

TASMANIA

On the journey into Tasmania we encountered rough seas. In order to get there from Sydney we have to cross the Bass Strait, which has notoriously turbulent waters, so this was no surprise. In fact we remember our first visit to Devonport a year ago - rough seas again!

So, instead of arriving at 09.00, it was 12 noon when we docked, and which left less time to spend there - we had to be back onboard by 17.30. We had planned to share a taxi with Tony and Sheila to the MaraKoopas Caves, stopping on the way back at the Don Railway. We soon realised that the caves were too far away, and that we would take the taxi straight to the Don Railway. A nice newish Ford Falcon drove us there, for the princely sum of AU\$14 - around £7 in total for four people!

It is a preserved railway, using standard gauge track, and using renovated rolling stock - some pre-war and some just after. They use both steam and diesel engines - steam on Sundays and special days, and diesel on weekdays. For our two o'clock train ride, we were the only 4 passengers, so the friendly driver invited us into his cab where he demonstrated the controls and various other mechanisms.



Our train was powered by a diesel engine built by the UK firm of Gardiner - who also provided engines for most of our buses during the 1950's and earlier. The carriages on our train were locally built, and their rounded corners and lines reminded us

of the 1950's airstream designs used in the USA.

The track is 3kms in length and runs alongside the Don River - we half expected to see crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks. It is a rural suburb of Devonport, so not many houses at all, and house prices far cheaper than in the UK. In this quiet area we passed a local cricket team playing, all resplendent in colourful outfits.

Back at the station we were given a tour of the engine sheds and workshops, and spent time browsing their unique souvenirs - yes we bought a few items. The station housed a table and chairs, and we were provided with free tea and coffee. At this time some buses arrived, coach parties from the Van Gogh, who all departed on the 3pm train, leaving the coach couriers at the coffee station. One of these couriers was telling us that he had taken parties of Van Gogh passengers from previous cruise trips, and when we asked him if he was still giving away "free lollies", he realised that we had met him the last time we came to Tasmania!

The taxi soon got us back into the town of Devonport, where we looked around the shops, and found a good range of sugar free sweets and chocolates to take back onboard with us. We also found a good local pub called the "Mersey View" - the river estuary we were berthed at was of course the Rive Mersey!

Back on board for our 6pm departure, and dinner at 6.30. OK, we had to sail out into the Bass Strait before turning westwards to Fremantle in Western Australia, so we expected the rough water again. What we did not expect was that this time it would be twice as rough, last all night, and is still raging away now as we approach the end of the day as well! The outer decks are closed to all passengers, and the ship's calendar of activities changed to all the sedentary ones! We have been told that this weather or storm more likely - will be with us for the foreseeable future!!!

