

ACHIEVEMENTS

GOURMET WALKING

by Barbara Whiter

“What began as a slide show for friends in Germany became the innovative idea that Gourmet Walking is today.”

“Since we launched the concept of the gourmet walking and camping tours in September 1986 at a Melbourne travel show, this is the first season Graeme hasn't had to supplement our income by returning to accountancy, and we have been able to hire part-time help,” smiled Gabriela Clarke.

Even in the five months since I first met them, Graeme and Gabriela Clarke seem to have thrown off the “struggling but happy” tag to now be glowing in a “successful and happy” phase, which seems destined to grow.

A story the Clarkes like telling is how they met on a tour by well-known Australian outback tour operator Bill King and that he now features *their* tourism ventures, Walkabout Gourmet Adventures, in his own brochure.

After that meeting, Graeme, a Victorian, joined Gabriela in Europe — she is from Germany — and they spent two-and-a-half years combining their love of nature walking and good food in the famous walking areas of Germany, France and Switzerland.

With the decision to return to live in Australia came the decision to throw in their collective professions — accountancy, nursing and retail fashion — and run their own business.

What began as a slide show for friends in Germany, became the innovative idea that is today giving both Graeme and Gabriela a living and a truly enjoyable, successful personal lifestyle.

The Melbourne-based tours' season begins in mid-September and runs through until the end of May each year, during which time they personally conduct around four weekend and/or weekend-plus (either including a Friday or a Monday) tours to areas such as Daylesford, the Great Ocean Road, Wilson's Promontory and the Grampians. Each Wednesday there are one-day adventures to several of the same areas and other interesting areas closer to Melbourne — like Phillip Island, Cape Schanck and even a Picnic at Hanging Rock. And, June and July this year sees them conducting twelve-day Gourmet Walking Adventures throughout the European Triangle.

When this year's brochure was put together only two twelve-day tours were listed. These have been fully booked for some time, so a third tour was arranged — there are only two places left!

Despite this overwhelming success, both Graeme and Gabriela are quite determined not to lose sight of what they have always seen as the secret of their tours — the personalised service, and both are adamant that they just don't want to be stuck in an office running the tours.

For the 1989/1990 season they are streamlining their tours to eliminate camping altogether and have found delightful ‘alternate’ accommodation in lodges, guest-houses and on farms in and around the areas they visit.

It also allows them to include other leisurely and optional activities, like cycling and gentle canoeing for beginners.

“We've always said that even the walking each day is optional,” said Gabriela, “We just want people to enjoy themselves, and several bring artist's materials, or cameras, or want to horse-ride or would prefer to sit and read a book for a day and we're more than happy to arrange this.”

Sounds idyllic, doesn't it?



Photography: Ron Robertson — Impressions