

Education on King Island

You would think that living a mere 260 kilometres from Melbourne would hardly be living in isolation. You would also be forgiven for thinking that education would be readily available. Put a big stretch of rough Bass Straight water in between and well, you start to get my drift.... pardon the pun.

King Island sits right in the middle of Bass Strait surrounded by treacherous waters that, in early days, claimed many ships to the ocean floor along with many lives.

With its small population of about 1200 people there is a different sense of isolation which either captivates people or drives some to escape and leave the island.

What an amazing place to grow up. The King Island school has always offered education for students from Prep to Year 10. This year however, they began to offer year 11 and 12. Some families have still chosen to send their older children off to boarding school, as has always been the tradition. I recently spoke to Anna from 'Raff Angus' who, along with her whole family and a heap of black cows, moved from drought stricken Queensland to the evergreen pastures of King Island. Hats off to them for making such a brave move but the isolation of King Island would have hit home when they sent 3 of their brood to boarding school in South Australia. Most families will send their children to Victoria, to Hellyer College, Scotch Oakburn College or Launceston Grammar in Tasmania.

Anna and Andrew's decision to choose Adelaide was more about the fact that Anna's mother lives there, giving the children a vital family connection while being so far from home.

Anna also believes in the importance of giving her children some idea of life off the island. I, as a long time visitor, have noted the trend for the young ones to leave, looking for the brighter lights of the mainland, but to later return, not so much different to outback Australia where stations will encourage their youngsters to go off and work at other properties before coming back to work in the family business.

I often meet folk that have grown up on the island and have drifted back in retirement.

If you get a chance to visit the Island take it. It is like stepping back 50 years which is what attracted me to the island, but a word of warning. They have huge tiger snakes, almost black in colour! The good news is there are no foxes and lots of places to watch the fairy penguins come in, without having to line up and pay for the privilege. Oh - and the fishing is magic, and there is never anyone else but yourself on the beach. My Dad is the reason I first went there so I will finish with one of his sayings that depicts the island perfectly.....PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

Dona McQueen

Rough Coast of King Island: Photo: Harry Trout

