

# DALE TILBROOK

OWNER-OPERATOR,  
DALE TILBROOK EXPERIENCES

“We’re about sharing the stories in our culture from many different angles, whether it’s food, medicine, art or history, so people go away with a different perspective.”



WHEN DALE STARTED MAKING RETURN BOOMERANGS AHEAD OF THE SYDNEY OLYMPICS, SHE WANTED TO BUILD AN ABORIGINAL OWNED AND OPERATED BUSINESS. NOW PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER COME TO MANDOON ESTATE, IN THE SWAN VALLEY, TO HEAR THE WARDANDI BIBBULMUN TOUR OPERATOR SHARE HER PASSION FOR CULTURE.

## HOW DID YOU GET INTO YOUR JOB?

I didn’t start working in tourism and hospitality until about 1996. I had a career in retail in London and Perth and was running a small shop but there wasn’t enough intellectual stimulation.

The late Ken Colbung was mad keen on return boomerangs, and he encouraged me and my brother to start a business in culture because he was concerned that tourism businesses weren’t owned by Aboriginal people. We started planning with our eyes on the Sydney Olympics and were able to get them endorsed; they were beautiful boomerangs. We did that for 10 years and started our first gallery.

I was looking for something to put next to the quandong jam on the shelf, so I started sourcing bush food. People wanted to know more about bush food and bush medicine, so that led to the bush tucker talks and tastings. When we moved to Mandoon it was meant to be a transition to semi-retirement, but we’ve never been busier!

## WHAT’S THE BEST PART OF YOUR JOB?

I’ve always been a people person; I love the opportunity to meet lots of different people and be able to share things that are dear to my heart. I spend most of my time on the experiences now. We’re right on the banks of Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) at Mandoon in this old heritage building and there’s so much to talk about.

We can talk about colonisation and the effect on our people. We can talk about the yam gardens that were all along the river, which no one knows about. We continue our Aboriginal art sessions and tell Dreamtime stories. Educating people is everything because the more people understand Aboriginal culture, the more we’re going to iron out our differences.

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

If you are going into business, you have to treat it like one. Nothing was entered into lightly because of my background in business. Everything we did was considered and planned. It’s important to have a combination of passion and practicality.

We have been through the GFC (global financial crisis), COVID, you name it ... and we’ve been able to trade our way through by doing different things. We became soap makers at one stage.

But we never lost sight of the reason we were there, what we started out to do - to work in culture, to have an Aboriginal owned and operated business.

## STEPPING STONES

1.

Worked in retail buying, merchandising and marketing



2.

Started business making return boomerangs



3.

Opened Maalinup Aboriginal Gallery, in Swan Valley



4.

Sourced bush food, building reputation for authentic native ingredients



5.

Runs Dale Tilbrook Experiences, sharing cultural talks and tours