

Destination Tasmania

There's an expression from the 1980s: 'Wake up Australia, Tasmania is floating away!' These days, however, mainland Australia is wide awake to the loveliness of its Apple Isle and holds it close to its heart.

Like any new love affair, there's a lot you can do in the space of a week. Top of your to-do list should be a close encounter with the state's wild places: the curves of Wineglass Bay, the far-flung Tarkine forests, the crags of Cradle Mountain. Almost a quarter of Tassie (as it's affectionately known) is classed as a World Heritage Area or national park – an inspirational backdrop of jagged mountain peaks and near-impenetrable rainforest, soaring sea cliffs and fragile alpine moorlands. Experience it first hand with world-class bushwalking, sea-kayaking, white-water rafting and cycling, or just bum around on a deserted beach. And while you're outside, grab a deep breath of Australia's purest air in the abundant sunshine – in the height of summer, Hobart (Tassie's capital city) enjoys more than 15 hours of sunlight every day (more than Darwin or Sydney).

When you wander in from the wilderness, you'll discover the table is laid. A highlight of any Tasmanian trip is sampling the local gourmet fare, especially fresh seafood, luscious fruits, outstanding dairy products and cellar-worthy cool-climate wines.

There's also no shortage of urban virtue here, delivered with less attitude and more charm than in Australia's mainland states. Hobart and Launceston, Tasmania's duelling cities, compete over more than just the quality of their local beer (Cascade and James Boag's respectively). Hobart, Australia's southernmost city, has views to rival Sydney's, and continues to evolve into a cosmopolitan hub with new-found urban cool. Following in its wake, Launceston has been busy transforming itself from colonial backwater into boutique harbour. A rigorous arts scene infuses both centres, while beyond the city limits small-town Tassie has almost as much to offer: colonial accommodation, cafés, festivals, reputable restaurants, traditional rural warmth and sandstone villages that look like film sets.

Of course, there was a time when Tassie wasn't so wonderful, when young islanders left in droves seeking careers, new haircuts and pub bands that played more than just *American Pie* and Billy Idol covers. Forever the butt of mainland jokes, Tasmanians had little to feel proud about. The stigma of isolation and a brutal colonial history have been difficult to reconcile and remain embedded in the landscape: don't be surprised if somewhere along the road you find yourself crossed with a mournful spirit or an inexplicable sense of sadness. This bloody past is captured in much of the island's literature and is a conflict that continues to be played out in today's academic 'history wars'.

But as this new century has matured, the exodus to the mainland has stalled. Tasmania gained more people than it lost in 2007, as 1200 Australians moved south across the perilous span of Bass Strait permanently. The allure varies: a lifestyle change for stressed-out Sydneysiders, climate relief for overheated Queenslanders, a room with a view for Melburnians, and a chance to come home for ex-Tasmanians now that things are looking up. A steady flow of Australians (especially Victorians) choose to holiday here each year, encouraged by increased flights with lower fares into Hobart and Launceston.

It seems the wee southern isle has never evoked more fondness in the hearts of mainlanders, who don't mind admitting what they find precious about

Tasmania. Intense debate over environmental affairs rages, as Tasmanian conservation once again became a federal election issue in 2007. Construction of the controversial Tamar Valley pulp mill, vehemently opposed by some mainland powerbrokers, remains the subject of heated legal wrangling. More than ever, there's conflict over what the big island thinks the little island should be protecting. Should they fight for a close-knit community, jobs for locals and a sequestered way of life? Or should it be for the wilderness, justly famous beyond these island shores? Should it be for both?

For the answers to these questions and more, start your own love affair with Tasmania. The island is flush with renaissance spirit – now is the perfect time to bite into the Apple Isle's goodness.

FAST FACTS

Population: 493,000

Area: 68,332 sq km

Number of national parks: 19

Number of surviving Tasmanian Tigers: 0 (but we can't be sure)

Reward for a fox sighting: \$1000

Unemployment rate: 4.8% (the lowest in three decades)

Number of tourists: over 800,000 in 2007 (42% from overseas)

Number of Tasmanian-born princesses: 1 (Mary Donaldson, Crown Princess of Denmark)

Tassie-born Australian cricket captains: 1 (Ricky Ponting)

Number of cattle on King Island: more than 89,000

Getting Started

Tasmania is an excellent family-holiday destination and is ideally suited to a self-drive trip – but don't try to cover too much ground in a short period of time. Distances might appear to be short on a map, but often take longer to drive than you expect due to narrow, winding roads. You might want to concentrate your touring in a specific region rather than darting from one coast to the other, otherwise you could find yourself spending most of your holiday in the car, when you're really here for the fresh air.

WHEN TO GO

December, January and February are the busiest times for tourism: with average temperatures around 21°C, it's almost warm enough to swim and you don't need a beanie (unless you're hiking, which calls for a beanie at all times!). You can expect to see a variety of fantastic festivals and events, including the sails coming into Hobart at the end of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the wonderful food festival 'The Taste' (p94). However, accommodation is heavily booked (and often more expensive, as is petrol), and roads and restaurants are more crowded. You may want to avoid Tasmania's prime destinations during school holidays when Tasmanians themselves love to camp in national parks. Exact dates vary, but the main period is from mid-December to late January, and again at Easter; see p324 for more information. (For a useful list of school holidays in all Australian states, check out www.dest.gov.au).

The great advantage of visiting in winter is that tourist numbers and prices are low (look for specials), and it can seem as if you have parts of the island to yourself, including all kinds of cosy accommodation.

In terms of Tasmania's highly variable weather, the winter months are generally cold, wet and cloudy (average 12°C), but days are often clear, crisp and sunny – ideal for sightseeing and short bushwalks. Autumn brings beautiful colours and mild temperatures, but towards the end of the season the days (even sunny ones) are usually quite cold and windy. Spring tends to be windy, too. Temperatures in early September can be chilly, and snowfalls can still occur in the mountains, but by spring's end the weather is improving.

COSTS

Tasmania is a tourism-conscious state that provides options for visitors on all budgets. These days, overseas travellers and Australians may find it more expensive than they expect. The biggest whack to the wallet is transport, both for getting there – your options are restricted to planes and ferries – and getting around. You can really blow out on top-quality food, too (and we suggest you do!), but there's wonderful fresh produce available if you'd rather self-cater.

How much you should budget for depends on how you travel and how you'll be occupying yourself. If sightseeing and having a good ol' time are integral (staying at midrange hotels, motels or B&Bs, and sampling the many great restaurants here), then \$150 to \$200 per day (per person travelling as a couple) should do it. You can easily spend more by regularly taking tours and staying in top-end guesthouses.

At the budget end, if you camp or stay in hostels, cook your own meals, look at the view for entertainment and travel around by bus (or in your own vehicle), you could probably eke out an existence on \$60 to \$70 per day; for a budget that realistically enables you to have a good time, raise

See Climate Chart (p320) for more information.

the stakes to \$80 or \$90 per day. Staying in places for longer periods and/or travelling in a group will help lower your costs. See the Directory for a few ideas on how to sleep cheaply (p316) and earn a few dollars along the way (p330).

HOW MUCH?

- Dorm bed in a hostel \$22–28
- Copy of *Mercury* newspaper \$1.20
- 10oz glass of beer \$3.50
- Souvenir T-shirt \$30
- Street treat (curried scallop pie) \$4
- See also Lonely Planet Index on the Quick Reference page

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

For information on 4WD touring, read *Cruisin' Without Bruisin'*, a free brochure available at most visitors centres around the state or online from the Parks & Wildlife Service (www.parks.tas.gov.au/recreation/4wd/4wd.html). Whether you're travelling on bush tracks or in a conventional vehicle on a highway, watch out for rampant Tasmanian wildlife on the road and try to avoid driving at dusk, when many animals become more active and harder to see. Sadly, you're likely to see more dead animals on the road than live ones in the bush.

Travellers must discard all plants, fruit and vegetables before their arrival. The state's 'disease-free' status is one of the things that makes its produce attractive to buyers, and the state government has stringent rules to ensure the island maintains this agricultural advantage. To this end, plants, fruit and vegetables cannot be brought into the state without certification.

Live fish that can breed in Tasmanian waters cannot be brought into the state. Anglers must not bring live bait into Tasmania and, in order to prevent the introduction of disease into native and recreational fisheries and aquaculture industries, they should also wash, disinfect and dry their gear before packing it for their trip.

Phytophthora is a root rot that's spread in soil and is devastating flora in parts of the state. Always clean dirt off your shoes and equipment before and after you spend time in the bush. For more information about responsible bushwalking, see p56.

Finally, be sure never to disturb or remove items from sites significant to Tasmanian Aborigines.

PREDEPARTURE READING

Readers who love the travel, history or biography genres should seek out Nicholas Shakespeare's masterfully researched book *In Tasmania*. The English writer discovered family connections when he moved here. His investigation into the past and the people who labelled the island 'a Hades or a Heaven' is also an exposé of the devilish Anthony Fenn Kemp, the 'Father of Tasmania' (not a dad you'd really want to have).

If you're a foodie, three recommended publications are Graeme Phillips' *Eat Drink Tasmania*, updated annually (\$15 from visitor information centres, newsagents and bookshops) and *Tasmania's Cellar Door & Farm Gate Guide*, plus *Cool Wine & Food*, *Cool Wilderness* – a series of free Tourism

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Waterproof gear and warm clothing (even in midsummer); layers are a good idea (thermal leggings and tops are almost a uniform in Hobart)
- A wetsuit, if you're planning on entering the ocean for more than 30 seconds
- Sunscreen and sunglasses – UV radiation down here is still high, despite the reputation for bleak weather
- Comfy, sturdy walking shoes so you can explore national parks and walking tracks; but also pack shoes to wear out at night – pub bouncers often enforce dress codes
- A hearty appetite for sampling the local food and wine – and the energy to walk it all off

TOP 10



TOP READS

Tasmania's people, places and creatures, its unique wilderness and complex history are explored in these critically acclaimed books. For reviews see p37.

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| 1 <i>For the Term of His Natural Life</i> Marcus Clarke | 6 <i>The Alphabet of Light and Dark</i> Danielle Wood |
| 2 <i>Death of a River</i> Guide Richard Flanagan | 7 <i>English Passengers</i> Matthew Kneale |
| 3 <i>The Sound of One Hand Clapping</i> Richard Flanagan | 8 <i>A Child's Book of True Crime</i> Chloe Hooper |
| 4 <i>Cape Grimm</i> Carmel Bird | 9 <i>Fate of a Free People</i> Henry Reynolds |
| 5 <i>The Boys in the Island</i> Christopher Koch | 10 <i>Thylacine</i> David Owen |

TOP FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tasmanians don't need much of an excuse for a celebration (see p323 for more information):

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| 1 Hobart Summer Festival (www.hobartsummerfestival.com.au) Late December to early January; includes The Taste food festival (p94) | 6 Antarctic Midwinter Festival (www.antarctic-tasmania.info) Brrrr... June (p94) |
| 2 Falls Festival (www.fallsfestival.com) Marion Bay rock fest, late December to early January (p94) | 7 Festive (www.festive.com.au) Food and good-times festival, February (p207) |
| 3 Ten Days on the Island (www.tendaysontheisland.org) Statewide biennial island culture and festivities, March (p323) | 8 Australian Three Peaks Race (www.threepeaks.org.au) Easter (p207) |
| 4 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (www.rolexydneyhobart.com) The finish of one of the world's greatest open-ocean yacht races; late December to early January (p61 and p94) | 9 Australian Wooden Boat Festival (www.australianwoodenboatfestival.com.au) Biennial gathering of yachts, dinghies and tall(ish) ships, February (p94) |
| 5 Cygnets Folk Festival (www.cygnetsfolkfestival.org) Banjos and balladry, January (p142) | 10 Tasmanian Craft Fair (www.tascraftfair.com.au) Arts and crafts, October (p240) |

TOP OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Tassie boasts a renowned coastline, numerous national parks and pristine wilderness... (see p56):

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| 1 Hiking the famed Overland Track through Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park (p290) | 5 Kicking back on a Gordon River cruise out of Strahan (p279) |
| 2 Walking to (and swimming in) Wineglass Bay on the utterly photogenic Freycinet Peninsula (p179) | 6 Exploring abandoned beaches and rocky headlands around the Bay of Fires (p194) |
| 3 Pelting down the slopes of Mt Wellington into Hobart on a mountain bike (p88) | 7 Paddling around the gorgeous D'Entrecasteaux Channel by sea-kayak (p136) |
| 4 Arguing over stalactites vs stalagmites (they 'might' go up but 'tights' come down) as you spelunk into a cave at Hastings (p151) or Mole Creek (p242) | 8 White-water rafting down the awesome Franklin River (p287) |
| | 9 Casting a trout fly across the serene waters of the Lake Country (p161) |
| | 10 Carving up the cold surf at far-flung Marrawah beach (p265) |

Tasmania brochures available at visitor information centres and online (www.discovertasmania.com; click on 'Activities & Attractions', then 'Food and Wine'). These publications might help you to plan your gastronomic tour as they detail the best restaurants, cafés, wineries and farm stores around the state, classified by region, along with info on annual foodie/boozy events. (The *Cellar Door* brochure also has a helpful chart detailing when particular foods are in season.)

The Photographer, The Cook & The Fisherman is put together by well-known Tasmanians Richard Bennett, a photographer with a love of the sea, and fisherman/chef duo George and Jill Mure.

The World of Olegas Truchanas is a classic 'retro read' about the photographer who was mentor to Peter Dombrovskis, whose images you will see everywhere: Dombrovskis' magnificently mysterious photo of the Franklin River became symbolic of a major campaign to save it (see p38). Along these wild lines, discover what all the fuss is about in *For the Forests*, edited by Helen Gee, about the history of Tasmanian forest campaigns in the 20th century. Also check out a beautiful book called *The Forests* by photographer Matt Newton and academic/poet Pete Hay. Newton's *Shack Life* is a pleasing record of that great Tasmanian institution, the shack (a rambling cottage in the hills or by the water).

INTERNET RESOURCES

Discover Tasmania (www.discovertasmania.com) Comprehensive details of key destinations, festivals, tours and accommodation.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Unbiased accommodation reviews on Hotels & Hostels; travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

Parks & Wildlife (www.parks.tas.gov.au) Extensive information on Tasmania's national parks, World Heritage areas, flora and fauna.

Pure Tasmania (www.puretasmania.com.au) Corporate site with a regional holiday planner (alpine, coast, Hobart and Launceston).

Tasmania Online (www.tas.gov.au) Government site with links to other Tasmanian websites.

The Gobbler (www.the-gobbler.blogspot.com) Foodie blog with links to other Tasmanian and national sites.

This Tasmania (www.thistasmania.com) Online magazine with great articles and excellent photography.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

NORTHWEST AT ITS BEST Two Weeks / Launceston to Cradle Mountain to Strahan to Stanley

Pick up a car in **Launceston** (p202), then take a stroll through Lonnie's **Cataract Gorge** (p202). Trundle through the eclectic attractions (seahorses, gold mines, lighthouses and wineries) around the **Tamar Valley** (p213) and the **Pipers River Region** (p221). Loop through the historic towns of **Evandale** (p225) and **Westbury** (p222) before drifting west to **Deloraine** (p239) and the caves at **Mole Creek** (p242). A roundabout route (via Moina) takes you to iconic **Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park** (p289), arguably Australia's top national park. From here, drive southwest to the lunar landscapes of **Queenstown** (p283) and ride the West Coast Wilderness Railway to **Strahan** (p277). If you have time, take a boat trip on the mirror-surfaced Gordon River. From Strahan, track north through the vast, tree-crowded **Arthur Pieman Conservation Area** (p268), catch a wave in **Marrawah** (p265), then clamber up the Nut in **Stanley** (p260). An ocean dip at idyllic **Boat Harbour Beach** (p258) is the perfect journey's end before wandering back to Devonport or Launceston.



From Tassie's second city into its legendary western wilderness, this 800km drive is a feast for the eyes. Breathe some of the world's cleanest air, tweak your tastebuds in the Tamar Valley and pump your legs up Cradle Mountain and the Nut.

EAST COAST CRUISER Two Weeks / Hobart to Port Arthur to Maria Island to Freycinet Peninsula to St Helens to Launceston

Craving some heavy history and serious sunshine? Spend a few days kicking back in Australia's smallest, southernmost capital **Hobart** (p77), beneath megalithic **Mt Wellington** (p88). Hobart these days is a surprisingly cosmopolitan town – good coffee, brilliant eateries and a vigorous arts scene. Next, head for the dramatic crags of the **Tasman Peninsula** (p121) for a couple of days, and pay your respects at eerie **Port Arthur** (p127). History lesson over, wind your way back north, stopping to growl at the Tasmanian devils in **Taranna** (p126) and for a surf at **Eaglehawk Neck** (p124). Near Copping, look out for the shortcut to the east coast via the wiggly **Wielangta Forest Drive** (p168). Hit the beach for a swim at **Orford** (p166), then take a boat out to **Maria Island National Park** (p168) for a couple of days and nights of camping, bushwalking and sipping wine on some rare west-facing east-coast beaches. Go gourmet in **Swansea** (p171) – the foodie hub of the east coast – then get your cameras ready for the **Freycinet National Park** (p175) and **Wineglass Bay** (p177), a sure-fire starter on every Tasmanian wilderness calendar. North of here are the chilled-out fishing towns **Bicheno** (p181) and **St Helens** (p190) – both worth a day or two of beach time and fish-and-chip dinners. Finish off your trashy holiday novel on the beach at **Binalong Bay** (p194) near the **Bay of Fires** (p194). From St Helens you can continue north to check out the Forester kangaroos in **Mt William National Park** (p196), or head west through historic tin-mining **Derby** (p196), **Bridestowe Estate Lavender Farm** (p198) near Scottsdale and the wine-soaked **Pipers River Region** (p221) to Launceston.

Adhere to the 'When in Rome' adage and hit the east coast – where Taswegians come to swim, surf and sun themselves. From sombre Port Arthur to the underrated northeast, this 700km tour rattles the skeletons in Tasmania's closet and reveals the island's true holiday colours.



UP THE GUTS: HOBART TO LAUNCESTON 10 days / Hobart to Bruny Island to Huon Valley to The Midlands to Launceston

Pick up a set of wheels in **Hobart** (p78). Don't miss a walk around **Battery Point** (p91) and the waterfront, and if you're flying in for the weekend, Saturday's sensational Salamanca Market (p85). You'll never forget a few days spent meandering through the hills, valleys and waterways south of Hobart. Load up the car and set off on a loop taking in the unspoiled beaches and forests of **Bruny Island** (p136) across the D'Entrecasteaux Channel from sea-salty **Kettering** (p136), artsy-craftsy **Cygnets** (p142), and far-flung **Dover** (p149). Detour to sway through the treetops at **Tahune Forest AirWalk** (p148), take a short walk in the **Hartz Mountains National Park** (p148) and go underground at **Hastings Caves & Thermal Springs** (p151). If you're here in late summer, make sure you pick up a bag of fresh, crunchy apples by the roadside in the Huon Valley – this isn't called 'the Apple Isle' for nothing!

Truck back through Hobart and hit the **Heritage Highway** (p154), the original route between Hobart and Launceston that opened up the Midlands for settlement from the 1820s. It's only 200km between Tassie's two major cities, but a string of gorgeous sandstone-built towns complete with country pubs, tea rooms and colonial accommodations will tempt you to linger for two or three days. **Oatlands** (p155) has more Georgian sandstone buildings than any other town in Australia; **Ross** (p156) is a cutesy heritage town with a great bakery, an historic bridge, a friendly pub and plenty of places to stay; and **Campbell Town** (p158) makes a handy pit stop en route to laid-back **Launceston** (p202). Reward yourself with a tour and a taste at the hallowed **Boag's Brewery** (p205).



From Hobart in the deep south to the northern lights of Launceston, this 500km trail takes in the verdant wonders of the Huon Valley and D'Entrecasteaux Channel south of Hobart, and the historic sandstone towns strung out along the Heritage Highway.

On The Road



COORDINATING AUTHOR Charles Rawlings-Way

There's something calming, welcoming, benign – dare I say English! – about the green, safe-haven folds of the Huon Valley (p144). After weeks spent haring around the state and two arduous days on Bruny Island (p136) – lashed by howling rain in the south, parched by the sun in the north – I rounded a lazy Channel Hwy bend south of Franklin (p145) and the broad Huon River unfurled before me in a shimmering band. I pulled over to admire the serene scene: this is a place that's good for the soul! Next stop, beyond the hills, Tasmania's Deep South...



COORDINATING AUTHOR Meg Worby

We had hiked the challenging Overland Track (p290) for six days, in constant sunshine – lucky, since it bucketed down the minute we got back to the city. Ominous Mt Wellington (p88) sulked behind clouds as we arrived at a waterfront hotel for the ultimate bath. The staff didn't blink at our muddy gaiters, packs and beanies. Their excellent umbrella later turned inside out (just after this photo was taken) as we walked across the docks to sample the local seafood... but in my book, packet pasta and cask wine at Pelion Hut after hiking 17km on day four were just as good!



GABI MOCATTA After a long day's East Coast (p165) research, I'd checked in after dark at a beachside B&B in Swansea (p171). I wanted to be up early for sunrise, so I took an early wander and was joyful to find a perfect little cove all to myself. There was the whole Freycinet Peninsula (p175) before me across the calm waters of Great Oyster Bay, and the sun a great silver orb, painting the whole scene impossibly bright. That day started with a salute to the sun and a long, salty-cool dip in the clear waters of the bay.

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