



ADVENTURE
WORKS
TRAINING & EDUCATION | EST 2001

Career Guide

A brief introduction to the Outdoor
Adventure Sector



Who works in this industry ?

People working in the outdoors are a diverse bunch, who tend to share certain skills such as leadership, planning and decision-making, a sense of environmental stewardship or kaitiakitanga, and a strong awareness of health and safety. People who work in this industry also tend to be people oriented. They want to share their love of the outdoors and be a part of others having their own adventures. There is one strong theme that connects everybody in this industry and that is a love of the outdoors and the learning opportunities that are possible for ourselves as instructors and the people that we will lead.

What sort of jobs are there ?

Most employers of outdoor instructors are small to medium-sized businesses. Most businesses have a specific specialised focus that is their core area of delivery. It could be based around a specific activity such as guiding or instructing sea kayaking, rock climbing, whitewater kayaking, tramping, mountain biking and caving. Or, the business may have a specific specialised focus around a type of client and their needs. It could be a provider of outdoor education services to junior or senior students at schools, corporate clients participating in outdoor team building activities or adventure therapy using outdoor activities for health and well-being outcomes. There are some bigger companies that provide a range of activities to a range of clients such as Outward Bound and Hillary Outdoors.

What are the employment options?

Employment options are as far ranging as the type of jobs. The main options for employment are as a contractor or an employee.

Outdoor Recreation Career Guide

Contractors get the benefit of being able to choose the work they take on and generally have a large variety of interesting work options available to them. Contractors can focus on providing services and activities that they particularly enjoy and get a lot of value from. As a contractor you get to say yes or no to work that is offered. Contractors are responsible for their own professional development, they generally operate as a sole trader and manage their own tax affairs. Contractors generally develop relationships with a few businesses in the area that they live. They maintain this relationship through their professionalism, in order to get enough work and become an integral part of a small businesses services and delivery. The downside of contracting is that there is less predictability and security. However, this tends to suit people that don't want to be tied into employment.

There are a couple of different ways of being an employee. One is having a permanent position with a set number of hours and the other is being casual and not having a set number of hours. The benefit of being an employee is having the protection that comes with having an employment agreement. This could be a benefit if you find a place you really love working for. The disadvantage of this is that work may become repetitive with reduced opportunities for growth.

If you find a business that has a vision and mission that you align with and commit yourself to that vision and mission there will be opportunities come your way for sure.

There are a few instructor characteristics that go a long way in a small business. Your willingness to learn, your willingness to take on a range of tasks and responsibilities, your ability to work well with others in adverse conditions, your ability to follow systems, your willingness to communicate what is working or not working in your role, your ability to solve problems and identify problems that need to be solved and your attitude to supporting people through their own struggles. These are all qualities that go a very long way in a small to medium size business.

What skills or qualifications do you need?

Most outdoor businesses are subject to the Adventure Activities Regulations 2016. This means that they legal need to operate with a Safety Management System. This ensures participants that are being exposed to risks are safe in their participation. The best way for an organisation to meet its safety responsibilities is to employ staff and contractors that hold nationally recognised qualifications. Skills active is the industry training organisation for the outdoor recreation sector. Skills active has developed a suite of outdoor instructor qualifications that have been developed by industry for industry. They include

- Level 3 assistant outdoor leadership certificate, 40 credits
- Level 4 certificate in outdoor and adventure education, multi strand 120 credits
- Level 5 certificate in outdoor and adventure education, multi strand 120 credits
- Level 4 outdoor leader award 60 credits, single-strand
- Level 5 outdoor leader award 80 credits, single-strand.

The strands include sea kayaking, whitewater kayaking, mountain biking, rock climbing, abseiling, bush tramping, alpine and caving.

Outdoor Recreation Career Guide

The levels define the type of environment that can be safely operated in. The higher the level, the more dynamic, challenging and remote. The levels also define the level of supervision that you need as an instructor. Level 4 leaders should be operating with a supervisor nearby, level 5 instructors should be able to operate independently within the scope of the qualification.

These qualifications can either be delivered while you are in a workplace or through a Tertiary Training provider such as us. The benefit of a nationally recognised qualification for contractors is that the employer knows exactly the scope of competence that the qualification defines and can confidently put an instructor into environments and activities that are going to be managed competently and safely. The benefit for the contractor and employee is that they are far more valuable and desirable for small and medium-sized businesses to employ.

What future opportunities does this create

Because most outdoor businesses are small to medium-sized there are always changing work opportunities and responsibilities. The diverse opportunities in outdoor business naturally leads people towards opportunities for their own further development and growth. The skills developed working in the outdoor industry are easily transferable and valuable to all sorts of other sectors.

Outdoor Recreation Career Guide

However there is one main set of skills that is developed and depend working in the outdoor sector... Leadership. Leadership is the ability to support a group of people or individuals towards a more desirable state. People participate in the outdoors because they want to learn skills, experience our natural environment, enjoy the social aspect, learn about themselves and grow. To be a leader creating these opportunities for others requires a diverse set of extremely valuable skills. Understanding how to apply leadership models, understanding personal and group development processes, facilitating the growth of individuals and also group difficulties and conflicts, having a deep understanding of the particular type of environment and activity and being able to make decisions on the spot in dynamic environments to ensure safety and manage risk.

Working in the outdoor sector opens the door to a wide range of other opportunities and careers. Environmental sustainability, para-medicine, education and teacher, adventure therapist, adventure tourism, uniform services, land search and rescue, organisational development and team development, youth work and social work, small business and enterprise development, community sport and fitness, advocacy for recreation and conservation, management and leadership.

So, are you ready to take the next step and start a career adventure of your own?

