

CEO Commentary

Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot for the year ending September 2014



With 2014 drawing to a close, I am pleased to see that Tassie is continuing to achieve positive results in terms of visitor numbers, nights being spent in the state, visitor spending and holiday arrivals.

Figures from the Tasmanian Visitor Survey for the 12 months to September 2014 show that around 1 062 700 interstate and international visitors came to Tasmania on regular air and sea passenger services during this period. This was around 6 per cent more than the number of people who visited us during the same period last year.

It represents a new record for visitor numbers to Tasmania in a 12 month period, albeit only slightly more than in the past couple of surveys. What is just as pleasing is that they spent more while they were here and stayed a bit longer.

For example, when compared to the same period last year, total visitor expenditure throughout Tasmania from October 2013 to September this year grew by 15 per cent to \$1.74 billion. The total nights our visitors spent in the state during the financial year also grew by 8 per cent to around 9.35 million nights, and their average length of stay rose slightly from 8.6 to 8.8 nights.

Given that Tourism Tasmania's destination marketing is aimed at the holiday and leisure travel market, we are pleased with the number of holiday travellers coming to Tassie. Of course, marketing holidays to Tasmania is a collective effort, so our partnerships with airlines, commercial travel partners, regional tourism organisations and others have played an equally important role in achieving the results we are seeing. These partnerships will continue to be a feature of our marketing efforts in 2015.

Like last quarter, the standout performer for Tassie during the year to September 2014 was Queensland with a gain of 20 per cent in visitor numbers. Visitors from Queensland are more likely on average to spend more and stay here longer, and I think this is being reflected in our current figures. It certainly reinforces the value of our continued marketing efforts in Queensland, to capitalise on the additional airline capacity out of Brisbane.

The latest Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot also continues to reveal the important role that our air and sea carriers play in the overall success of the industry, with both air travel and the Spirits of Tasmania seeing growth of 5 and 10 per cent respectively. With the resurgence in sea passengers and holiday travellers, it is not surprising that our regions have been seeing positive results in the past few quarters, and the latest figures show that this has continued. They show that the South, East, North and Cradle Coast regions grew by 7, 18, 6 and 9 per cent respectively.

These are all good numbers, however it would be prudent to not take this level of growth for granted in future quarters. As passenger loads on existing air and sea services increase further, and accommodation supply constrains growth in some parts of the state during peak periods, it would be no surprise to see these levels of growth softening without further changes to access and accommodation infrastructure.

From a demand perspective, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that demand for travel to Tasmania remains strong, and with recent high profile events and accolades, this demand may get even stronger. Tourism Tasmania has certainly been playing its part on raising Tassie's profile in our main domestic and international markets, and that is why the latest results for Tasmania regarding international holiday visitors are also pleasing.

According to the International Visitor Survey, the number of overseas visitors who came to Tasmania between October 2013 and September 2014 increased by 8 per cent to 167 800 visitors. This is a record number of international visitors to Tasmania, and like the previous figures for the 2013-14 financial year, this growth was mainly driven by a substantial 13 per cent increase in visitors coming here specifically for the purpose of holidaying in the state.

It is great to see that most of our key international markets contributed to this growth with the UK, USA, New Zealand, Germany and our Asian markets all showing solid results. Almost 53 000 visitors came to Tasmania during this period from our four most important Asian markets of China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, and I am confident that the visit to Tasmania in November by President Xi Jinping and the First Lady will deliver significant long-term tourism and trade benefits for our state.

Our state's profile as a travel destination gained an unprecedented boost from this visit, when millions of Chinese viewers saw them arrive and spend time in Tasmania. More than 100 million people followed his visit on Chinese social media website Weibo, and more than 200 million people watched his visit through Chinese TV and online news.

Not only is his visit expected to generate more visitors in the coming months and years, but Lonely Planet's recent ranking of Tasmania in the top five regions in the world to visit in 2015, will also create renewed interest for holidays in our state.

We will certainly be making the most of Lonely Planet's announcement through our marketing activities next year, and we will also be pursuing opportunities to generate more tourism out of China and other Asian markets, following the extensive profile Tasmania received from President Xi's visit.

Of course, we can't forget the other event in November that brought around 86 of the world's most influential food and wine personalities and media from around the world to Tasmania for *Restaurant Australia's* 'Invite the World to Dinner' gala event.

It was an incredible opportunity to showcase everything our state is renowned for – fresh produce, great beverages, amazing surroundings and great hospitality. The buzz throughout the crowd that night was electrifying and with the guests commanding a social and media reach of over 400 million people worldwide, I know we have created many new influential foot-soldiers for Tasmania across the globe.

Right now, Tassie's main tourism season is in full swing, and with all the events of recent months as well as the Cricket World Cup in March, I look forward to sharing more positive news during 2015.

With all that has been going on in Tasmanian tourism during 2014, I can safely say that the well-used cliché about Tasmania being 'Australia's best kept secret' no longer applies. 2014 has undoubtedly seen a very bright spotlight turned in our direction, and we look forward to capitalising on this in 2015.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire team at Tourism Tasmania, I hope your light shines brightly in 2015 and I wish you and your families a safe and a happy Christmas.

John Fitzgerald
CEO, Tourism Tasmania