



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



**PARKS AND
WILDLIFE**
SERVICE

Licence application guide for tour operators



Connecting visitors to Western Australia's natural wonders

With more than 24 million local, interstate and overseas visits annually to Western Australia's (WA's) outstanding national and marine parks and reserves, opportunities to establish authentic nature-based tourism businesses continue to grow.

If you are thinking of establishing a visitor experience in one or more of Western Australia's (WA) parks and reserves you will require a licence to operate your business. The following step-by-step guide makes it easy to understand the process of applying for a commercial operations licence.



Boranup Karri Forest. Image – Tourism Western Australia

Principles for tourism businesses

operating in WA national and marine parks and reserves

- 1. Create memorable and safe experiences for your guests**
Make sure every visitor feels welcome, safe, and has access to enjoy the inspiring natural beauty around them.
- 2. Help people connect with nature and understand these special places**
Share the stories – the stories that belong to you, values, and wonders of the parks so visitors leave with a deeper appreciation.
- 3. Encourage care and respect for Country and culture**
Inspire visitors to look after the land and honour its Aboriginal cultural significance.
- 4. Design experiences that actively leave places better than you found them**
Promote appreciation of nature through environmentally respectful and sustainable practices.
- 5. Work together with local communities and Traditional Owners**
Build strong relationships that support shared goals and lasting benefits.

Step 1: Preparing your application for a commercial operations licence

You will need:

- ☐ Business details including an email address, physical address, ABN/ACN and contact details.
- ☐ A signed letter from a Company Director that you are authorised to register on behalf of the organisation (or a letter showing you are a sole trader).
- ☐ Details of your planned tourism business such as the activities you'll offer and the parks you want to operate in.
- ☐ A copy of your public liability certificate of currency (\$10 million minimum per event).
- ☐ Signed and witnessed indemnity and release ([deed poll](#)¹).
- ☐ Vehicle and/or vessel details, where applicable.
- ☐ A visitor pass, if required, to access some native title lands.
- ☐ A credit or debit card to pay the one off, non-refundable application fee of \$117.00.

Within six months of submitting your application, you will need to obtain tourism accreditation to show you meet standards for quality assurance, marketing, and operational sustainability within protected environments. More information on accreditation, including providers and requirements is available on the [DBCA website](#)².

Step 2: Creating an online account

Register the organisation that will hold the licence on the **Commercial Operator Licensing System** (COLS³). We will notify you once your registration has been approved and you can then submit your licence application.

Handy hints

- A user guide for COLS can be downloaded [here](#)⁴.
- If you need any help, contact the licensing team

Preparation time

Around 5 minutes to register

Approval time

Same-day approval on business days

Step 3: Applying online

Once you receive approval of your registration, log into COLS to submit your licence application. You will need to provide information about your tourism business, which includes the documents described in Step 1.

You will also need to complete a basic online '**Commercial Operator Training Program**⁵ – which takes around 30 minutes to complete. This short course provides you with essential information for operating a tourism business in WA's parks and reserves.

Once we receive your application, it will be reviewed to make sure your tourism business proposal aligns with the objectives and management plans of the park/s and reserve/s in which you have requested to operate in. All management plans are available on the [DBCA website](#)⁶. This supports the ongoing protection of the area's natural and cultural values and ensures visitors can continue to enjoy and appreciate them into the future.

Preparation time

Approx. 30–45 minutes for a single activity application

Approval time

A target approval time of 10 working days for national parks and reserves.

Marine based applications may take up to five weeks.

Handy hints

Make sure you list all the parks and reserve in which you plan to operate. Adding more at a later date will require a licence amendment application. You can apply for a licence for up to 20 years.

If you experience any issues submitting an online application, or you don't have access to a computer or internet connection, call our Licensing team on for assistance.

Partnering with Traditional Owners

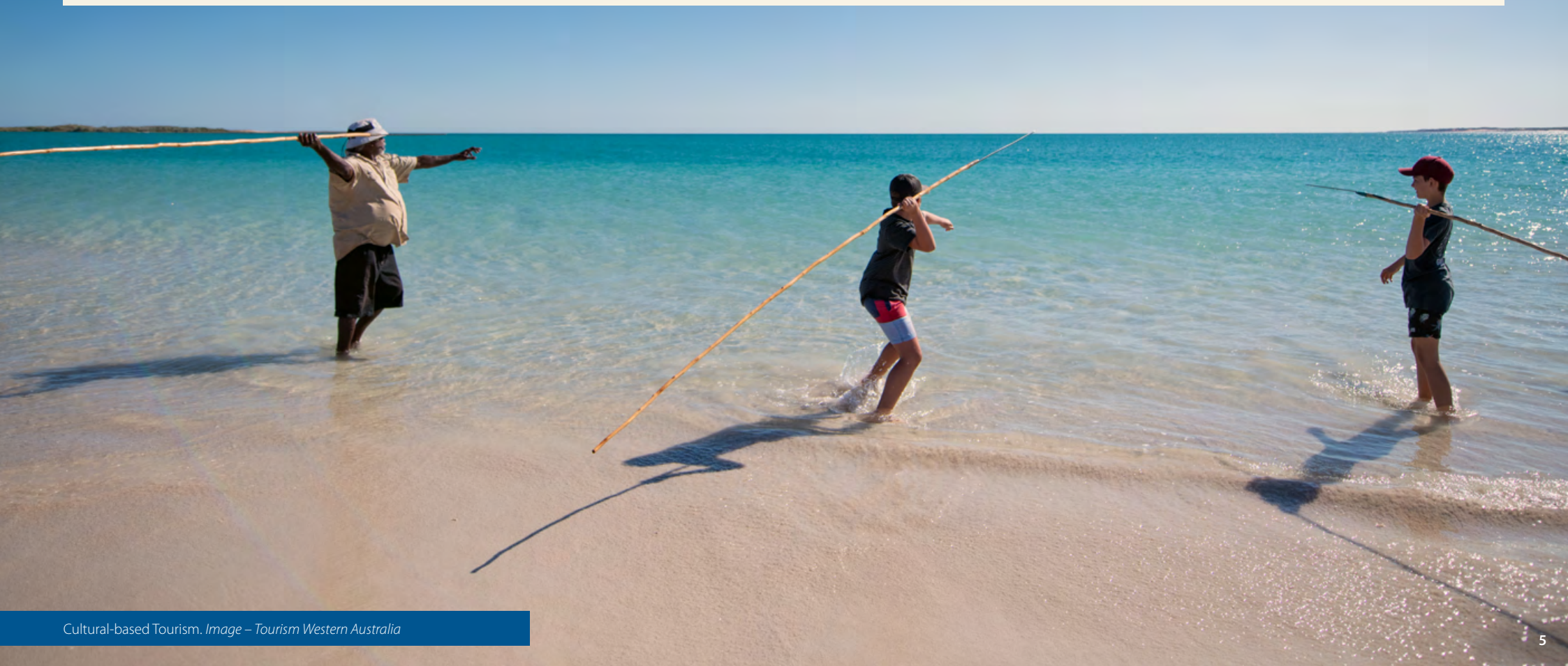
An increasing number of national and marine parks and reserves are co-designed and jointly managed in partnership with Traditional Owners. To find out which parks and reserves are jointly managed, and for more information on joint management visit the [DBCA website](#)⁷.

Early and ongoing engagement and partnerships with Traditional Owners is encouraged. If your application relates to a jointly managed park or reserve, please allow additional time for approvals (up to five months for complex applications). During this time, our Team will keep you informed of progress.

Handy hints

Four guides⁸ have been developed as an educational resource designed to assist non-Aboriginal tourism operators to engage and work respectfully with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal tourism businesses.

- Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide One: Country
- Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide Two: Respect
- Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide Three: Language and Protocols
- Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide Four: Action and Resources



Step 4: Licence approval

Applications are assessed to ensure the proposed commercial operation is compatible with the relevant park management plan and the [Commercial Operator Handbook](#)⁹. You will be notified via email as soon as the licence is approved. The licence will include all the relevant details and conditions required to operate your tourism business.

Time: No wait time, once you receive your licence you can start operating straight away.

Handy hint

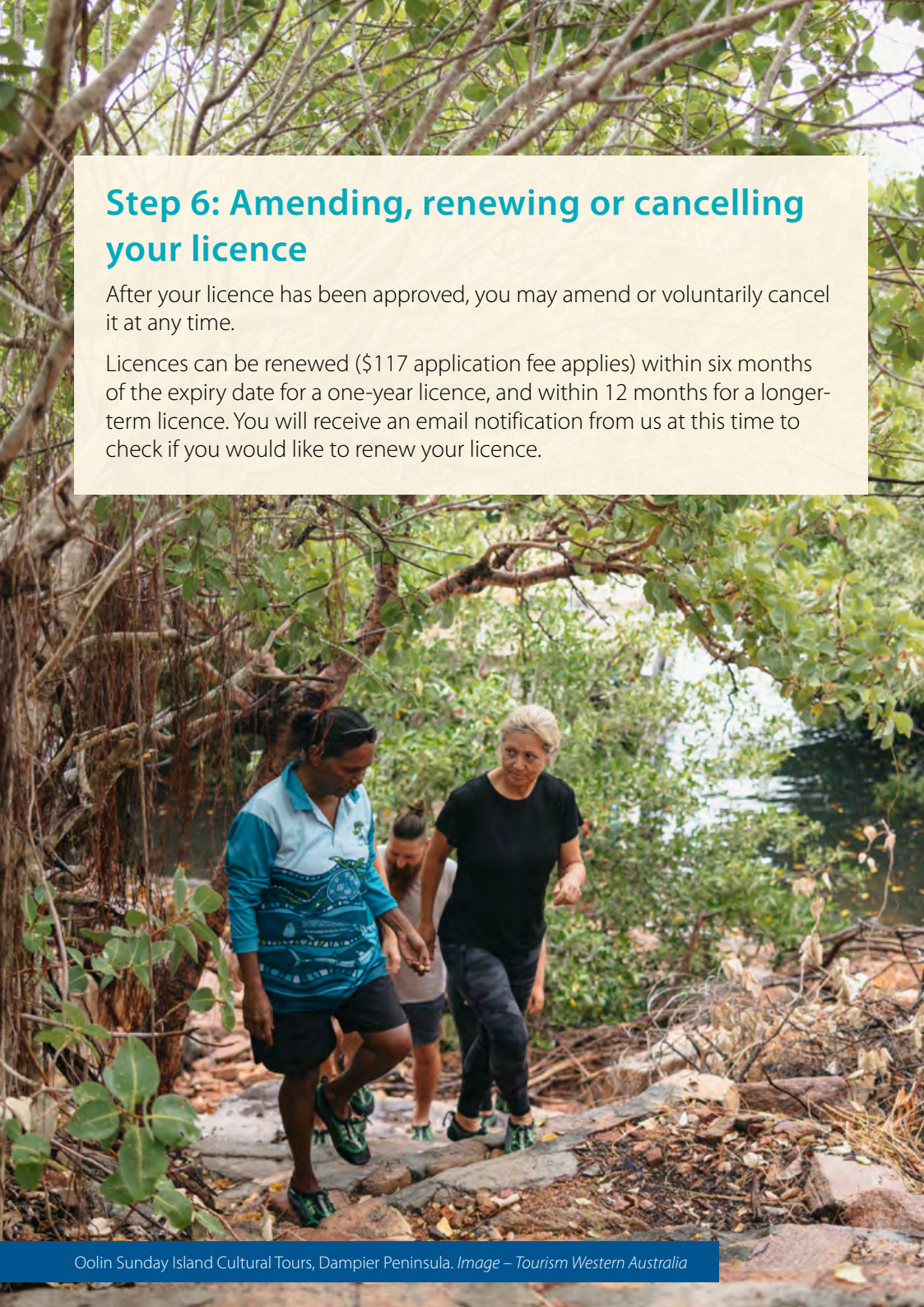
Apply as early as possible.

Step 5: Operating in WA's parks and reserves

- All licence holders will receive regular email alerts communicating up-to-date information about the State's conservation estate, including notifications of fires and road closures.
- Valuable information about WA national parks and reserves can be found at [Explore parks](#)¹⁰ and dbca.wa.gov.au¹¹
- Other useful links include:
 - » [Campground booking system](#)¹²
 - » [Contacts for regional office](#)¹³
 - » [Commercial Operator Handbook](#)

Fees

- Fees may apply to your tourism business, including entry fees at some parks, camping, attraction entry and parking fees. Licence fees contribute to the costs of conservation and management. Information on fees and charges relevant to commercial operations licences and how payments can be made via exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au/fees¹⁴.
- There is currently (2026) no annual licence fee with the WA Government waiving the annual fee of \$406 until 30 June 2028. This is part of a trial to support tourism in WA's national and marine parks and reserves.



Step 6: Amending, renewing or cancelling your licence

After your licence has been approved, you may amend or voluntarily cancel it at any time.

Licences can be renewed (\$117 application fee applies) within six months of the expiry date for a one-year licence, and within 12 months for a longer-term licence. You will receive an email notification from us at this time to check if you would like to renew your licence.

Contact us

Contact the Nature-based Tourism area of DBCA with any questions

Website: dbca.wa.gov.au

Phone: 08 9219 9978

Email: licensing@dbca.wa.gov.au



Francois Peron National Park, Shark Bay. Image – Tourism Western Australia

Links

- 1 Deed poll: dbca.wa.gov.au/media/577/download
- 2 Accreditation: dbca.wa.gov.au/management/nature-based-tourism/commercial-activities/commercial-operations-licensing
- 3 COLS: cols.dbca.wa.gov.au/
- 4 COLS User guide: dbca.wa.gov.au/media/5491/download
- 5 Training program: dbca.wa.gov.au/media/569/download
- 6 Management plans: dbca.wa.gov.au/management/plans
- 7 Jointly managed parks and reserves: dbca.wa.gov.au/management/aboriginal-engagement/joint-management
- 8 Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guides: <https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/resources-and-support/industry-development/aboriginal-tourism>
- 9 Commercial Operator Handbook: dbca.wa.gov.au/media/581/download
- 10 Information about parks: exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au
- 11 DBCA website: dbca.wa.gov.au
- 12 Campground booking system: parkstay.dbca.wa.gov.au/search-availability/information/
- 13 DBCA Offices: dbca.wa.gov.au/contact-us/office-locations
- 14 Information on fees: exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au/fees