

# Business booms in outback opal town

## Tourist trade a real gem

Business is booming in Coober Pedy and it's not all in the opal trade.

The tourist trade has gone berserk in the last few years.

And the Coober Pedy Business Association is doing its best to promote the tourist industry.

Association chairman and opal cutter, Mr Claus Wirries, said the group had been working hard on different projects.

He said the association represented about 40 of the town's businesses.

"Our biggest challenge is uniting everyone so businesses act together.

"There are so many nationalities in Coober Pedy it is difficult for everyone to take a common approach," he said.

Mr Wirries believes there is a demand for more hotel accommodation but only at certain times of the year.

"The tourist population has increased by about 50 per cent since the bitumen was laid," Mr Wirries said.

The association had worked on a variety of projects in the last year including producing a special tourist map for visitors which listed places of interest, he said.

Another major project had been making a \$7000 video showing the life of the outback town.

*By Karen Shaw*

He said another asset to the town would be a new caravan park, currently in the early stage of construction. He said 400 caravans were already booked to stay at Coober Pedy in May.

"This place is crazy. Some days every parking lot is packed because the town is booked out.

"There is room for expansion but it's a funny situation - occupancy rates for seven months are high but during summer nobody comes.

"From Easter to mid-October is the peak period," he said.

Mr Wirries, who has lived in the town for 21 years, said opal worth \$100 million was taken from the area each year.

He believes the rarest opal specimen in the world is no further than his back yard.

The specimen (pictured) is worth \$75,000 alone - "It's the biggest I have ever seen," he said.

Mr Wirries works cutting specimen opals out of rock for export to about 30 countries.

"I cannot keep up with demand," he said.



Mr Wirries holds an opal specimen

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FEB 24

THE NEWS

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