanian Aboriginal) guide leads the trek and performs a cleansing eucalyptus smoke ceremony to pay homage to local communities. Guests can also stay in Aboriginal-inspired accommodations (pictured below) and listen to traditional tales around a campfire.



THIS PAGE: ADAM GIBSON; OPPOSITE PAGE: JESSICA ANTOLA

