

From Gisela Gmeinder – Note that the following has been published as a holiday supplement to Grapevine Vol. 37, Issue 1; December 2025

The Spirit of a Bass Strait Crossing

A conference attendance took me to Launceston early December and I thoroughly enjoyed revisiting the Cataract Gorge where peacocks roam and the very historic Princess Theatre there. In fact just about the whole town is historic and brimmed with Xmas decorations everywhere - and in this setting it felt 'right' rather than Kitsch or overdone. And of course it's cooler there.



Then onward by bus in an hour to Devonport and overnight to catch the Spirit of Tasmania the next morning - mooring 500 meters across the water on the other side.

The little ferry that used to connect is gone and I wasn't up to the 45-60 min or so (locals have no idea of walking distances) walk around the nearest bridge.



But I chanced upon a very friendly RACT (RAC Tasmania) man in the morning who said he didn't mind at all to 'chuck' me over there. He had lived in Perth for a little while but it got too hot and busy for him there.

By the way I met a few 'climate refugees' along the way who had moved from interstate to Tassie for that reason.

The boat trip was great - relaxing, calm seas, fresh air, various spaces to sit - with a bit of entertainment on offer (a guitarist and movies, the latter now paid previously free apparently). I was content to sit and write Xmas cards, wander around and watch the sea. Other than a few sea birds no wild life to be seen.

The route cuts straight up and then hugs the Victorian coast to Geelong. There you can see the new Spirit of Tasmania waiting for her berth in Devonport to be built (they forgot about that detail when ordering the boats) - the second new ferry is held back at the shipyard in Scotland still.

I was disappointed that the arrival had been shifted from Port Melbourne to Geelong 3 years or so ago but it worked out ok as there are regular trains to Melbourne (half hourly). However there are no transfer services, call your own taxi or Uber - or, as in my case, pick up your bag and walk to the closest train station which is Geelong North Shore.

It helps to have a MyKi transport card which the automat on the platform should provide. I was prepared and had my own. Then it's an hour to Southern Cross Station and free trams all December and January in the city.

I met a couple of friends, recommend the Old Baths in town and the Fairfield Boathouse if you've never been there. But everyone goes for their own reason and interests. A certain hit however was the 'Love Actually' parody stage show in the old Atheneum, even if you never saw the movie (I hadn't).



The flight to Perth brought it home again how much of a desert and other landscapes lie between East and West (also great views of the Bight) and how we cling onto a narrow strip of land along the Indian Ocean.

Gisela