

BUS FIRM CONFIDENT OF TOURIST TRADE FUTURE WEATHERING IT

By Fran Bardsley

THE man behind Oxford's city bus tours is confident the city's tourism industry will get through the recession.

David Strainge, who runs Osney Mead based Guide Friday City Sightseeing Oxford with manager Jane Marshall, was speaking at the open-topped bus tour business's 20th anniversary.

The company, which runs up to 50 hour-long tours of the city every day during the peak summer months, said so far the economic downturn had yet to bite.

Mr Strainge said: "At the moment the numbers are very much as they were a year ago but we will know better after Easter because that's when we start getting busy."

"Of course we are concerned, but the biggest problem we had over the last two years was the really bad weather over the summer."

Four new buses have recently been bought, taking the fleet up to 14. They will go into service at the end of April, with three older vehicles being taken out of the fleet.

Figures released by the Oxford Association of Hotels and Guest Houses showed that the number of visitors staying in Oxford overnight in March dropped by nearly 40 per cent compared to March last year.



INVESTMENT:
David Strainge
and Jane
Marshall, of City
Sightseeing,
pictured with
one of the
firm's new
buses

Picture:
Jon Lewis

But Mr Strainge, who has been with the company since City Sightseeing and Guide Friday merged in 2002, said he believed tourists would continue to be attracted to the city.

He said: "At the moment the exchange rate is in our favour, so we are hoping that will lead to more people coming from abroad."

"We are also hoping that with the difficult economy, less Brits will go

abroad and they will go on day trips to Oxford, London and Bath and we will benefit that way."

Of the 150,000 people who take the £11.50 tours each year, about 50 per cent are from the UK and 50 per cent foreigners, according to Mr Strainge, but he expected the proportion of foreigners to rise this summer thanks to the weak pound.

He added: "Two summers ago, we

had the flood which really ruined that July, then last summer it was just generally consistently bad.

"I am banking on the law of averages that we must be due a good summer."

He added: "I think Oxford will keep pulling people in, partly because we are so close to London, along with all the history which makes it a place that everyone knows."

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