

Wightlink – First Choice For Travel Across The Solent

Wightlink (0871 376 1000 www.wightlink.co.uk) is the leading cross Solent ferry operator offering the greatest choice of routes to the Isle of Wight with a fleet of seven car ferries and two state of the art foot passenger catamarans. Its fast, year-round shuttle service to the Isle of Wight is used annually by more than five million passengers and one million vehicles.

Fuelled by research, which has established that frequency of service is the big issue for visitors to the Isle of Wight, the cornerstone of Wightlink's operational strategy is to provide a fast 24-hour service all year round. In recent years an expansion in the number of sailings has brought the annual total to more than 72,000 with more than 230 daily sailings across the Solent, half-hourly at peak times.

Car ferries cross the Solent from Portsmouth Gunwharf to Fishbourne in the east of the Island and from Lymington to picturesque Yarmouth in West Wight. Travelling on the eastern Solent route takes around 40 minutes and leaving from Portsmouth there are views of the 21st century Spinnaker Tower standing 170 metres high in the sky with HMS Warrior beyond in the distance. On the western route from Lymington, the 35-minute journey provides fine views of wild salt marshes along the river estuary.

The company also runs a fleet of passenger-only catamarans between Portsmouth Harbour and Ryde Pier Head, arriving at the Isle of Wight on historic Ryde Pier, the UK's oldest and most historic pier. These link up with Island Line trains running between Ryde and Shanklin, as well as with the extensive Southern Vectis bus network.

Wightlink is the sponsor of *Team Isle of Wight* and has a long association with supporting Island sport, making it a natural partner for the NatWest Island Games 2011 on the Isle of Wight. Now in its 16th year, Wightlink runs a sponsorship scheme that has provided travel assistance for more than 700 teams and individual athletes. Several of the youngsters – like windsurfer Ross Williams, cyclist Kieran Page and Olympic sailor Leigh McMillan - have gone on to represent England or Great Britain internationally.

Wightlink Marketing Manager Kerry Jackson said that the sponsorship programme was a crucial way in which Wightlink could demonstrate its community commitment. “For many Island youngsters, success depends on whether they can get across to the mainland regularly to train and compete. By offering a Wightlink sponsorship, we are delighted to make it possible for talented young people to step up the ladder to success.

“We take real pleasure in seeing the impressive tally of medals brought back to the Island by many of these young people and are pleased to have played a part in helping to make their training and competition schedules more viable.”

For the many visitors with differing interests travelling to the Isle of Wight, Wightlink has also produced a range of themed booklets and online guides. These include *Secret Wight*, 10 itineraries designed specifically for adventurous families, the *Wight History Trail*, a 33-stop trail around the living history of the Island and the *Wight Taste Trail*, which profiles the very best local food.

The latest addition is *Wight Safaris* - adventure walks in the wild to spot rare flora and fauna; discover the homes of famous Victorian celebrities or see some of the Island’s most unexpected heritage landmarks. All are available free from Wightlink by calling 0871 376 1000 or to view on the Isle of Wight Guide & Events section of the website at wightlink.co.uk

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