

FRANCIS SHOVELLER

OWNER AND CULTURAL GUIDE,
WARRWANY CULTURAL TOURS

“Tourism gave me more hope that I can share. I can actually give that knowledge back to my kids and my kids are going to carry that knowledge as well.”



A PROUD KARAJARRI MAN, FRANCIS SPENDS THE WEEK WORKING WITH YOUTH IN BIDYADANGA, SOUTH OF BROOME (RUBIBI). ON WEEKENDS, THE MUSICIAN AND FORMER WAFL PLAYER SHARES HIS KNOWLEDGE OF COUNTRY AND CULTURE WITH TOURISTS. HE'D LOVE TO INSPIRE ABORIGINAL YOUTH TO DO THE SAME.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO YOUR JOB?

My father was a music teacher and my mother was a health worker so I couldn't say that I was sick because my mother was at the clinic working and I couldn't skip school because my dad was the music teacher. I had to stay committed to school.

My music career started off at a really young age and our music (Family Shoveller Band) is now played everywhere around Australia and the world. I later played WAFL one season with Subiaco and they asked me to come back, but I wanted to come home.

I'm a youth worker in my local community. My father-in-law, who is a tour operator up in the Peninsula, said to me you should pick up tourism because you know your culture, your Country, the stories; your grandparents have told you everything you need to know.

I wrote down plans on a piece of paper; it gave me a bit of guidance, but the knowledge is in my head from what my old people taught me. I reached out to the nearest caravan parks and said I'm going to deliver a walking tour. I had six people attend my first tour and from that day onwards, I've been delivering tours on the weekend.

WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF YOUR JOB?

I have the best office in the world. Some people just see it as trees, landscapes, landmarks but as Indigenous people we see stories. We see the purpose of why it's there. The thing that I love the most is that I get to go out on Country, I get to bring my kids along and my wife.

There's a sense of connecting culture back with Country, that's the most important thing being an Aboriginal person. You know it's going to fail if we don't connect with it and the next generation won't understand and it will just slowly fade away.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE FOR ANYONE CONSIDERING A CAREER IN TOURISM OR HOSPITALITY?

The number one step for me was understanding your culture and having a plan on how to deliver your tour. And making sure it's genuine.

I grew up basically busking, so when I started doing tourism, it was natural for me to entertain and to show people more about my culture. Playing sport made me fit to walk back on my Country. And it gave me more strength to talk about my Country.

Tourism gives you a sense of belonging to your people, to your Country, to your knowledge. There's also a lot of people on that journey who can help get you to where you need to be.

STEPPING STONES

