

# CEO Commentary

## Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot for the year ending September 2013



Tourism remains a very dynamic, challenging and competitive global industry, and for this reason all Tasmanian tourism operators should feel buoyed by the results of the latest Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot as we head into 2014.

For starters, we all should be feeling more positive about another record number of visitors arriving in our state by air and sea. This has to be generating extra business for more Tasmanian tourism and hospitality operators, and it certainly is the kind of number I would want to see as we start into our new year.

The latest results for the 12 months to the end of September 2013 show that just over 1 million interstate and international visitors came to the state on regular air and sea services during that period. That's 15 per cent more visitors than for the same period the previous year.

What is most significant about this number is that it is the first time ever that Tasmania has seen more than one million people arrive here on regular air and sea services. In the past, the 'one million visitor' figure has been reached with the inclusion of cruise ship visitors, whose numbers are recorded separately by Tasports. This is the first time we have achieved the milestone without the help of our cruise ship visitors, and that makes it even more special.

Again, most of the growth in these visitor figures has come from our 'bread and butter' domestic travel markets of Victoria and NSW. And while I had said in my previous commentary that Queensland had not contributed to the growth in visitor numbers last financial year, our new figures show that the sunshine state has played its part in this record result.

This is good news, and I am confident that with the extra \$1 million we have to promote Tasmania in Queensland this year and the increase in direct flights from Brisbane, we will see even more Queensland visitors coming here in 2014.

The latest Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot also saw total visitor nights spent in the state increase to around 8.6 million nights, or about 8 per cent more nights than the same period in 2012. Although this translates into a slightly shorter average length of stay of 8.5 nights for each visitor, I am pleased to say it is only marginally less than last year's average. This tells me that while some people may be coming for shorter breaks, others are still enjoying longer than average trips here, which naturally benefits our regional areas.

I am also pleased to see our interstate and overseas visitors continuing to spend up while they're here, with around \$1.51 billion being spent in Tasmania during the 12 months to September 2013. This is around 11 per cent more than the same period in 2012. It's another really good result and shows that we continue to head in the right direction when it comes to achieving our \$2 billion annual visitor spend goal in Tourism 21.

Unfortunately, when we have announced the state's record tourism results on previous occasions, some members of the local community have made ill-informed remarks suggesting that the figures include Tasmanians or local fly-in fly-out workers returning home.

I would like to reassure our industry that this is not the case. The Tasmanian Visitor Survey (TVS) is an exit survey that interviews people when they're leaving the state. This means we identify and only survey people who have been visiting Tasmania - not locals leaving the state. Anyone who wants to know more about how we conduct and manage the survey can visit [www.tourismtasmania.com.au/research/tvs](http://www.tourismtasmania.com.au/research/tvs).

However, I would like to emphasise that not only do we use a large survey sample to ensure the results are statistically sound, but we also use a methodology, overseen by global research specialists Roy Morgan Research, to make sure we deliver high quality, robust and reliable results that accurately represent the number and behaviour of visitors who are coming to our state.

So there's every reason to feel confident and buoyed by the latest annual figures as well as Tasmania's outstanding results between July and September, which include a 29 per cent increase in visitors, when compared with same quarter back in 2012.

Not only did we see around 45 000 more interstate and international visitors come to Tasmania during what is usually our quietest quarter for the year, but we also saw a strong jump in visitors travelling to Tasmania on the Spirits of Tasmania and by air during that period, as well as a substantial increase in visitors to all our regions.

However it's no great surprise that we were able to achieve this kind of growth.

Most of our visitors get here by airline, and in the September 2013 quarter our major airlines put on around 44 500 extra seats each way on the main Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Launceston routes, compared with the same period in 2012.

Of course, putting on extra seat capacity is one thing, but people also need reasons to travel here if we are going to fill them. In my opinion, there seemed to be more reasons than ever for people to come here during this period due to the plethora of sporting and cultural events being staged throughout the state.

And although the total number of visitors who travelled here by sea over the entire 12 months was down a little on the previous year, we now have seen very positive signs in the last two quarters of a recovery in sea travel.

For example, the Spirit of Tasmania recorded a substantial 22 per cent jump in passenger numbers between July and September 2013 compared with the same quarter a year earlier. It is also good to hear reports about the growth in their forward bookings. If this trend continues, we could expect to see total annual passenger numbers on the Spirit of Tasmania return to positive territory during the year.

The latest figures also show that more people visited the Southern, Northern, East Coast and the Cradle Coast regions during the 12 months to September 2013, compared with the previous year. It's a marked improvement on past results and the quarterly statistics for the regions were even better. They showed the total number of people visiting our four regions grew in the September quarter by double-digit figures as high as 38 per cent, compared with the same quarter in 2012.

While I naturally hope that all operators saw more business as a result of these extra visitors, I appreciate that not everyone might have. However it is good to see more people were getting out into our regional areas and I hope that we can keep this momentum going in 2014.

Regional dispersal is important to us, and through our own marketing efforts as well as those of our travel partners and regional tourism organisations, we will continue to encourage visitors to explore more of the state.

However it is also important for us all to recognise that the holidays many Australians are taking in their own country are not the same as the ones they took in the past. National tourism authorities and researchers remind us that the average length of interstate holidays taken by Australians has become shorter over the last decade.

With people generally having less time to spend on a holiday, many visitors who come to Tasmania now have to decide how far they can travel in the state and how much they can see or do in the time they have available. Our regional tourism partners play an important role in getting travellers to spend more time in their patch, and we will continue to look at ways to support them with this.



We too are responding to changes in people's holiday and travel behaviour, and especially how they get information, opinions and ideas about travel and destinations. The new Discover Tasmania website, which will be going live in a matter of weeks, will showcase our state in new and better ways in an ever-changing and more mobile digital world.

Phase 3 of our *Go Behind the Scenery* campaign this Autumn will also be in full swing in weeks as well. The campaign will continue to build on the success of our past two seasonal campaigns, but will also include a substantial cooperative marketing program with national air and retail partners over the coming months to boost pre-winter bookings.

It is evident that over the past 12 months our growing collection of top-class tourism experiences, our increased air capacity and our well-targeted marketing efforts have combined to deliver some standout tourism results for this state.

But it doesn't end there. We still need to convince more of those who are thinking about a holiday here, to take the next step and actually book their Tassie holiday.

While these latest results are purely historical and show how our state performed for a large part of last year, I am buoyed by recent reports from the Spirit of Tasmania about their increased forward bookings. I am also heartened by the greatly improved sales results our air and retail travel partners reported from their recent cooperative marketing campaigns with us.

All this suggests that the prognosis for our tourism industry in early 2014 appears very positive. Naturally, I hope the benefits will flow to all tourism operators throughout the state.

**John Fitzgerald**  
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