

# AN UNKNOWN

*TASMANIA'S DIVERSE TERRAIN  
AND UNIQUE CULTURE ENTICE  
VISITORS TO EXPLORE*

**T**HE AUSTRALIAN STATE OF TASMANIA is a true wilderness escape: a green, beautiful and geographically diverse island that amounts to a boutique shop for the outdoor adventurer. Imagine a place where in one 90-minute drive you can go from near-impenetrable rain forest valleys to Serengeti-like plains, and then from ancient alpine meadows to long white beaches.

Tassie, as the locals call it, sits just 150 miles southeast of mainland Australia, the two separated by the Bass Strait. The heart-shaped island, roughly the size of the Republic of Ireland, is rich in maritime history and features lush green valleys, rugged mountain ranges, uncrowded towns and undeveloped coastlines.

BY GREG RIENZI



# N ESCAPE







**Tasmania is a nature lover's paradise. Hiking opportunities are abundant, whether through Freycinet National Park to overlook Wineglass Bay, pages 24-25, or at Cradle Mountain in Lake St. Clair National Park, above.**

Elbow room is certainly not a problem here. The island's population is less than 500,000 and more than 40 percent of Tasmania is protected as World Heritage Area, national parks and reserves. The island's unspoiled beauty is perhaps its greatest resource and Tassies take great pride in having the world's cleanest air and water, which, they are quick to add, has been scientifically proven.

Bushwalking is a national pastime and the island has perhaps the best nature walks in the world. Visitors can expect breathtaking waterfalls, towering sea cliffs, diverse forests and beautiful waterways, with nothing but nature to provide the soundtrack.

"Tasmania offers a chance to get away from it all and experience a true wilderness environment," says Malcolm Griffiths, North American representative of the island's tourism agency. "It's a place that makes you want to get out and adventure, whether it's hiking, cycling, paddling on the coastlines or white-water rafting. There's just countless adventure destinations here and it's the main reason people come."

Tasmania has more than 1,000 mountain peaks and some of the world's rarest animals, such as the Tasmanian devil, the state's icon.

Aboriginal people, who were primarily hunters and gatherers, populated the island throughout most of its history. The first European to explore the island was the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, who arrived in 1642 and later named the island Van Diemen's Land after the governor of the Dutch East Indies. It was renamed Tasmania in 1856 to honor Tasman and in 1901 became an official state of the new Commonwealth of Australia.

Like its neighbor to the north, Tasmania was also a



# TASMANIA FACTS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOURISM TASMANIA



**THE PEOPLE:** Tasmanians are a friendly, happy and relaxed lot. They love their sport and the outdoors—and what's not to love? You'll soon discover their fondness to abbreviate words and/or end them with an "ie" or "y," e.g. brekky (breakfast), chalkie (teacher) and, of course, Tassie. Be forewarned: you might be doing the same by the end of the stay.

**WHEN TO GO:** Tasmania has four mild but distinct seasons, and you can travel to the island year-round. Autumn (March through May) is a favorite of many Tassies for its sunny days and vibrant colors. Perhaps the best time to go is during the summer months, December through March, when you can feel the sun on your back as you stroll the coastline and enjoy peak bushwalking season. If you go then, check out Hobart's Summer Festival, which is highlighted by the famous Taste of Tasmania. The festival also overlaps with the Rolex Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race, another signature event.

Keep in mind that the island's climate can vary greatly on any given day, hence the local quip, "If you don't like the weather in Tasmania, wait five minutes."

**HOW TO GET THERE:** Travel experts recommend flying to either Sydney or Melbourne to connect with a short flight across Bass Strait to Hobart or Launceston. For a more romantic passage, the Spirit of Tasmania offers ferry service between Melbourne and Devonport twice daily.



**WHAT TO SEE AND DO:** Plan on staying at least a week to get the most out of your Tasmania experience.

Narawntapu National Park ranks as one of the best places to see animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, pademelons (now extinct on mainland Australia), wombats and, of course, the legendary Tasmanian devil. Look for the devils after sunset and listen for their spine-chilling screeches.

For a one-of-a-kind view, go to Tahune Forest, a beautiful reserve on the banks of the Huon River and home of the popular AirWalk and swinging bridges. The AirWalk is a 600-meter walk above and amongst the trees, the highlight of which is the 60-foot-high cantilever bridge, which offers stunning views of the forest.

All the locals will point you to Cradle Mountain in Lake St. Clair National Park, part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Pack your backpack and walk the Overland Track, a well-marked 40-mile trek that takes you past alpine moors, gorges, tall forests and right up to Cradle Mountain.

Less wild but still great fun is Salamanca, an area on Hobart's waterfront lined with a long row of Georgian sandstone warehouses built in the 1830s. The area offers great night life, restaurants and shopping.

For seaside beauty, go to the historic village of Stanley, located in northwest Tasmania and nestled at the base of "The Nut," a sheer-sided bluff that is the remains of an ancient volcanic plug.

To learn more about Tasmania's penal colony past, go to the Port Arthur Historic Site, which has more than 30 buildings, ruins and restored period homes dating from the prison's establishment in 1830 until its closure in 1877.



**WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK:** If you're not already a "foodie," you will be by the time you leave. Thanks in large part to the clean air and water, Tasmania boasts some of the best produce and seafood in the world. Try the Atlantic salmon, rock lobster, oysters, game meats, mushrooms, summer berries, leatherwood honey and any vegetable you fancy. Your taste buds won't know what hit them, and you'll see why the island is called Australia's gourmet state.

Fine restaurants can be found all over the island and seafood is a staple of most menus. In Hobart, check out Mures Upper Deck, Mr. Wooby's (named after a famed area convict), Maldini's (a quaint Italian cafe) and Prossers on the Beach, regarded by many as one of the best seafood restaurants on the island.

If you're on the go, stop by a takeaway shop and order a "burger with the lot," a beef patty traditionally topped with egg, tomato, cheese, bacon, lettuce, onion and barbecue sauce.

Wine lovers rejoice as Tasmania has plenty of fine wines to uncork. Of note, the Tamar Valley Wine Route, which follows the Tamar River from Launceston to Bass Strait, offers top-tier wineries in scenic settings. Unlike the mainland where Shiraz is king, the Tasmanian climate favors grapes such as Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.



**WHERE TO STAY:** Major chain hotels are relatively new to Tasmania, so what you will find are an assortment of very personal, unique and quality accommodations. At the top end of the spectrum are the Islington Hotel and the Henry Jones Art Hotel, both in Hobart. The Islington, a Regency-style hotel built in 1847, is relatively small but luxurious, and offers spectacular views of Mount Wellington. A relative newcomer is the award-winning Henry Jones, billed as Australia's first and only dedicated art hotel. The hotel's suites, foyers, bars and restaurants are furnished with more than 250 original artworks, most created by students from the nearby Tasmanian School of Art.

If you're looking for a base camp for outdoor adventures, a good bet is the Cradle Mountain Lodge, nestled high in the Tasmanian wilderness. The lodge features fine food and wine, day trip activities and 86 timber cabins, some with hot tubs and fireplaces. On the northern coast, the Beachside Retreat West Inlet gets top marks and guests rave about its secluded beach, views and friendly service.

Back in Hobart, the bed and breakfast industry is alive and well, and you need look no further than the historic village of Battery Point, a lovely part of town and a 10-minute walk to most of the city's attractions.



## TASMANIA: TIPS FROM A LOCAL



**EARLY ONE SUMMER MORNING**, marine scientist Peter Nichols and a student waded out into the shallows of one of Tasmania's many pristine estuaries. They were there to learn but took a moment to hunt in the crystal-clear waters of Safety Cove for abalone, a prized shellfish Tasmania is famous for. Nichols also wanted to capture the moment for his student.

"I told him to just look around and take it all in: the horizon, the water, the shoreline. How lucky are we to be surrounded by all this natural beauty? There is just something wonderful about all this," says Nichols, a native of Melbourne who came to Tasmania in 1986 for a five-year contractual job.

The island's natural beauty is why he never left, he says. Here are some of his favorite spots.

He suggests a drive to Sheffield, a quaint town on the northwest coast famous for the murals painted on the sides of its buildings—and even "rub-bish bins"—that offer a visual history of

the area. Drop by one of the town's traditional Australian pubs for a beer and a "counter meal," Tasmanian for pub food. You're in the north, so ask for a pint of James Boag's.

Sheffield is also a gateway to Cradle Mountain and picturesque Lake Barrington, a popular recreation spot and the site of the world rowing championships in 1990. If you're lucky enough to be there during regatta time, he says, don't miss the races.

"It is one of the more spectacular rowing venues in the world," he says.

Water lovers, he says, need to visit Coles Bay, roughly a three-hour drive from Hobart. Coles Bay sits at the foot of granite mountains known as the Hazards and on the edge of the world-renowned Freycinet National Park. Here you can fish, sail, swim, kayak, snorkel, rock climb, bushwalk or just take in the spectacular coastal scenery.

Nearby is the iconic Wineglass Bay, a perfect crescent of white sand beach set off by the stunning turquoise water. The best way to approach the bay is from a trail that starts at Freycinet. Halfway along the trail stands a peak that offers an amazing view of the bay and valley, he says. "The waters provide beautiful, clean snorkeling or diving, with an abundance of marine life to be seen."

The more adventurous can tackle the South Coast Track, known as one of the world's great wilderness walks. Most people take about six to eight days to complete the challenging trail, which depending on the time of year, is prone to harsh weather conditions. A popular

way to do this walk is to fly into Melaleuca and then walk out to Cockle Creek. The trail includes beach treks, the Prion Beach boat crossing, grassy hills, the rugged Ironbound range and "a number of beautiful inlets that make wonderful overnight camping stops."

Nichols says the effort is well worth the unspoiled, civilization-free beaches, lagoons and majestic mountains.

Speaking of mountains, he recommends a hike to the top of Mount Wellington, which overlooks Hobart. Nearby is Tasmanian Devil Park and Bonorong Wildlife Conservation Park where, in addition to the Tassie devil, you might see kangaroos, wallabies, emus, koalas, kookaburras, possums and many more unique native species.

If you want to have fun getting lost, Nichols says to head to Westbury Maze, a hedge maze in historic Westbury in northern Tasmania. It features 3,000 neatly clipped bushes and a network of pathways more than a kilometer long. Don't underestimate the challenge, he warns. "I got stuck in there once with my daughters."

Once you do get out, enjoy some refreshments or a light meal in the famous Tea Room, with its formal garden courtyard.

When you're tired from all the walking and want to unwind, Nichols says the quintessential Tasmanian town of New Norfolk on the Derwent River makes the perfect getaway. Tour the historic buildings there—in particular the old Oast houses (used for drying hops)—or sit on the riverbank and just savor the beauty of Tasmania.



**Bustling Hobart, left and right, is Tasmania's capital city and cultural center. It attracts visitors and residents to its restaurants, night life and busy arts scene.**

penal colony where those brought to justice under the Crown of England lived in harsh conditions. The majority of convicts were sent to Port Arthur on the island's Tasman Peninsula, which is now an area of farms, forests, sheer cliffs and the world's southern-most historic prison. In fact, the Port Arthur Historic Site offers tourists an opportunity to stroll back 150 years and explore a prison once feared and reviled.

The island's top three destinations and largest cities are Hobart, Launceston and Devonport.

Hobart, the island's capital, is also the cultural center of Tasmania and the best place for night life. The historic harbor town on the island's southern tip is famous for its 19th-century waterfront warehouses that now house cafes, restaurants and studios that bustle with visitors. Hobart also has a busy arts scene, highlighted by the Tasmania Symphony Orchestra and the Salamanca Arts Centre. The active harbor also boasts many tour boats and fishing charters.

Launceston in the north is the gateway to the Tamar Valley, where you can drive past rolling fields that in the springtime come alive with color. The Tamar Valley is also home to one of the island's four wine trails, an inspiration for more outdoor adventures.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOURISM TASMANIA

Farther west is Devonport, which sits on the banks of the Mersey River and is home to the Spirit of Tasmania ferries that make regular trips to Melbourne. Devonport also beckons you to go inland and explore the many national parks located directly south.

Griffiths says that when you want to take a break from all your adventures, you can enjoy the island's many spas and some of the best food and wine on the planet.

"I tell people that Tasmania is somewhere you can expect to get your feet dirty by day and pampered by night," he says.

The best part? Nothing is more than three hours away. ■

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