

## Scholars in Focus – Grant Wilckens



Adelaide isn't the most obvious choice for headquarters of a top Australian tourism business, but for one of the industry's quiet giants it's been the perfect launch pad, with locally-born CEO and founder Grant Wilckens at the helm.

Discovery Holiday Parks (now expanded to be the G'DAY Group) was founded during the global financial crisis with just three caravan parks and Grant's vision for reinvigorating the great Australian holiday. With Grant's background in mergers and acquisitions, the Group has pursued an aggressive growth strategy, expanding to almost 300 properties and over 1400 staff, making it the largest regional accommodation provider in the country.

With a corporate finance background built on roles with Rothschild and 360 Capital Group, Grant's career spanned London and Sydney before resettling in Adelaide in 2004. As the G'DAY Group has grown, so too has Grant's ability to shift the dial, reshaping the image of dated 70s campsites to a new, authentic experience with the customer at its heart.

In a landscape traditionally dominated by small family businesses, Discovery and the G'DAY Group are a disruptor, leading the charge in digital technology and data-driven customer insights, as well as investing significantly in park developments and experiential tourism.

In 2019 the Group opened its first glamping resort on Rottneest Island in WA, which won a WA Tourism Award and has featured in many international publications including TIME Magazine, the New York Times and more. The resort is the first new accommodation facility on the island in over 30 years and its luxury eco tents, exclusive beach club, resort pool and sand dune boardwalks offer a reimagined Australian holiday with freedom, space, and low environmental impact.

As the Chair of the Caravan Industry Association of Australia and a board member of the South Australian Tourism Commission, Grant is a leading figure in the Australian tourism industry and sees substantial opportunities ahead for the sector in the wake of COVID-19. While the impact to tourism businesses of both COVID and bushfires has been in the tens of millions, there is opportunity like never before as the domestic customer base looks set to replace overseas travel with local and

regional holidays. As an affordable and diverse option, the market for holiday and caravan park holidays looks set to boom.

Grasping this opportunity with both hands, Grant and the G'DAY Group are heavily investing in technology platforms, park developments (glamping, waterparks, resort pools) and an industry-leading customer loyalty program to shift the dial on customer experience and truly reinvigorate the industry.

Winner of a 2019 EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award, Grant's mottos are 'aim, fire, adjust' and 'fail fast'; a mindset of not being afraid to make mistakes but being sure to realise them early and adjust the strategy, to which he credits much of his success. As a hands-on leader and the biggest ambassador for 'making camping cool again', Grant and his family (wife Adele and children Sebastian and Sienna) are often found holidaying at Discovery Parks to enjoy the true park experience.