

New Spirit opens opportunities for Gippsland



WITH the refurbished Spirit of Tasmania I and 11 increasing the number of day crossings to and from Tasmania Gippsland tourism has a unique opportunity to attract visitors from Tasmania while Gippslanders can more easily enjoy the many attractions of the island state.

According to TT-Line chief executive officer Bernard Dwyer the refurbishments completed on Spirit of Tasmania I will enhance the passenger experience, particularly for passengers travelling by day.

This increased focus on day crossings is the result of the Tasmanian government's stated aim of increasing visitations

to the island state to 1.5 million by 2020, and with the extra crossings also boosting incoming tourism from Tasmania opening opportunities for Gippsland accommodation providers to put together touring packages.

Tasmanian tourists making the day time crossing in the coming summer months have plenty of daylight time to escape Melbourne's mad rush and enjoy accommodation in Gippsland.

Mr Dwyer said passenger numbers had increased in 2014/15 compared to the previous financial year and forward bookings in 2015/16 were already very positive.

Importantly, an additional 33 day sailings have been scheduled for 2015/16, and

bookings are already being made for these sailings.

In addition the TT-Line's business plan shows fares will likely reduce by an average of 14.8 per cent over the next four years.

"We are particularly pleased that day sailing forward bookings have more than doubled compared to the same time last year," he said.

"And we are confident that our passenger numbers will increase further following the commencement of the service by both refurbished vessels."

Speaking at the official unveiling of the 'new' Spirit of Tasmania I in Melbourne earlier this month Mr Dwyer congratulated contractor Trimline and TT-Line staff for their collective work in delivering the refurbished Spirit of Tasmania I on time and on budget.

The total project to refurbish both vessels is expected to cost \$31 million.

"It was a complicated task given that some of the works were required while maintaining the overnight sailing schedule," he said.

"But the works were well planned and well executed. And we are clearly delighted with the final product."

Mr Dwyer said all passenger decks, including cabins, had been remodelled and refreshed.

"The new bars, facilities and amenities introduced will enhance the on-board passenger experience," he said.

In addition to the new decor in all cabins, and the vastly improved recliner lounge with its brand new comfortable recliners, equipped with individual reading lights, tray table, and USB port travellers will appreciate the new self-service restaurant area,



The dining area at TMK.

TMK - Tasmanian Market Kitchen, offering a fresh selection of crowd favourites including a Tasmanian signature dish of the day.

There is also a 'grab and go' shop, The Pantry, offering a wide range of convenient food and beverage options and Tasmanian products.

Two new cinemas screening latest release movies add to entertainment options during the voyage.

Deluxe cabins have been fully refurbished and new soft furnishings provided in all other cabins.

The most noticeable changes are the stylish internal décor, lighting and colour schemes, most appreciated on the fully transformed upper decks with astro turf flooring, deck chairs and stylish lounges.

Live acoustic music was provided until 11pm on the refurbished Deck Nine during our crossing, although it was hard to understand why the Terrace Bar closed at 9.30pm while the entertainment continued, meaning a walk to Deck 10 or Deck 7 if a drink was required.

Family entertainment includes an arcade-style teen zone and a kids play area, 28 new flat-screen TVs located throughout

the ships, a restful reading area without the distraction of televisions and for adults three stylish new bars (Bar 7, Top Deck Lounge and Terrace Bar) which showcase Tasmanian wines, ciders and beers along with a variety of bar snacks.

Tourist information is provided with a dedicated hub to assist passengers to plan their holiday and travellers will be able to access WiFi connection across Bass Strait.

Regular travellers will enjoy the more spacious, brighter and better equipped lounges, each offering different television themes.

However those with a nostalgia for the former Leatherwood Restaurant and deeper pockets will miss the attentive dining staff waiting on their table. That area is now the restful reading room.

Spirit of Tasmania II's refurbishment is being completed on the Bass Strait run and in port with both ships fully refurbished by the end of August.

- Destination Gippsland was approached for comment. The writer travelled courtesy of TT Line.

The 4 x 10 ad GP1482360 for DISPLAY *VCPA is missing or incomplete.



The bright Top Deck Lounge offers stunning ocean views during day and early evening crossings.

The 4 x 18 ad GP1482428 for Allied Bearings & Industrial is missing or incomplete.

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