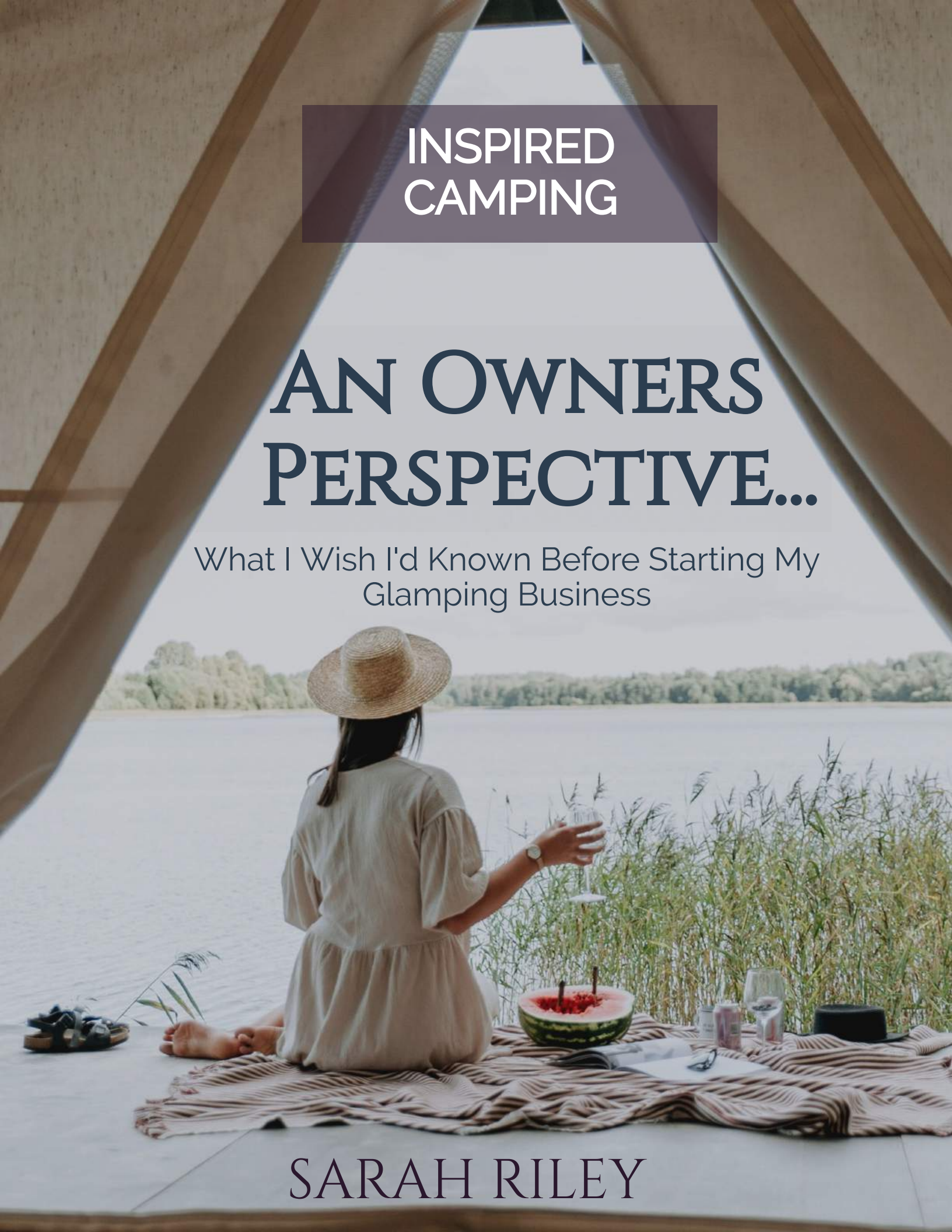




INSPIRED
CAMPING

AN OWNERS PERSPECTIVE...

What I Wish I'd Known Before Starting My
Glamping Business

SARAH RILEY

HOW TO GENERATE AN IMPACT AND SUCCEED

“Life is no straight and easy corridor along which we travel free and unhampered, but a maze of passages, through which we must seek our way... But always, if we have faith, a door will open for us, not perhaps one that we ourselves would ever have thought of, but one that will ultimately prove good.” A. J. Cronin

INTRODUCTION FROM SARAH RILEY

I have been involved in the Glamping and Hospitality Industry in some capacity since 1998 and in that time I have been able to test a lot of theories and find out what actually works. When I look back, much of it was a surprise to me and now I realise that I didn't know... what I didn't know... until I knew it!

One of the things I have learnt since those early days is the benefits of connecting with others.

This is the reason why I started what is now one of the largest business communities for glamping business and holiday rental hosts and my Podcast.

But I still think back to those early days of taking a chance and investing heavily in an idea without really knowing what I was getting myself into and without having someone to talk to.



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

This is something we continue to experience every day and is the reason why I contacted some inspiring and successful people I know and asked them two very important questions. I asked them...

1. What do you wish you'd known before you started your glamping business... and;
2. If you had to start your business from scratch, what is the one thing you would do first to have the most impact quickly?

Many of us keep doing what we've always done as it feels scary to step outside of our comfort zone, even though we realise benefits could wait for us there. We hesitate to problem-solve, take chances and tackle change... because... what if...?

That's why I urge you to read the words of the experienced glamping business hosts in this eBook. They may hold a key piece of advice that can help you unlock something blocking your way so you can begin to move forward with your own business dreams and aspirations.



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

Remember that a very little key can open a very heavy door and as you might find a few keys here and start to move forward, who knows what doors might open for you as a result. Then, if you need further help or someone to bounce a few ideas around with, all you need to do is go to the final page to find the resources you need.

The glamping and holiday rental industry has been attracting a different type of business owner. Someone who is dedicated to providing a great service, while also enjoying a lifestyle that is more aligned with their true values. So, as you begin to move forward with your own journey don't ever forget to take the time to smell the flowers, listen to the birds and enjoy the ride.

Have fun!



Sarah Riley
CONSULTANT, COACH, TRAINER

A huge thank you to the business owners and the photographers featured in this eBook.
You are inspiring us all!

SARAH DUSEK **UNDER CANVAS** UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Under Canvas offer nights under the stars in safari or tipi tents. With private bathrooms, uninterrupted views and the only noise being the wildlife, this is an experience not to be forgotten. Having recently successfully attracted significant funding from major investors they are expanding in to National Parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty across the USA. Having started with nothing in 2010, they are growing into a multimillion business making Sarah and her team at Under Canvas a real powerhouse and one to watch in the future.



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"I'm glad I didn't know how hard it would be to bootstrap a business as I think I would have been very daunted by the prospects. So I'm glad I didn't know how tough the mountain climb would be. Although climbing the mountain has definitely been an extraordinary thing and in terms of the learning and the knowledge and the experiences that I've had now over the last 10 years because of climbing that mountain have been really truly extraordinary.

I think I wish I would have know... it's always the case that when you do something that you don't know anything about and you're pioneering in a space where you've really got no knowledge, I wish I'd had more advisers. I wish I'd had more input and that we could have learned some of the hard lessons that we learnt the hard way... easier and faster. Capital's a really interesting one in that space for example. I had no idea how businesses raised money.

I had no idea about venture capital. I had no idea how you think about raising money for your business. All of that was completely new to me. I didn't have an MBA. I hadn't gone to Harvard or Oxford. It just was not in my vocabulary. And so having someone along side of me to say, this is how you model out your business. This is what it will take to think about raising money for your business at some time in the future, would have been very, very valuable.

That being said, not having it forced me to build a profitable company because when you don't have much cash to spare it really defines you to think about, we really must make this sustainable and profitable otherwise we're not going to exist for very long. So that was a plus for not doing that. But certainly we learnt all our lessons the hard way for sure."

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"I definitely would raise money sooner for sure. That being said, you really can't do that without having a really well oiled business model that is proven to work. So really defining my business model sooner is what I would have done and thinking bigger sooner.

Thinking outside of my small mind-set and thinking bigger sooner is definitely what I would do if I was doing this again.

We all underestimate what we think we are capable of and we get trapped in our own mindsets of what we know and what we think we can manage and one of the great things about being here in the states is the challenge to that that does push you to think bigger and to think beyond that.

And even now as I look ahead to the future and even what's next to Under Canvas and beyond I am constantly challenging myself to think bigger than I can today and that's really scary.

If you can dream it you can make it happen. If you can imagine it, it's possible. It's when you can't imagine it, it's not possible. Its about really continuing to push the envelope (and ask)... what's the impact I want to have in my lifetime? That's a big driver for me. Beyond building a big business.

The reason to build a big business is for impacts sake. What impact can I make with this vehicle that i've been given... this business that I've been given and what difference can we really make to the world and how big can I think, what problems can I solve, what problems can my business solve?"

LOUISE MIDDLETON **KUDHVA** UNITED KINGDOM

The word 'Kudhva' is ancient Cornish dialect and it means 'hideout', which is exactly what these unique architectural cabins have been designed to be. The wooden structures blend into the quarry rich environment they inhabit and have attracted some major attention since they were launched. They are off-grid and raised above the ground with a suspended bed and captivating views down the coast. These are structures for adventurers and those who love all the elements of a wild Atlantic coastal life.



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"I wish I'd known that achieving grants would be such a catch 22 situation for my site at the beginning. The extra finance could have doubled my project Kudhva in Cornwall if I had been able to achieve it. As a new project, you can not easily attract investors without some kind of track record of income and tracking your bottom line. However, to attract new business grants you can not move forward without planning permission, which is difficult to obtain without extra finance. "

With the additional backing, Kudhva would be a bigger project for Cornwall and therefore would be able to employ more people, have better renewable systems and be more groundbreaking for the Cornish economy.



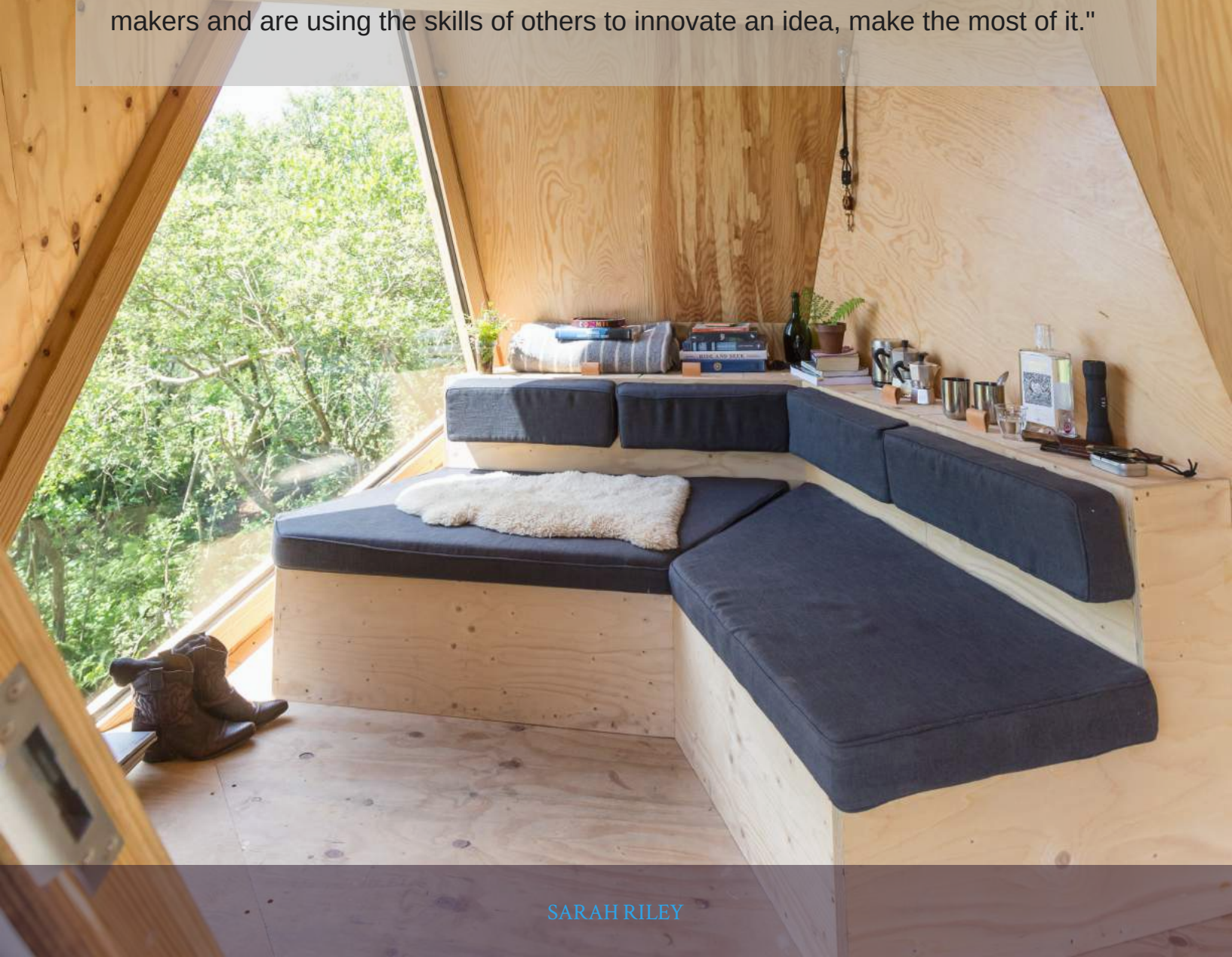
"What I needed was a source of finance that was not so reliant upon obtaining planning permission. So a way to achieve this would be to design the product itself, apply for grants available to achieve their build and then use the sale of those to finance the bigger on-site glamping project, where grants and investment is harder to obtain."

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"I was advised not to build so many Kudhva structures at the beginning of my project but I'm glad I went ahead regardless. Building quickly and achieving good economies of scale is essential, especially when building small scale architecture or temporary buildings. We were able to get up and running and earning income quickly. We had 3 cabinet makers building 3 Kudhva in 3 months.

Kudhva is a challenging design and deciding to build more allowed for better efficiencies. While you have a space to build them, have the attention of the cabinet makers and are using the skills of others to innovate an idea, make the most of it."



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

KERRY ROY CAMPKATUR, UNITED KINGDOM,
CERCHIO DEL DESIDERIO, ITALY



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

Recently, Kerry has moved from the UK, where she already has a well established glamping site, to Italy, where she is currently setting up a new site. She focuses on offering a special retreat experience with a cocktail mix of fun, relaxation, tranquillity and adventure.

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"I wish I had understood more that the bigger you grow and the more staff you need, the more complicated and time consuming Health and Safety and Human Resources becomes as well as the constant worry it becomes in the back of your mind incase we are not fully complying to all legal H&S and HR requirements correctly. We've heard some horror stories in these areas which I pray we never have to experience. Often you can end up spending more time keeping the team happy, motivated and trained to the high levels you require to ensure the business runs successfully.

If you're setting up a Glamping business for work life balance and lifestyle change then my advice is stay small..it will be more enjoyable!

Staying smaller with a team of less than 5 employees keeps it more simplified. When opening my first Glamping site back in 2013 it was all still very new to the world and there weren't any regulations in place, which made it confusing at times for planning, licenses, and insurance. However, through networking with others and trailblazing it all became possible and we have grown not only in size but also in knowledge."

2. If I had to start my business from scratch this is what I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"Definitely have a higher budget in the bag and aim for the project development timeline to take longer than you think. It's better to over estimate than under estimate the duration as you never know what might crop up!

The build of our second site which is a much smaller site in Italy has ended up costing as much as our first uk site which was larger. We also had lots of physical help from family and friends during the developments of the uk site which you can't easily find when moving to a new country whereby you know fewer people and the language barrier is a massive challenge in itself.

Admittedly I have been a little over ambitious with the second site build up and naive, after all the free help we got in the uk. If I was to do this again I would definitely spend more time getting prices of materials, builders, architects, planning officials etc before even committing to a property/plot of land. Many of us move seek a place in the sun whereby land costs less but other parts of the developments can end up costing more and negotiating is all the more difficult with language barriers!

Working with such a small budget and lack of language skills has ended up costing me much more time and money that has definitely been wasted in some areas therefore resulting in opening 3 months later than originally planned (12 weeks potential bookings lost of circa 20k) and leaving me with minimal budget for marketing, therefore, I have to spend more time I don't currently have trying to find ways to market ourselves with minimal spend! Our first UK site was marketed 6 months prior to opening because we had better budgets and lots of helpers to call upon so we were sure we would be ready for our first guests. However we have not been able to that at the Italian site with its many delays in various areas and from various suppliers because we run the risk of having to cancel bookings if not open in time. Therefore we are only taking bookings from 4 weeks after the planned opening date to allow for any further possible delays."

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

TIM BOWLES THE FARM CAMP UNITED KINGDOM

Tim and the team at The Farm Camp offer a 'rewilding' experience that focuses on being 'wild but calm' and 'off-grid but connected'. They have bell tents in a woodland setting and offer a hand-picked selection of experiences, including sheep herding, wild swimming and wellbeing activities. They have been particularly successful in developing packages for people who want to reconnect with each other and with nature through their inspiring and relaxing events full of campfire sessions, outdoor activities, foraging and wild food cooking.

1. What I wish I'd know before starting a glamping business...

"I thought it would be as simple as pitching some nice tents and watching the bookings roll in. There's a lot more hard work (at a computer and on-site) and more practical knowledge required than expected. It's been a rollercoaster, but you learn fast and what an incredible journey!"



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS



2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"Investing in expert advice saves a lot of time, effort, stress and money in the long term. Whilst I started on a bit of a shoestring and learnt a lot going the long hard way round, getting some sound advice on key areas would have been so valuable."

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS



CAMERON D'ARCY SIERRA ESCAPES AUSTRALIA

Sierra Escapes is an award winning Luxury Eco Glamping experience with breathtaking views over 280 acres. It is home to kangaroos, deer, native birds and many other kinds of Australian wildlife. Cameron is an expert at creating visuals to generate wanderlust and they found this was a key reason for their success when they wanted to fill the booking calendar quickly from the start.



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"To be honest there's actually nothing I'd wish I'd known before we started Sierra because I think if I did I would have chickened out. In our industry because what we are doing is so unique there are so many barriers to entry, struggles, money pits and challenges that had I known all of that I'm not sure I would have had the guts to go through it. However when you're already committed (financially and emotionally) you don't have a choice but to figure it out (which there is always a way).

That's not to say the venture isn't worth it (financially and spiritually - it is on both fronts) but gees it's not an easy battle. Particularly in ours (and Bubbletents) business model of small number of units - exclusive experience style. I constantly see people trying to research the crap out of their venture before they commit - which I'm not saying don't research but people seem afraid to take the plunge and I think a lot of people probably end up overthinking and deciding it's too much trouble and not for them.

Educate yourself, sure, but I think a degree of naivety can actually be somewhat useful. There are people that called me after we launched our first tent to ask questions about XYZ who are still asking questions now when we're 3 (nearly) 4 tents in and currently developing other expansions of the retreat. So there is definitely a lesson to be learnt in spending a short amount of time researching and then start doing!"

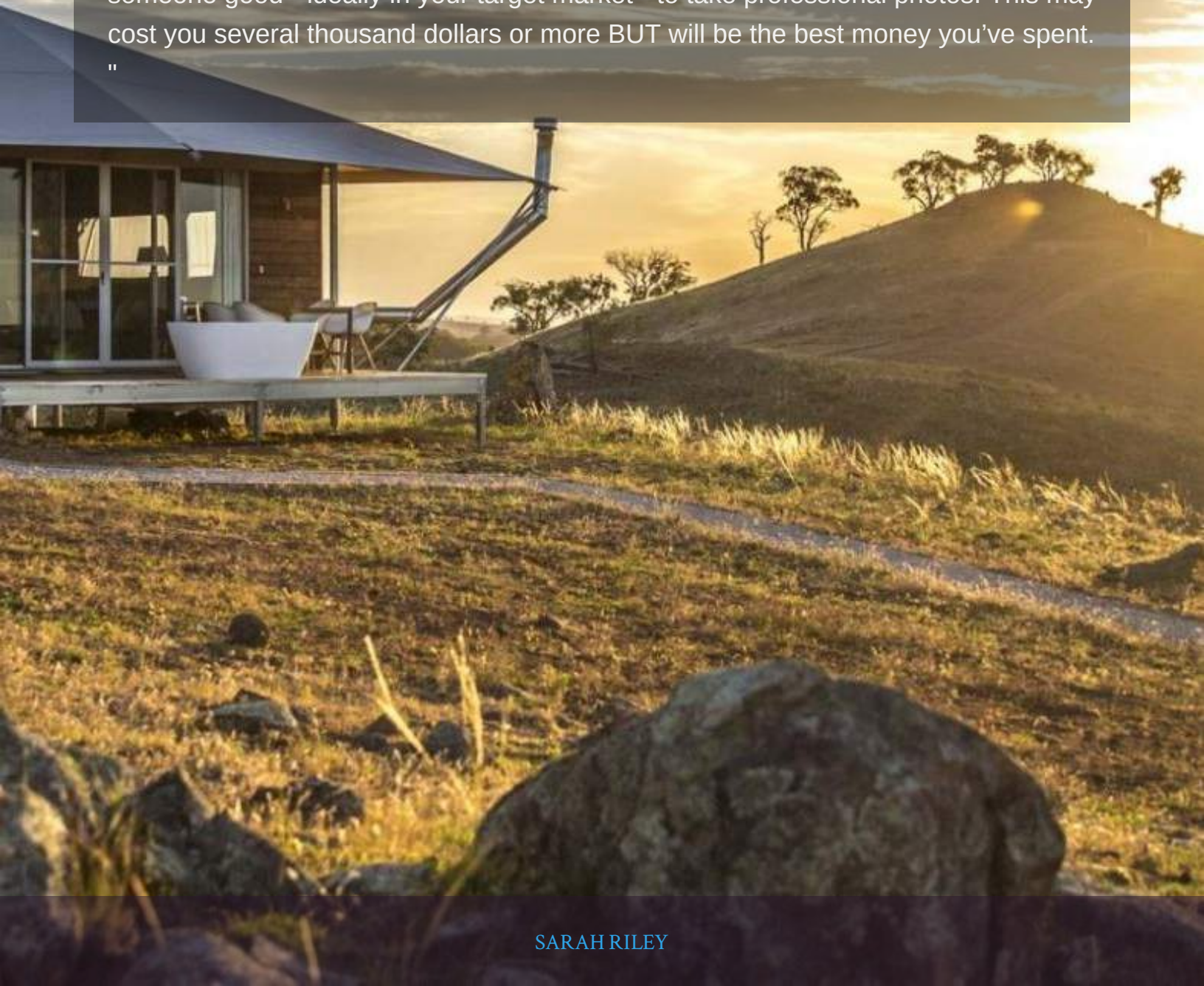


SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"If we had to start again from scratch I'm not sure we'd do anything differently to what we did the first time. We were really fortunate to have extremely strong booking levels right from the beginning. This is what we did:

Invested heavily in good photography (luckily I had this covered but if you don't, pay someone good - ideally in your target market - to take professional photos. This may cost you several thousand dollars or more BUT will be the best money you've spent."
"



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

"Build your social media profiles before you launch - even while you are building. Start building a following sharing photos of construction etc.

The minute you're done and you've got some nice photography, spread it as widely as you can (website, socials, etc etc)

Partner up with your local tourism office and work with them to create a press release. If you can't make your own press release and send it out to blogs, magazines etc etc.

Unless you have a product like Bubbletents that will capture people's attention no matter what - make sure your photos are stunning - as this will make publications want to write about you.

Organise sponsored social media campaigns.

Have friends and family stay for a small nominal fee for the first few weeks to test the business out, and send them surveys afterwards using something like Survey Monkey to get their feedback on it.

People will tell you their feedback won't be helpful because they didn't pay full price - and I agree with this to a degree but we still found it fairly helpful (particularly in regards to if utilities were working? How easy instructions were to understand and ensuring the whole booking process was seamless and easy.

The only thing I'd do differently would be to get influencers involved early in the game to drive bookings. Just make sure they're in the right target market - (I've learnt that from what I've done and your presentation, Sarah, at The Glamping Summit) - and that they are going to generate some killer photographic content for the business."

DAVID LEVENTHAL **PLAYA VIVA** MEXICO

Playa Viva is nestled between the sparkling waters of the Pacific Ocean and the majestic Sierra Madre Mountains on the western coast of Mexico. Playa Viva is close enough to the trappings of modernity yet worlds away providing immersion into the wonders of nature and an escape to private relaxation. The property's nearly 200 acres includes an estuary, an Aztec archeological site, a turtle sanctuary, and a coastal forest and mangrove ecosystem, which supports an array of stunning wildlife. David is an expert at attracting the type of media attraction that many others crave and I spoke to him about his techniques recently on the podcast.

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"I wish I had a better understanding of the economics around the business model. How many units were needed to reach certain economies of scale around operations and how much I would need to invest in marketing to reach profitability sooner."

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"I would have started with more rooms, especially treehouses as this iconic building is driving so much brand recognition and differentiation for us, and would have invested more in marketing. The good news is that starting small and building allowed us to get a lot of operational issues aligned and perfected so when we did get bigger we could handle the increased guest volume."

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS



SARAH RILEY

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

SONNY VREBAC **BUBBLETENTS AUSTRALIA**



SARAH RILEY

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

In an Australian first, Sonny and his partner introduced a concept which allows the guest to experience something they've never experienced before, sleeping under the stars in a clear and inflatable bubble tent in superior comfort and convenience in the remoteness of Australia. The launch of Bubleletents attracted immediate attention through 4 prime-time TV spots and they were featured in 30 different countries around the world. This extraordinary media success was achieved through hard work, determination and focusing on their unique offering, which definitely paid off.

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"I don't know if I'm going to be squarely able to answer those questions, since previous business experiences taught us that we knew enough to know that we had to be prepared for a great deal of uncertainty from the get-go and knowing that the business plan we had initially was going to be thrown out the window once we started, allowed us to make room for uncertainty and hiccups. If I'm pressed for an answer though, unless you've done a project of this sort before, I'd be inclined to say that you can safely double your initial forecasted budget (ever watched Grand Designs?!) However going into it, it's not unlike other businesses really, to succeed it will require you to be malleable, persistent, customer-experience-focused, have a great friend/partner who won't mind you having a whinge to every now and then and have a healthy dose of naivety – because if you knew all the places you'd trip up on, you'd never embark on the journey in the first place."



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS



2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

If I had to do it again... hmm, while we did get quiet lucky with how PR started to evolve for us (and don't underestimate how much it can move the needle when it does work) I'd say marketing needs to be a daily activity from the day you decide to go ahead and be a glampreneur and really be mindful of where your marketing dollars go because you'll be offered busloads of opportunities where you'll be able to spend ample amounts of money where it might not be appropriate for you. What if you're not a 'marketer' tough? Tough, learn to love it. Don't abdicate this until you know what you want/need them to do. Just like you wouldn't allow a housekeeper get by with not changing the sheets between your guests don't allow a social media 'expert' to get away with not showing you a pathway to converting your social media expenditure to actual bookings. Your marketing efforts need to be centered around getting heads in beds. Always!

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

EMILIE AND PAT LEBLANC **CIELO** CANADA

SARAH RILEY

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"We wish we would have done some contracts with the carpenters with accurate estimates (to be able to follow our budget) \$\$\$ and not have weekly added costs (plus the construction took way longer than estimated)"

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"To start our marketing earlier. If we would have had the time and energy to make a grand opening in the winter with visits of the accommodations it would have had a great impact on sales from locals that are only finding out about us now!"



SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

MANOLO RAMOS **PITAHAYA GLAMPING RETREAT** PUERTO RICO



SARAH RILEY

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

The award-winning Pityaha Glamping Retreat is a well-known glamping destination in Cabo Rojo that's endorsed by the local Tourism Board. It is situated in Puerto Rico, a beautiful tropical, Caribbean island that is popular for its natural and cultural tourist attractions. Manolo began his glamping site when he became a father and realised he needed a more consistent income and stable livelihood for his new family. Since then his business has gone from strength to strength.

1. What I wish I'd known before starting my glamping business...

"Although I'm very happy with the success with local tourism, I see that I have limited control on how to bring international tourism to Puerto Rico.

This area has everything but needs to be known more outside. I do have excellent support from our Tourism Company and they are promoting Pitahaya Glamping. What I mean from this is that you must be sure on how the local area promotes itself for the tourists (local and international) and what part you should do to attract them since both are important.

One management aspect is that at first I permitted the 5 tents to be rented by a group of friends/family and it did not work because it was difficult to control. Most of the time, people in groups that rent everything exclusively behave like the place is private and it was hard to control them.

What I do now is limit the tents to two maximum per group or family. I only permit everything to be rented by interviewing them and If their intentions is to look for a place to relax. I do allow groups for yoga/spiritual retreats or nature conservation oriented ones."

SETTING UP A LUXURY CAMPING AND GLAMPING BUSINESS

2. If I had to start my business from scratch, this is the first thing I'd do to have the most impact quickly...

"This apply directly to Pitahaya Glamping since my first two weeks it was almost empty. This was because I didn't know exactly when I was going to open and I even have to cancel some reservations. I also went completely broke so I couldn't advertise it on traditional media (flyers for example). I recommend to have a budget only for this and never touch it, unless is for promotion (making Facebook "boosts"). Better to sacrifice something else.

Is also very important to have the web page which I still don't have and it takes a lot of time to create it or money for someone to do it but you must have the budget to . (I will have it soon done). Also it would have been positive to make an event where I could have formally invite people from the press and tourism. (this will be done as an "official" inauguration)

This depends on your vision and mine is that Pitahaya Glamping is a place to relax, enjoy nature and to promote all the outdoor activities you can do around here. Another aspect is that if you choose canvas tents as beautiful as they are, they get mould and it could be very fast and is difficult to clean. I would choose the tents again since that is the glamping style that I like and relate but would like to have been prepared with more information about this and how to treat it and prevent it the most I can. It did get very bad and this could affect the sales since this a very aesthetic oriented business."



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[SARAH RILEY](#)