

Visitors need our help to see city

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In coming months, an armada of international cruise ships will be arriving in Sydney for the peak summer cruise season, with thousands of overseas visitors eager to discover our wonderful city.

The big question, are we ready for them and do we have the visitor information services they need to make the most of their time in the most attractive harbour city in the world?

Not really. We could be doing far more, especially when it comes to giving them the information they need or the ability to get around and discover the city with its awesome dining, retail and entertainment.

This is why Business Sydney has long called for the George St light rail section to be made fare-free from Circular Quay to Surry Hills.

Cruise visitors and others could use light rail to access the city's retail district then jump back on to enjoy the cafes and restaurants in the Surry Hills precinct. It's a no-brainer.

The cruise lines will have done on-board briefings to let incoming passengers know of the city's attractions and some will purchase tour packages before disembarking for the day.

Many others will operate

independently with little or no idea of what to do with their time.

The Sydney Travel Guide, published by Big Splash Media, this week celebrating its first anniversary, helps fill that gap. The guide is available in Sydney's cruise terminals, at 200 hotels, 450 cafes and in taxis.

However, even more could be done to help bring our city to life for visitors. Visitor information services are currently very thin on the ground. In fact, the only one is a volunteer-run desk at Customs House, well away from most visitor foot traffic.

Sydney needs at least two professionally run visitor information centres, one in The Rocks close to the Overseas Passenger Terminal and the other at Sydney Airport.

These centres need to be a one-stop-shop for visitors to buy tours, book restaurants and purchase theatre tickets. It's what travellers expect to find in global cities.

We currently have nothing like this in Sydney other than the 1980s-style visitor desk at Customs House.

It's time we looked and acted like a grown-up city by helping visitors discover Sydney's many tourism gems.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director at Business Sydney.