

## SOVEREIGN HILL TRADE NEWSLETTER, 2016

### Sovereign Hill wins National Tourism Award

It's official: Sovereign Hill is Australia's best tourist attraction!

At the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards in February, Sovereign Hill was announced the winner of the **Major Tourist Attraction** award, one of the most hotly contested and prestigious awards in this event.

This followed the win of **Victoria's Major Tourist Attraction** award in 2015 for the second year running at the RACV Victorian Tourism Awards, as well the RACV **People's Choice for Favourite Regional Attraction Experience 2015**.

Recognised as an innovative tourist attraction that has made a significant contribution to Australia's tourism industry, Sovereign Hill took the awards because of its consecutive years of increased visitor numbers, crowd-pulling events and new visitor experiences.

"We continuously strive to deliver new experiences to our visitors, and to be a major force within the goldfields tourism region. Each year, our Christmas in July program is a significant event on the regional calendar, and we're thrilled that our efforts have been recognised with these awards," says Sovereign Hill's CEO Jeremy Johnson.

Sovereign Hill's service culture, sound business plan, strategic marketing program and its close involvement with the local community also placed us well ahead of other very high profile attractions around Australia.

Our outdoor museum has won the Major Tourist Attraction Award many times in the past, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2005 after three consecutive wins.

### China fashion event draws international praise

Capitalising on the fascination visitors have for our 1850s costumed characters, Sovereign Hill hosts a major annual competition in which fashion design students from Chinese universities research and create an extravagant formal gown and accessories for a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century lady.

The brainchild of Jessica Xue, our International Marketing Manager, the competition has attracted a growing number of entries since it was launched three years ago.

This year there were more than 400 entries, including those from Chinese students studying in the UK, Macau and Taiwan.

The 10 finalists presented beautiful gowns of the highest quality at a special fashion event in Beijing. The in-market publicity generated has been exceptionally strong, with the event being described as the "best in-market presentation ever made by an Australian tourism company" by one of the guests.

Other industry leaders said:

"Sovereign Hill...is using such an innovative way to well represent Australian history, culture, art and love..." Ms. Jianqing Gao, GM of Chengdu Overseas Tourism Ltd.

"Sovereign Hill combines the art, history and culture with the costume competition; they bring us a very strong visual impact, meanwhile they also promoted themselves

very successfully. I'm so proud of their creative idea!" Ms. Li Chen, Oceania Department Manager of Shanghai Eastern Air International Travel.

The Victorian Trade Commissioner, senior Qantas representatives, the General Manager of Tourism Victoria, the Business Development Managers of Tourism Australia and Austrade, plus many other VIPs attended, together with all key trade media and all major travel agents and operators who sell Sovereign Hill in China.

This annual competition further connects our marketing in China with Tourism Victoria's branding of Melbourne as the fashion capital of Australia.

While the competition adds cultural and heritage depth to that branding, costume is yet another rich vein of interpretive information that tells Sovereign Hill's story of the great Australian gold rushes.

## **What's New?**

### **Secret Chamber Mine Tour now even more impressive**

A new show using state-of-the-art digital and projection technology has taken one of Sovereign Hill's most popular tours to an impressive new level.

The Secret Chamber Mine Tour was launched in 1997, and has become a mainstay of the underground gold mine experience for some 100,000 international visitors annually.

Visitors walk through a maze of silent tunnels, with only flickering candlelight to guide them past dig sites, shafts and forbidden places before reaching the Secret Chamber.

Here the audio visual show tells the story of Chin Tem and his brother, based on the unforgettable experiences of the Chinese diggers who flocked to Ballarat in the 1850s in search of their fortunes.

The show is available in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Indonesian. New video captions also make it accessible to visitors with hearing difficulties.

### **New '5 in Hand Stables' experience**

Sovereign Hill's coach rides through the township are a 'must do' for many visitors. Those who look closely see a very complex harness system that's required for the two, three or four horses which pull the coaches.

Now visitors can take a seat in the old '5 in Hand Stables' (which were built when five horses used to pull coaches) and watch as members of our horse department expertly change over the teams which pull the coaches.

Horses were absolutely vital during the gold rush, and this new experience includes discussion about their roles as well as traditional harnesses.

## **New Aboriginal 'Hidden Histories' digital tour**

'We love Sovereign Hill, but where's the Aboriginal story' was a frequent question from historians and visitors. There's now an answer - the new 'Hidden Histories: The Wadawurrung People' free online tour.

Accessible on mobile devices while at Sovereign Hill, the tour gives the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal people on the Ballarat goldfields. There are 12 tour stops around Sovereign Hill, an interactive timeline, videos, games, audio files and a large collection of images and quotes from the mid-1800s.

Visitors can also try on a traditional possum-skin cloak and hunt for other replica artefacts hidden around the museum.

Academic research for this tour was provided by Dr Fred Cahir of Federation University, who worked with numerous Victorian Aboriginal people to complete his book 'Black Gold: Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850-1870' .

Check out the tour at [www.sovereignhillhiddenhistories.com.au](http://www.sovereignhillhiddenhistories.com.au)

## **'Christmas in July' beats all winter visitation records**

'Christmas in July' was first staged at Sovereign Hill in 2012 in a bid to increase very low visitation in the depths of a chilly winter. Four years later, July has now become one of the top months on the Sovereign Hill calendar.

Patronage has grown by more than 275% to a record breaking 60,000 in 2015, with the event becoming one of the largest in regional Victoria.

Sovereign Hill turns on a spectacular 'Winter Wonderlights' show of its period buildings and rings to the tune of traditional carols. Christmas trees and Victorian-style decorations adorn buildings, faux snow falls, a full theatre program entertains and delicious Christmas treats warm up winter days.

Local residents and visitors are eagerly anticipating Christmas in July in 2016, as Winter Wonderlights will illuminate even more of Sovereign Hill with brilliant new projections.

The regional impact of the event has been so great that Ballarat has now created a new Winterlude festival to capitalise on the increased visitation.

Christmas in July been extended to four weeks, from 24 June to 24 July 2016, giving wholesalers a great opportunity to package this fantastic event.

## **A real feast at Sovereign Hill**

Chinese workers on the goldfields would have struggled to eat well – but that's certainly not the case for group tours who now have a choice of Asian and Indian feasts as well as Australian dishes in the 1850s dining rooms.

Typical dishes on the Asian menu include prawn crackers, vegetable spring rolls, special fried rice, BBQ pork with Singapore noodles, stir fried chicken in black bean sauce and ginger, a fruit plate and green tea.

The Indian menu typically features pappadums, raita, vegetable samosa, steamed rice, vegetable curry, chicken Balti with chick peas, cucumber and tomato salad, oranges and watermelon slices, lemon squash and water.

Banquet service is available for 10 to 30 guests, and buffet service for 30 or more guests.

Australian menus feature 1, 2 and 3-course plated dishes. Other options include quick takeaways from the Café and freshly baked traditional pastries from the Hope Bakery.

### **Making the most of a Sovereign Hill visit**

So much to see, so much to do – and not always enough time to enjoy it all! So here are three itineraries for visitors who have less than a day to spend at Sovereign Hill:

#### **2.5 hours**

- Secret Chamber Mine Tour
- Gold Pour demonstration
- Gold Panning
- Chinese Camp and Temple

#### **3 hours**

- Secret Chamber Mine Tour
- Gold Pour demonstration
- Gold Panning
- Chinese Camp and Temple
- Redcoat Soldiers
- Devonshire Tea at the New York Bakery
- Visit Miners' Cottages

#### **4 hours**

- Secret Chamber Mine Tour
- Gold Pour demonstration
- Gold Panning
- Chinese Camp and Temple
- Redcoat Soldiers
- Lunch at the New York Bakery
- Coach Ride
- Visit Miners' Cottages
- Costume Photo session
- Gold Museum