



MEDIA RELEASE

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TOP TOURS FOR NEW KARIJINI ECO-RETREAT

In what is believed to be an industry first, a professional touring and training organisation has been appointed to create and manage a specially designed tours program for Australia's newest and largest remote area eco-retreat.

Karijini EcoRetreat, which opened just this month, lies in the heart of scenic and rugged Karijini National Park in the Pilbara region of northwestern WA. Owned by the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation under the control of its enterprise arm Gumala Enterprises Pty Ltd, the retreat is managed by the Eco Company under their Ecomodation brand.

The African-style safari camp situated near Weano Gorge and the Visitors Centre comprises 40 luxury tents with en-suites, 10 standard tents with shared facilities, an al-fresco dining area with quality cuisine, caravan sites, campground and BBQ style self-catering bush kitchens. Access is by road (approximately 1300 kms from Perth and 1000 kms from Broome) and by air, with regular flights into Newman, Paraburdoo and Exmouth and shuttle services or hire cars available from these airports.

The retreat is the first accommodation – other than camping – to be developed inside the park and is expected to attract thousands of new visitors to Karijini each year.

Ecomodation General Manager Michael Collins says Karijini EcoRetreat is one of the most exciting tourism developments in Australia. "With its rising hills, red earth, plunging gorges and rock pools, Karijini has the potential to be the new Kimberley," he says. "Traditionally the park has received a relatively small amount of visitors because there was no accommodation, but now that the retreat is open, tourists who love the outback but also enjoy their creature comforts are discovering the magic of this wonderful destination."

Mr Collins says that because the area is so steeped in Aboriginal culture and has such unique flora and fauna, it was imperative to offer visitors a range of cultural and nature-based experiences once they arrived. "The natural beauty is breathtaking, the camp is extremely comfortable and the food is great, but we also wanted our visitors to have a range of activities to choose from while they are here," he said.

"We decided to appoint an experienced tour operator who was familiar with the area to develop a suite of nature-based and cultural tours especially for us," he said.

With the full support of the Gumala Enterprises Pty Ltd, the retreat has appointed award-winning tour and training company, *Global Gypsies*, to research and develop the tours, recruit and train the Tour Guides and generally coordinate the new tours program.

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Global Gypsies has impressive credentials to undertake the work. Director Jeremy Perks is a professional Tour Guide with experience in Africa and Australia, a former Tour Guide of the Year, qualified mechanic and experienced four-wheel-driver with a Certificate IV in Workplace Training & Assessment and a Certificate in Remote Area First Aid. He has experience in leadership and bush survival skills having served as an officer in the South African Defence Force for over a decade.

Jeremy is also the only commercial tour operator to be invited by the WA Minister of Tourism to serve on the Adventure Tourism Review Committee which is examining outdoor tour activities at Karijini and other DEC-managed parks in WA. He also serves on a number of tourism-related Boards and committees including the WA Tourism Industry Reference Group, Desert Research CRC, Forum Advocating Cultural & EcoTourism and Tour Guides WA (Inc).

In addition to running tours to remote areas in Australia and overseas, Global Gypsies developed Australia's first "Safari Guide Workshops" in conjunction with Murdoch University to provide a hands-on, introductory training program for remote area guides.

Says Jeremy, "Karijini offers a fantastic opportunity to develop what could become the best tours program in Australia, particularly from a cultural perspective. We want visitors to Karijini to understand and appreciate the local culture, history, flora and fauna and enjoy the optimum nature-based visitor experience in this amazing environment. Well-planned tours led by professional Tour Guides with extensive local knowledge will achieve this.

"With input from the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, we hope to develop a range of exciting and educational tours including nature and cultural walks, bush-tucker and bush-medicine walks, indigenous experiences, self-drive tag-along-tours, astronomy tours, photographic tours and more based at the Retreat. We want to unveil the mysteries of Karijini to the people who come here and ensure that visitors return home with special memories they will never forget," he said.

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See attached photos. Caption for group pic is:

Jeremy Perks of Global Gypsies (right) discusses the new Tours Program at Karijini EcoRetreat with (from left to right) Jeff Bayldon (Pilbara TAFE); Maitland Parker (Department of Environment & Conservation); Ray de Jong ((Department of Environment & Conservation); Lily Kauler (Pilbara TAFE); John Carlson (Manager, Karijini EcoRetreat) and Jo Clews (Food & Beverage Manager, Karijini EcoRetreat).

For more information, contact Michael Collins at Karijini EcoRetreat on (08) 9425 5591 or Jeremy Perks at Global Gypsies on (08) 9341 6727. Also visit www.karijiniecoretreat.com.au or www.globalgypsies.com.au