

Tinaberries, Bundaberg: Tina shares her agritourism experience and insights

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In my travels this year I have come across several farms doing pick-your-own strawberries and dabbling in agritourism as an extension to the farming operation. Tina McPherson from Tinaberries was kind enough to welcome me on to the farm and share her learnings from her agritourism journey.



Tina & Bruce McPherson. Photo credit: Emma Hook

Tina and her husband Bruce bought the property in Bundaberg 17 years ago and started growing strawberries a few years later. About 12 years ago they started pick-your-own and invited school excursions on to the farm to help raise awareness of farming and provide more people with a farm-life experience. Tina gets great pleasure from teaching and providing people with a positive farm experience. The business has continued to grow into a unique and authentic farm experience that can be enjoyed 363 days of the year.

The agritourism shop front came about when the challenge of excess fruit was faced. Tina and Bruce - who both enjoy ice-cream and had an ice-cream machine - decided to make soft serve strawberry ice-cream, and with a couple of hay bales as seats, the journey began.

They sell a variety of ice-cream flavours all made with their own fruit along with fresh fruit and various other goodies.

Tinaberries is very much a team effort, with Bruce doing what he enjoys and does best - growing the fruit - and Tina focuses on the public experience which is where her passion and skill set lies. The workers here are an extension of the family, while the shop and gardens that the public enjoy are an extension to farmhouse yard and farm.

My personal experience started from the moment you see the driveway. The signs at the gate provide a warm welcome and guide you down the road to the farmhouse and area where you park. Everywhere is perfectly manicured, welcoming you into the shop and garden area. More signs show you the path to the shop front, more glorious gardens, shade trees with rustic farm-feel tables and carts, and finally an amazing old farm shed where you can sit and enjoy an ice-cream and fresh fruit and soak up the tranquil view of the farm and gardens. There are also lawn games set up for you to enjoy for both kids young and old. The staff are all very welcoming and eager to serve and answer any questions you may have. You can tell a lot of effort has gone into the design and maintenance of the 'farmyard' style gardens and it pays off in providing a very enjoyable and picture-perfect tourist destination where you can enjoy the outdoors and the country farm feel. The service is genuine, and everything is generous.



The ice creams at Tinaberries draw visitors from all over the region. Photo credits: Emma Hook & Tinaberries



It is important to invest in good signage with a coherent design feel to make the experience feel well put together.

Photo credits: Emma Hook & Tinaberries

Gardening brings Tina great pleasure and the agritourism component of their business allows her to invest time creating and maintaining a nice garden.

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It makes me feel good and brings me enormous satisfaction. You have to love what you do, and I love the gardens. If I wasn't interested in gardening, it would just feel like more work and there is already enough of that around here!

I interviewed Tina and here are some of her insights.

What are some of the factors that you think have led to your success?

Agritourism requires a very different skill set to that required to grow the fruit. Agritourism is all about the customer experience and interacting with the public. I have a background in marketing and hospitality and genuinely enjoy working with people and making them happy. Bundaberg has a lot of tourism so we could tap into this opportunity and provide another attraction for the area. We are open all year round and 7 days a week so customers know they can drive out here and we will be open.

What are the negatives?

It isn't all positive and you must consider some of the trade-offs. There is always a public eye on what you are doing. There are different levels of quality assurance and compliance that you don't normally have to deal with if you are farming; it is a totally different area when you move into agritourism and food service. There is a lot of work required with council including traffic flow on the main roads, signage, traffic flow on your farm, parking, and things like toilet facilities to manage as well.



What advice would you give to others getting into agritourism?

Know your niche & stick within your niche. Do what you do well. This is especially true when new ideas pop up.

It is demanding of your time. You must love what you do. It should be more than just an economic reason for getting into agritourism.

Your customers have an expectation about how everything should be. Be ready for criticism and understand that you cannot please everybody.

Set boundaries around where you will allow the public to roam. This can include building physical barriers to create private zones.

Social media is a key driver to an agritourism business. You have to be ready & willing to respond online in a timely fashion. Invest in learning the skills or pay someone who has the right skills.

Consider the long-term infrastructure needs and the long-term outlook for your property

Ask yourself these questions...

- ? Do you want to? Do you need to? What are your long-term plans with the property?
- ? How does the agritourism infrastructure (e.g., car park, shop front, toilet facilities) fit in with your long-term plans for the property?
- ? What are your passions and skill strengths and do these align with the success factors for agritourism?
Are you genuinely interested and invested in providing an incredible experience to every customer?

"We may have started accidentally, but we are now very strategic. I attended a leadership course and worked with a strategic planner. We know our long-term plans; we know which opportunities to take up and which ones to let go by. Working with a strategic planner can help with determining what type of long-term infrastructure you invest in on your farm, and that is a critical part of having a plan to work to."

Thank you Tinaberries for your generosity in sharing your learnings & offering advice to others.



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