

Unique Charlottetown business relies on customers for pedal power

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Business partners Peter Ixkes, left, and Steve Arnold just opened a new tourist business on the Charlottetown waterfront that requires people to pedal to move things along. One of the tour guides they employ, Claire Niebuhr, maintains control of the 18-passenger bike that also relies on solar power. - Dave Stewart

A new waterfront business in Charlottetown is pedalling an eco-friendly way to enjoy the downtown this summer.

Steve Arnold and Peter Ixkes have just opened Ride Solar, an 18-passenger solar-powered pedal bus, next to Founders' Hall.

It's basically a big, four-wheel bicycle with room for 12 people in the bicycle seats, 10 of which actually pedal, and room for another six people on benches.

With no one on it, the bike weighs 1,200 pounds.

A minimum of six to eight people are required to move the bike, although it comes with an electric-assisted motor to make it easier on the legs. The vehicle's maximum speed is about 12 kilometres an hour.

"It's a good balance of a little bit of exercise (but) not too much because we've got the electric-assisted motor and it's very easy," said Arnold.

The three-hour tour, at a cost of \$69, includes food and drinks at stops along the way, including Sugar Skull Cantina, Hopyard and the Confederation Centre of the Arts. For safety purposes, a tour guide sits at the steering wheel at all times with complete control of the bike. That includes control over steering, signal lights, the brake and a gas pedal which powers the electric motor.

Ixkes, who moved to P.E.I. from Germany four years ago, said these bikes are all over Europe and the United States. He and Arnold have been trying to get the 18-passenger vehicle moving since then but only this year have they been successful in Charlottetown. They also have a similar bike operating in Halifax.

Ixkes said one key factor separates the Charlottetown bike from the others.

"This is the only one with solar (power)," Ixkes said. "We have 1.2 kilowatt of solar panels on top which are feeding our batteries and the batteries support our motor. It is green energy." Ixkes said they'll even offer "spin classes" where people can get a gym-like workout without assistance from the electric motor.

"It's a bit more of a social way to get your exercise," he said. "It's something new and different."

There are now 10 of these passenger pedal bikes operating across Canada. The one in Calgary is now also licensed to serve beer. Arnold and Ixkes are hoping to be able to do the same in Charlottetown next year. The big bike comes complete with cup holders and USB ports so people can charge their phones.

Arnold said if they can get approval to serve beer on board next year, their tour guides will all be required to have their responsible driver's certificate.

Two dollars from every single ride goes toward the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation, which supports P.E.I.'s largest referral hospital.

For more information or to book a ride, visit www.ridesolar.com.