

**MELBOURNE & SYDNEY**

◀ FROM P19

made for GABS since 2011. That is a phenomenal number of beers," Mr Jeffares said.

"GABS is there to celebrate the creativity of what craft beer can be. Yes, there are some beers better tasted in 85ml tasting cups and not suitable for pots, middies or pints. But the vast majority of people who attend GABS are open to new experiences. If we can open these people's eyes to new flavours then that is a great thing for beer."

GABS has become a traveller itself. Last year the festival first went north to Sydney and next month there will also be an event in Auckland.

Mr Jeffares said while the Melbourne and Sydney versions are similar, the New Zealand instalment will only feature beers native to the Shaky Isles.

"We know of a couple of people who are travelling to all three," Mr Jeffares said. "Beer tourism is on the increase."

"Auckland GABS will be very much a New Zealand event with 65 local beers so again it can give the beer traveller a new experience."

It could also lead to the festival staging other GABS-style events under licence around the world.

A recent economic study looked at the regional benefits of one particular annual beer occasion, the release, albeit too short term, of Pliny the Younger from Californian brewer Russian River. The brew is considered the best seasonal beer in the world and has a cult following. The triple Imperial India Pale is on draught for just two weeks each February and punters queue for hours outside the brewhouse north of San Francisco to ensure their sip.

Research by the local Sonoma County Economic Development Board discovered Pliny the Younger generated a \$US5 million (\$7 million) economic bonus for the region.

Just over 61 per cent of



Left: New Zealander Jos Ruffell.  
Below: A GABS tasting paddle.



visitors were tourists. They came from 40 US States and 11 countries. A little more than 90 per cent wanted to return.

New Zealand's Garage Project sees the tourism benefits of beer from both directions.

The trio of Jos Ruffell plus brothers Pete and Ian Gillespie are regular visitors across the Ditch, selling their products as well trying new flavours from Australia. They are also regular visitors to the US beer trails and were at Good Beer Week.

However, Garage Project is a pivot in a Wellington craft hub that is becoming a strong lure for the lovers of the amber, or red, gold, straw, brown and black, nectar.

About 25 per cent of all beer sold in their home town of Wellington is craft beer, much from the local region which features a dozen breweries.

"Wellington has always been the craft beer capital with great bars throughout the city, though when we started there was no brewing happening in the city. That has changed greatly with an ever growing list," Mr Ruffell said.

There has also been a

growing industry for Australian beer bus tours; after all drinking alcohol and driving vehicles is a cocktail everyone must avoid.

David Phillips' brewery visits have ferried 3000 customers on the east coast, a similar operation has started in Brisbane to cope with demand and one tour group in South Australia is running more beer tours than those for wine through the Barossa Valley.

Julian Lelah started Margaret River Brewery Tours in earnest three years ago after seeing the demand for good transport options between the South West set-ups. There are nine craft breweries in the region.

"I'm a surfer and after getting

off the boards there were always arguments among my mates about who'd drive to the breweries for a beer," he said.

"So, and I hate the word, this grew organically. There was also a 30 per cent increase in breweries in the area over the past couple of years. With wine tours you consume very small amounts of alcohol but to enjoy a pint or a tasting paddle you are already over the limit. And some of the alcohol volumes in craft beers can be quite high.

"There are a lot of kangaroos and you want to know the roads as well because there are sharp bends that sneak up on a driver.

"Better for us to do the driving and let the drinkers enjoy the beer journey."



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