



Hardgraves open their hearts to guests

THE Hardgrave family open not only their home but their hearts, according to happy visitors to their Lillydale Farmstay on the Scenic Rim.

"You are really made part of the family while you are there," Lesley Thurlow said.

And she should know – she's been back more than 20 times.

Mrs Thurlow was won over on her first visit.

"I was with my mother-in-law, who is disabled, and they

really went out of their way to make her comfortable," she said.

Doug and Pam Hardgrave (pictured), who opened their 127ha working property near Mt Barney 11 years ago to give people a taste of country life, have been nominated for their great service by several *Sunday Mail* readers.

Mrs Hardgrave said their approach was simple: "The customer is always right – even when they are wrong."

And they are fully committed to Queensland Tourism's Pledge to provide great service. "We got the Pledge laminated and we use it as a placemat on the kitchen table for Doug. If he starts to go off track, we push it under his nose," laughs Mrs Hardgrave.

A fourth-generation bush farmer, her husband loves to share his stories and skills with guests, half of whom are overseas tourists.

SERVICE SIMPLY THE BEST

■ "Being upgraded to a room with a spa really made our holiday that little more special!" Kelly Ryan on the Novotel Twin Waters, Sunshine Coast.

■ "Step aboard Queensland's Ambassador for Tourism The Tilt Train staff treat you as old friends, fantastic service, great humour, tasty plentiful meals and fast comfortable travel!" Darlene Sellar about Queensland Rail staff.

■ "Friendly and professional service, exquisite cottage, complete privacy, special little daily treats created a wonderful relaxing holiday to revitalise the soul!" Carolyn Black about The Narrows Escape rainforest retreat, Montville.

■ "I may not be a model, I may not be a star; thanks for making me feel like one at your rejuvenation spa!" Janice Romaguera about the Daydream Island Rejuvenation Spa.

■ "Diving the HMAS Brisbane in crystal clear waters, led by friendly and informative dive staff, you couldn't ask for a better day out!" Andy Porter about Sunreef Scuba Diving Services, Mooloolaba.

■ "We have left our 'girls' with Alida three or four years running, with no hesitation. Our pets are well cared for and that leaves us to fully enjoy our annual pilgrimage to Coolangatta, our favourite holiday destination!" Susan Menz about Alida's Pet Resort, Alberton.

■ "Great Aussie experience: campfires, kangaroos, fishing. Nothing is too much trouble for Joe, he's always cheery, and makes you feel at home on holidays!" Chris Anastasiou about Bivouac Junction Holiday Camp, Macrossan.

■ "Feeling cold from a night dive on the Barrier Reef, warm water was poured into the back of my wetsuit." Suzanne Hilton about Tessa, staff member on the Spirit of Freedom tours, Cairns

■ "Peppers have THE friendliest staff going; even in middle of the night when we wanted burgers, the chef made them for us. It's the little things that matter" Sacha Finley about Peppers Coral Coast Resort, Airlie Beach.

Eclipse to spark total exposure

Daryl Passmore

QUEENSLAND is known as the Sunshine State but a major tourism event next year will involve the sun disappearing.

This weekend marks a year until the next total solar eclipse – when the moon blocks the sun, casting an enormous shadow and plunging the Earth into darkness.

And north Queensland will be the best place on the planet to witness the phenomenon, which has been described as "the most inspiring event in the natural world".

It will occur on November 14, 2012. About 50,000 visitors are expected in the tourism



hotspots of Cairns and Port Douglas and surrounding towns, with 20,000 tipped to camp at a Solar Eclipse 2012 Festival planned for the Palmer River Roadhouse, south of Cooktown.

Next year's Solar Eclipse Marathon in Port Douglas is

also expected to attract 2000 runners and hundreds of supporters from around the world for the event, timed to start just as the sun re-emerges.

The best views of the eclipse will be along the coastal strip of far north Queensland, between Wonga Beach and Cairns, and the Atherton Tableland.

Bookings for accommodation are already flooding in. Hotels and resorts are expected to be full for the period around the event and places on Great Barrier Reef cruises are also filling.

Meanwhile, a new discussion paper issued by the Queensland Government as

part of developing its Tourism Action Plan for 2012-15 highlights the importance of Asian visitors over the next few years.

The industry is aiming for a quadrupling of spending by Chinese tourists from \$330 million a year to \$1.42 billion and a surge in expenditure by visitors from India and the Middle East from \$170 million to \$860 million.

The paper says half of all international visitors in 2020 will come from Asia.

To achieve that, the plan is to target new routes including non-stop flights from China, Korea, India and the Middle East to Brisbane, Cairns and

the Gold Coast, as well as increasing capacity on existing routes by 5 per cent a year over the next three years.

The *Sunday Mail* is partnering with Tourism Queensland on the Summer Pledge campaign – celebrating the best service in the state – to help the industry recover after last summer's disasters.

Hundreds of readers have nominated providers who have exceeded their service expectations as we search for the state's top tourism operator.

■ The winner of last week's \$5000 holiday voucher is Bianca McCabe.



WIN A \$5000 HOLIDAY

Tell us about your great holiday experience and get the chance to win another!
Go to thesundaymail.com.au/thepledge and share your story about the service which made your Queensland vacation special. You can nominate the receptionist at

a resort, a waitress at a restaurant, a volunteer at a visitor centre or even a cheerful taxi driver – anyone who gave your trip a boost.

Each week of the campaign a submission from a reader will be chosen at random to receive a prize of a Queensland holiday worth \$5000.

