

SUE O'CONNOR

FREELANCE TOUR GUIDE

"I just love seeing people have fun. What better way to spend the day than with people on holiday?"



WHEN SUE STARTED LEADING TOURS ON WEEKENDS AT 50, SHE WAS NERVOUS ABOUT LEAVING HER SECURE OFFICE JOB. FIFTEEN YEARS ON, THE CANADIAN-BORN GUIDE CAN'T IMAGINE BEING ANYWHERE OTHER THAN THE GREAT OUTDOORS SHARING THE WONDERS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - AND EVEN TEACHING THE LOCALS A THING OR TWO.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO YOUR JOB?

I was working in an office job but feeling unhappy. I thought if I could do anything, what would it be? Who was I before I was a mum? I remembered my passion for the outdoors and began kayaking the beautiful waterways around Perth, and hiking sections of the Bibbulmun Track with a friend. Then we walked the Camino del Norte in Spain and went glacier trekking and kayaking in Alaska.

A dear friend had just started Adventurous Women. Climbing Mt Kilimanjaro was next on my bucket list and she asked if I'd consider hosting a group tour. It was amazing - I was so proud when all six of us summited! That's how I got into tour guiding and I've never looked back. It's taken me all around Perth, WA, Australia and overseas.

I work freelance for a few companies. They often lock me in for one-to-two-week tours well in advance - whoever locks me in first gets me! In between the longer tours, I do day tours in and around Perth, to the Swan Valley, Pinnacles, Rottnest, etc. I prefer smaller groups, as I can interact with my guests better and really have fun with them.

WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF YOUR JOB?

When I found out I could get paid to do what I loved doing anyway, it was a no-brainer. My friends sometimes ask if I ever get bored going to the same places, like the Pinnacles. Absolutely not! I love sharing my guests' excitement when they experience them for the first time.

I also love the flexibility of working freelance and being my own boss. I can pick and choose what I want to do and how little or much I work, which means I can be available for family, especially my grandchildren. And there are so many styles of tours, so I enjoy so much variety.

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

Think about what you want your life to look like once your family has grown, or whenever you feel you need a change. I've had a lot of women say, "I wish I could do what you do". You can, but nobody is going to make it happen for you. Make a plan!

If you're unsure about giving up that secure job and trying something new, perhaps this little piece of advice from my counsellor 15 years ago might help. He asked me: "In your entire working life, any time you've wanted a job, have you found one?" For me, the answer was yes. "So, what's holding you back now?" In other words, trust yourself, it will work out.

STEPPING STONES

1.

Rediscovered love of outdoors after years working in an office

2.

Walked the Bibbulmun Track and Spain's Camino del Norte

3.

Hosted a group of six women to the Kilimanjaro summit

4.

Decided to leave corporate life and become a full-time tour guide

5.

Leads tours around Perth, Swan Valley, Rottnest Island and more