

King Island - Straddling The Strait

King Island lies at the western entrance to Bass Strait, midway between Victoria and mainland Tasmania in the 'roaring forties' latitude.

Statistical overview

	Total Population	Internet use	
		At home	From Any Site
King Island	1656	18%	29%
Remote Tasmania	13,105	16%	26%
Tasmania	456,693	22%	34%

King Island was just one of four communities in Tasmania defined as a remote area in the 2001 Census. Of these, King Island had the highest level of Internet use with 18 per cent of the Island's population using the Internet at home and 29 per cent from any site during Census week. Levels of Internet use on King Island were 6-8 percentage points lower than for Tasmania as a whole. While the age and income profiles of the population of King Island are similar to remote Tasmania overall, King Island has a higher proportion of families comprised of a couple with children.

Background

King Island shows the benefits of a strong synergy between a community development project and a forward-looking tourism board. The small community of about 1800 people is mostly engaged in high quality beef and dairy farming. Cray fishing is also an important industry and abalone, giant crab and oysters are exported from the island. Kelp harvesting, an abattoir and a cheese factory complement the peaceful green image that attracts many tourists.

Tops for Tourism

Two key web sites for the island provide complementary functions, and cross-link to each other. Overall, the tourism and community sites reveal a community with more action per capita than most in their region. Tourism is a major driver of the local economy. Local events like the King Island Imperial 20, a marathon race held in March each year, the Queenscliff to Grassy Yacht Race and the King Island Open Golf Tournament draw annual attention. The Island's serene environment, natural beauty and wealth of history are also key tourist attractions. The marketing ability of the Internet has helped this small isolated island at the bottom of the world to become an appealing and prosperous holiday destination.

Today's travellers expect to be able to research, book and pay for their travel and accommodation before arriving. King Island tourism not only provides this, but through a unique cooperative venture the island's tourism businesses have gone one step further and

created a centralised one stop [Tourism website](#). Photographs, pricing breakdowns, availability information and bookings for all of King Island's holiday destinations and attractions are provided on the site. This gives holiday-makers fast convenient 24-hour access to information, reservations and payment. The self-serve nature of Internet communications also means that managing the booking dates etc is in the hands of the holiday-maker, while the database of each hotel, bed and breakfast establishment, boat house etc is automatically updated as online bookings are made.

The convenience of researching and organising a holiday online has been a strong element in King Island's tourism success and has also brought noticeable cost saving for business owners. The shared facility initially channels all payments through a single account, markedly reducing the transaction and banking costs for each provider. Visitors can interlink the accommodation, activities and services (such as car hire) of a range of businesses into one holiday and one convenient payment. The success of this online partnership has also translated into a range of offline business joint ventures that further strengthen the Island's economic base.

Community building - Online and Off

The Island's community has also worked hard to develop strong cooperative partnerships both on and offline. The [community website](#) shows this commitment to harnessing new technology for displaying and supporting social capital. It functions very much like a community Intranet, and recognises the mobile lives of King Island residents. For example, an active visitors book and noticeboard allows locals to keep in touch with the community while away from the island and to find out what's happening on the Island at any given time.

Screening sessions at the Town Hall movie theatre are a regular feature as are exhibitions and virtual tours of King Island's features and information on community events. One of the features of the site while writing this profile was the Class of '77 reunion. The reunion was held in early 2003 and the site included meeting times, event discussions, old photographs of class members and calls for missing classmates. For class members, potential reunion organisers and others the site is definitely worth a visit.

The Community website also contains practical information about local health service providers, sport and recreation clubs, community organisations and local government. Not all of these are online, but some have e-mail addresses where further information can be requested. With 14 community groups and 12 sporting groups listed, there is every indication of high interactivity among residents. One example, the link to '[equine dentistry](#)', goes to a well-developed web site, with photos, free e-mail advice, and an online forum that discusses issues such as 'bridle teeth'.

King Island's school children use the Internet to communicate with other classes on the mainland and internationally. Basic programming and computer skills are a part of the every day curriculum. The Internet is also a valuable research tool for children and adults, with online books and journals complementing the King Island library holdings.

Ongoing adult education is an area that can be difficult to resource particularly in isolated communities. However many Australian universities offer online language classes, writing courses and distance education. Charles Sturt University offers educational resources for Higher School Certificate students and tertiary courses and other national and international universities offer online-only courses. Professionals in an isolated community must rely on strong communication between peers and industry bodies to keep abreast of changes in their field. Online periodicals and journals, discussion groups and research make the task much simpler and information can be transferred much faster than by mail. One resident said, "The Island has experienced some enormous social and economic benefits from residents completing further education without having to leave the community. Lifestyle commitments and family and farm commitments often hold people to the Island "but that's no reason to stop learning".

A Centre of Activity

Online activity on King Island is some of the strongest in the region and has in part been stimulated and constantly renewed by the education projects and activities run through the island's [Access Centre](#). Initially a telecentre, the Centre received Networking the Nation funding to assist in the set up of the facility and to support a part time community coordinator.

Like most Access Centres, the King Island centre provides residents with access to computers and the Internet, and free one-on-one training. Visitors to King Island can also use the Internet at a modest cost. This Access Centre offers a number of additional value-adding services. Skills development workshops are run through the centre and aimed at specific groups such as older residents and small businesses managers. These have greatly assisted the community to experience the benefits online services marketing and information can bring to a small community.

The Access Centre sports a large range of up-to-date equipment including graphics, web design and video editing software, a digital camera, a flight simulator and a CD burner. Access to such 'high-tech' creative tools has inspired youth on the island to make strong use of the new media. This is reflected in the [Youth Access](#) site, with its bright yellow 'Wassup?' and special events sections. The site is used to help coordinate the cartoon club, screenings of movies and general chat about projects like the new skate park mural. There is also a growing range of links to 'cool' youth sites nationally and internationally.

Help @ Home

Part of the King Island Access Centre's success in creating a technology savvy community has been its management of a help line for Internet users at home. The Access Centre's coordinator and a number of the island's IT-skilled residents have made their time and skills available to help set up new equipment and assist with problems and advice. Many of these volunteers received their initial training at the Access Centre, just one indicator of how such projects can generate social capital.

The Centre's location has been an unexpected advantage, as it is co-located with the King Island Regional Development Organisation. The tourism centre has allowed the Access Centre coordinator to set up a network of IT-skilled workers throughout the building and further afield to answer help desk calls as part of their normal work load. Scheduling of assistance by rostered helpers can then be arranged either after hours or on the spot, depending on availability. Shared responsibility and good co-ordination between volunteers has created a reliable help desk service for residents, alleviating many of the initial worries new users experience when setting up their first Internet connection. A help desk facility particularly in a small community can be the difference between a family's decision to test the Internet water today or wait another year.

Co-location has also encouraged each office to become more creative in their use of new computing technologies and certainly more sophisticated in the services they provide. Networking both physically and online has allowed many King Island organisations to take advantage of the skills and knowledge contained within the community. This has produced flow-on effects beyond each organisation and has helped to build a strong economically and socially advantageous Internet presence for King Island.

Prepared by NOIE in February 2003. Information current as at February 2003.