

## Keeping quality without losing the passion

When Simon and Alison Stubbs started Freycinet Adventures, they had a strong, intuitive sense of what they wanted to achieve, resulting in the development of an award-winning kayaking business.



These days, they employ up to a dozen casual guides in the peak season across locations 200 km apart – Coles Bay and Hobart.

“One of the main strengths of the experience we deliver is that it’s highly personal with credible local connections. So as the business grew and we began to employ more guides, we faced a real challenge in maintaining quality,” Simon says.

The couple took a hard look at things a few years ago and decided to focus on their core business of water-based activities, including the popular Freycinet Paddle.

“We want customers to feel a kind of spontaneity but we need to achieve that with a standard of excellence that’s about careful crafting behind the scenes.

“So we put together a solid trip plan that’s concise but with enough detail so that any of our guides can read it and know what the expectations are, especially the three Ps that are our business values: people, product and passion.”

In eight pages, the plan not only covers the basics – such as safety gear, where to stop, options depending on group type, and key interpretive messages – but also flags what Simon and Allison have identified as less obvious yet critical elements.

“At the end of last year we talked about not finishing the trips well. We weren’t wrapping up the actual trip in a way that felt complete for our customers and we weren’t always linking the customer on to other things that interested them. So we identified how to address those things.

“We absolutely have to build in the personal touch for every client, from the first email or phone call right through to where they go and what they do next,” Simon says.



“Even things like fostering the social engagement between individuals on the trip is so important. They’ve all got great stories to tell and we want our guides to talk to customers and find out what their interests are so that interpretation can be more personally meaningful.”

The focus is on maintaining quality without restricting the passion of guides. “If one of them has a special interest, like birds, we encourage them to share that with customers but within the trip outline that everyone’s expected to follow.”



Sometimes, too, managing the quality means dealing with issues. “We had one staff member who used lots of humour. The problem was, customers didn’t know what was a joke and what was true and this affected our credibility. So we had to work with the person to get the right balance.”

Simon and Alison have used the same broad approach more recently to managing quality for the Hobart Paddle.

“Documenting the experience has helped us get clarity and is a great tool for managing the quality – whether it’s using local produce, interpretation or the level of engagement with customers,” Simon says.

No-one doubts that tourists make the final decision on whether the experience works. The verdict? “Our evaluations show that more than 90% of clients would recommend the experience to friends or family.”