

CEO Commentary

Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot for the year ending March 2014



It's pleasing to see that the latest set of results from the Tasmanian Visitor Survey show that Tasmania is continuing on its pathway towards achieving the State Government's ambitious 1.5 million visitor target.

The latest results show that almost 1.06 million interstate and international visitors came to Tasmania on regular air and sea passenger services during the 12 months to the end of March 2014. This is again 14 per cent higher than the same period the previous year, and so far, it is the most number of visitors our state has ever recorded in a single 12 month period.

Again, we saw solid growth in visitor numbers from Victoria, NSW, Queensland and some overseas markets, which was supported by a 4 per cent increase in airline seat capacity to Tasmania across the four major direct air routes between Melbourne, Sydney, Launceston and Hobart over the 12 months to March 2014.

Of particular interest was the much stronger 11 per cent increase we saw in the total number of seats available on flights between Tasmania and Sydney over the 12 month period, which would have helped considerably in achieving the 24 per cent increase we saw in visitors coming to Tasmania from this very important domestic market for us.

Naturally, we not only need to market the state effectively to our potential holiday visitors in our key mainland and overseas markets, but we also need to have the flights and sailings to get the additional travellers here. In this regard, it is wonderful to see the positive commitment our carriers are making to Tasmanian tourism by providing more choices for visitors to come here and enjoy the various events and other great tourism experiences we put on.

This is particularly evident through the very strong 24 per cent growth we saw in the number of holiday visitors who came to the state over this period.

It was also great to see our visitors spending more while they were here. During the 12 months to March 2014, the 1.06 million visitors who came here spent a total of around \$1.68 billion during their stay. That's 17 per cent more than the same period the previous year. But just as importantly it showed that on average, each visitor was spending more while they were here.

The latest tourism figures also reveal that the total visitor nights being spent in the state during this period grew to around 9.14 million nights, or about 1 million more nights than the same time the previous year. Not only that, but the average length of stay for each visitor was pretty much similar to the previous year. So clearly, many of our visitors still see Tasmania as a place for the longer touring holiday and getting out into our regional areas.

Also as predicted, I am pleased to see the Spirit of Tasmania's yearly results for the year to March 2014 moving in to positive territory with a 9 per cent increase in travellers using the service during this period, compared with the same period last year.

It's great to see an increase in travellers using the service, and this can only be expected to improve in the months and years ahead with the changes being made to their operations by the State Government. As I said last time, their return to positive passenger growth is good news for our regions, because they especially benefit from these passengers.

The latest figures support this, In fact, all regions saw double-digit growth with around 13 per cent more people visiting southern Tasmania, 20 per cent more people heading to the east coast, 12 per cent more visitors checking out the north, and 10 per cent more visitors exploring the Cradle Coast region between April 2013 and March this year.

I imagine many operators throughout our regions have seen more business as a result of all the extra holiday visitors coming to Tasmania by air and sea. The feedback I have received from local operators during my travels throughout the state suggests that most have had a pretty decent season. And even though we have now moved into the normally quieter part of our year in terms of visitor numbers, we are still working hard to keep the momentum going.

For example, phase three of our *Go Behind the Scenery* campaign, which finished back in early April, was heavily oriented towards convincing those who are thinking about a holiday here, to actually book a Tassie holiday during autumn or for winter. There were plenty of deals and offers promoted by our national air and retail travel partners during this campaign, and the feedback we received about the Tasmanian sales they generated was very positive.

However our marketing effort didn't end there. During April and May we conducted a three-week national promotion to give away \$500 000 of return seats to Tasmania on Qantas flights in June, July and August. The aim of the promotion was to highlight some of the state's winter events, get people talking about Tasmania with their friends and family across Australia, and get people down to find out for themselves why our winters are so special.

Although it was a huge logistical challenge, our Cheeky Tassie Half Million Dollar Seat Giveaway was a great success, with more than 2 500 return seats given away via three events - a giant game of musical chairs in Sydney's Circular Quay, a national online competition, and at the Hawthorn versus St Kilda match at the MCG in early May.

During the campaign, our promotional website received over 82,000 individual visitors. Tasmanian itineraries were viewed over 44,000 times and perhaps the most pleasant outcome from the seat giveaway was that the average length of stay requested by the winners was five nights. Naturally we hope this means people will be travelling beyond our city gateways and events to explore our regional areas.

Tasmanian tourism has seen a lot of good news lately, and judging by the number of tourism development and investment projects getting underway or being touted right now, it seems there's plenty of potential for us to maintain our trajectory towards the target of 1.5 million visitors per annum by 2020.

As many of you would know, from 1 July, Tourism Tasmania will be moving from under the former Department of Economic Development to become an independent State Authority with the primary responsibility for marketing the state and attracting more visitors to Tasmania.

We look forward to sharing more news with you during our transition to a State Authority, including the tourism marketing initiatives that we have planned for the coming year to deliver on our 5-year marketing strategy, attract even more visitors to the state, and achieve the State Government's visitor target.

John Fitzgerald
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