

Tips for effective interpretation

Enthusiasm

If you are enthusiastic about the subject you are interpreting, show it! The enthusiasm will rub off. Your clients will walk away inspired. It may mark the beginning of a new-found passion. They may rave to their friends about the experience — certainly good for business.

Be friendly

It may be obvious, but people like people who like them. If you are warm and friendly with your audience, they will tend to listen more, and will be more likely to be moved by what you have to say.

Try different approaches

Some of the most effective interpretation is done in silence. An important aspect of interpretation is to help facilitate an emotional response. Stop for a rest break within the heart of the rainforest. Tasmania's rainforests are unique in their ability to evoke a silent, contemplative atmosphere. Try to encourage everybody to remain silent so that they may hear the silence of the rainforest itself.

For some, it may be one of those rare times that they have allowed themselves to be free of the cares and worries of everyday life.

Use all your senses

Encourage your guests to use as many of their senses as possible. It helps to reinforce learning. Encourage your guests to touch the moss that cloaks the myrtles. Smell it. Listen to the silence of the rainforest. Feel its cool and damp atmosphere. They may remember these things long after they have forgotten the names of the plants.

Put people in the picture

Whether it be natural or cultural heritage that you are interpreting, your audience is likely to prick their ears at the mention of human involvement. While the involvement of people in cultural heritage is obvious, what is less obvious is how to include them in an interpretation of a convict ruin that has long been silent. Stories of particular characters (of which there is no shortage) who lived within the confines of

the penitentiary on Sarah Island, say, or the piners who pioneered the wilderness of the wild rivers are just some examples of the human element that lies behind all of our (European) cultural sites. If you can bear in mind the lives of such people as you research and formulate your story about a place, then those people can potentially bring a most valuable perspective to your story.

With respect to natural heritage, there seems to be this unspoken message that wilderness is devoid of humanity. It's almost as though those tremendous photographs that Dombrovskis took were done without him actually being there. To make the link between the many positive human interactions, perceptions and experiences with nature, try to find a story that revolves around such a theme. For example, what were the perceptions of escaping convicts when they found themselves confronted with the rugged mountains of the west? What were the perceptions of the early piners who

worked deep in the heart of the wild rivers? What are your own perceptions today as a tour operator?

If you have a story or anecdote, tell it!

Those who have lived and worked within an area have a rich treasury of experience. Stories of your experiences can be laced throughout your interpretation. Such stories quickly gain the interest of people, and offer them the gift of sharing such experiences with a person who has gained a wealth of personal experience in the area.

Interpretation by example

Those nice, old adages about taking nothing but photos and leaving nothing but footprints are at the heart of minimal impact bushwalking. Take the centre path when you come to a section of track that spreads out. On encountering the inevitable muddy patch, set a good example by going straight through the middle of it. Tottering around the edges only serves to widen the quagmire. Let your guests know why you are doing it. Perhaps *some* might follow your lead!

All plants are protected within our National Parks. Picking flowers is not a good example. Interpret them where they are. Pick up any rubbish that you might find along the way. Let your

guests see you do so. You don't even have to say a word. Maybe you will find that some will do likewise, spontaneously sharing in a concern for their environment. This is interpretation at its best.

Put people into novel situations

If you can get an immaculately dressed, high-heeled, high society socialite wearing a fur coat down on the forest floor scouring through the leaf litter in search of bugs, then good luck to you! Kids will do it unhesitatingly; but for adults, the idea is the same and the need perhaps more pressing. For example, try lying down on the forest floor beneath towering trees and look up to where the canopy reaches the sky. Some visitors may not have done such a thing since their childhood. Help them rediscover it.

Take advantage of unexpected events

Nature is full of surprises. If a thylacine wanders by while you're interpreting the adaptive responses of plants to the alpine habitat, don't ignore it and continue doggedly on with your talk. Be flexible enough to interrupt what you are doing to take advantage of those typically fleeting glimpses of animals or the brief and spectacular interplay of light on the mountains.

Also be flexible to the interests and knowledge of your group. If you have a thylacine expert in your group, use him or her. If someone visited Strahan in 1962 encourage him or her to share that experience. The beauty of this approach is that you will be constantly learning and adding to your collection of stories.

Don't overload people

Too little is better than too much. The human brain, it would seem, has a very limited capacity to store information! In fact, psychologists have found that people tend to remember no more than seven items or 'chunks' of information at a time. This would suggest that stopping and talking more than seven times will be less effective than limiting your number of stops. Each of your stops should revolve around a specific aspect of the wider theme that you are interpreting. Give just a few of the most interesting, relevant, special features of the object you're interpreting. Don't stop at everything and try to describe it in a way that might do it justice. You'll never get home!