

Tourism's winter boom

KITTY BARR

TOURISM in regional SA has boomed this winter and regional tourist operators have recorded record high occupancy rates for July.

An average occupancy rate of 57 per cent was an increase from pre-Covid levels of 50 per cent.

Regions which exceeded pre-Covid levels were Eyre and Yorke peninsulas, Limestone Coast, and the wine regions of the Adelaide Hills, Barossa and Clare valleys.

Operators in the Hills, Barossa and Clare recorded an average occupancy rate of 60 per cent while Eyre and Yorke

peninsulas averaged 65 per cent. Tourism Minister Zoe Bettison said the figures were "just unheard of".

"This is data and figures we have never seen before in South Australia," Ms Bettison said at Discovery Parks Hahndorf Resort on Saturday.

"We can see that people are still excited about being in SA, we've got pent-up demand, we've got people from interstate, the July school holidays all lead into people spending time in our beautiful state."

Ms Bettison said she expected demand in tourism to continue with the October long weekend and September school holidays coming up.



Holidaymakers Lydia, Jacinta and Damon Atterton at Discovery Parks Hahndorf Resort. Picture: Keryn Stevens

"We know South Australian's really love discovering their own backyard ... we see that continues and goes for-

ward," she said. "Regional tourism has been the powerhouse through the pandemic and these latest results show

that visitor demand for regional SA is staying strong.

"We can expect regional demand to grow even stronger as we work to recover our state's once \$8.1bn visitor economy."

Grant Wickens, chief executive of G'Day Group which owns 46 Discovery and G'Day parks across SA, said it had been a busy winter.

"Covid delivered a regional travel boom and it hasn't slowed down with July visitor numbers even stronger than the year prior across our SA portfolio of properties," Mr Wickens said.

"Covid actually promoted people to not travel overseas, obviously because they

couldn't, or travel interstate and people got to explore their own backyard."

Mr Wickens said bookings were already "very strong" for the parks in the September school holidays and up to Christmas.

"The message is, yes, bookings are strong but it also means that if you want to get a holiday, get in quick," he said.

"The tourism recovery has given us plenty of confidence to invest.

"While fuel prices may be rising and international borders have opened, the demand for regional road trips has remained strong and is expected to into the future."

Every dog can have its day (and overnight)

ARJ GANESAN

A SOUTH-EAST hotel has set tongues wagging after adding dog-friendly rooms in a million-dollar upgrade.

Mount Gambier Hotel said the paw-some news had been welcomed by travellers who loved roaming with their four-legged friends.

The family-owned hotel is run by the Matthews Group and its general manager of hospitality Lee Cook said the new offering had been a howling success.

"Dog ownership hit record highs during Covid and we've found there's an increasing desire for patrons to holiday with their four-legged friend," he said.

Dog-friendly rooms include a custom-made velvet bed that matches their owner's bed, special cushions, blankets, mats and dog bowls.

Guests can also enjoy a meal with their canine pal on an outdoor balcony or take them to the hotel's gated dog park.

"The dog-friendly accommodation was fully booked during the recent school holidays and is occupied most weekends," Mr Cook said.

The \$1,122,500 upgrade was part-funded by a \$336,740 Tourism Industry Development Fund grant.

Though guests, four-legged and otherwise, are encouraged to make themselves at home, Mr Cook said "excessive barking isn't tolerated".

Pippa the dog at the hotel. Picture: Supplied

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