

Story and photography by Gabi Mocatta

walking in *luxury*

Like your walking but you're not enamoured of a soggy tent and a pot of stodgy camp food at the end of the day? Crave a bit of comfort with your wilderness experiences? Then Tasmania's own brand of luxury walking is the answer.



There's one fact about Tasmania

that never fails to bring a smile to the lips of a walker. So, if you're of the hiking persuasion, lean close and listen. Australia's heart-shaped island state is criss-crossed, positively *cross-hatched*, by a vast network of walking tracks. There are 3000 kilometres of routes to walk, which gives Tasmania more kilometres of walking tracks than of roads. With wilderness and national parks aplenty, there's endless natural beauty to discover.

Tasmania has it all when it comes to walking in style. Think scenic alpine and coastal routes with reasonably easy terrain, and stylish tented camps or lodges where you'll rest your head at night. Think fresh, inventive food, prepared while you recount the day's adventures with your walking compatriots, a glass of Tassie's finest pinot in hand. Here, think relaxation. Professional guides take care of all the details. You just walk and enjoy.

The Overland Track is Tasmania's legendary foot journey, and it was also the first to host guided, catered walks with accommodation in private

cabins. Cradle Mountain Huts takes groups of up to eight walkers for six-day journeys on what is surely one of the great walks of the world. Starting at imposing Cradle Mountain, deep in Tasmania's World Heritage-listed wilderness, the track winds 65 kilometres south through the island's alpine heart.

This is an awe-inspiring environment of craggy peaks, glacial lakes, ancient, gnarled forests, tannin stained rivers and delicate wildflowers. When the weather turns wild – which it often does here at 42 degrees south, right in the path of the infamous Roaring Forties – one of the cosy private huts is never far away. Each afternoon on the track, one of the two guides rushes ahead to warm up the hut and prepare afternoon tea. Around the dinner table at night, walkers fill the huts with laughter, even when the wind howls outside.

There is the luxury of hot showers, and guests stay in comfortable private rooms. It's a far cry from the early days on the Overland Track when aching heavy backpacks, unwashed bodies and windblown tents were standard. The track itself has been greatly improved over the years. There are now kilometres of easy boardwalk, which take much of the sting – and knee-deep mud – out of this iconic route.

At the Bay of Fires on Tasmania's East Coast, there's no mud at all to speak of. Here, it's all flax-blond sand, Bombay Sapphire seas, molten silver sunrises and gentle coastal heath. The Bay of Fires Walk traverses this peaceful coastal environment in Tasmania's far north east, from the secluded granite bays of Mount William National Park to the great sweep of the Bay of Fires. This is four days' walking with a difference – walkers carry the lightest of backpacks with only their personal gear, while strapping guides shoulder all the provisions.

Secluded tented accommodation at Forester Beach Camp is the first overnight stop, then the journey continues south along the coast to



Main: Barn Bluff, on the magical Overland Track. Pic courtesy Don Fuchs

Above: Lunch at Friendly Beaches Lodge with the Freycinet Experience



the fabulous Bay of Fires lodge, an architectural marvel perched on high sand dunes, and thoughtfully hidden by bush. Based here for two more nights, walkers can swim, go sea kayaking or wildlife spotting.

The Bay of Fires walk does meals with amazing panache. Menus are planned by renowned Tasmanian chef Daniel Alps, so this is no simple camp cooking. Forget cardboard muesli and clods of powdered milk – breakfasts on this walk are the likes of savoury hotcakes piled with juicy mushrooms and spinach.

Walkers who are led by their tastebuds will soon find their way to Maria Island, where the wonderful Maria Island Walk seems as much

culinary odyssey as luxury guided walk. Working in the mess tents, the guides whip up wonderful evening meals like scallops with black Thai rice and fresh salad nicoise for a walking lunch. On the last night, there's a feast of whole poached Tasmanian salmon.

One of the newer delicacies on the Tasmanian walking menu, this East Coast Tasmanian journey requires no more than gentle strolling with the lightest of backpacks through the tranquil bush and beach environment of this island's national park. The island burgeons with wildlife – wombats, wallabies, cape barren geese, penguins and sea eagles are routinely spotted. Two nights are spent in comfortable canvas standing camps, and the last night at Bernacchi House, a beautifully restored heritage

Above: Hikers on the summit of the Overland Track. Pic courtesy Gabi Morcatta

Left: Relaxing in paradise at Freycinet Espape. Courtesy Kip Nunn

Below: Barn Bluff Hut in Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park, Courtesy Simon Kenny



wheretowalk

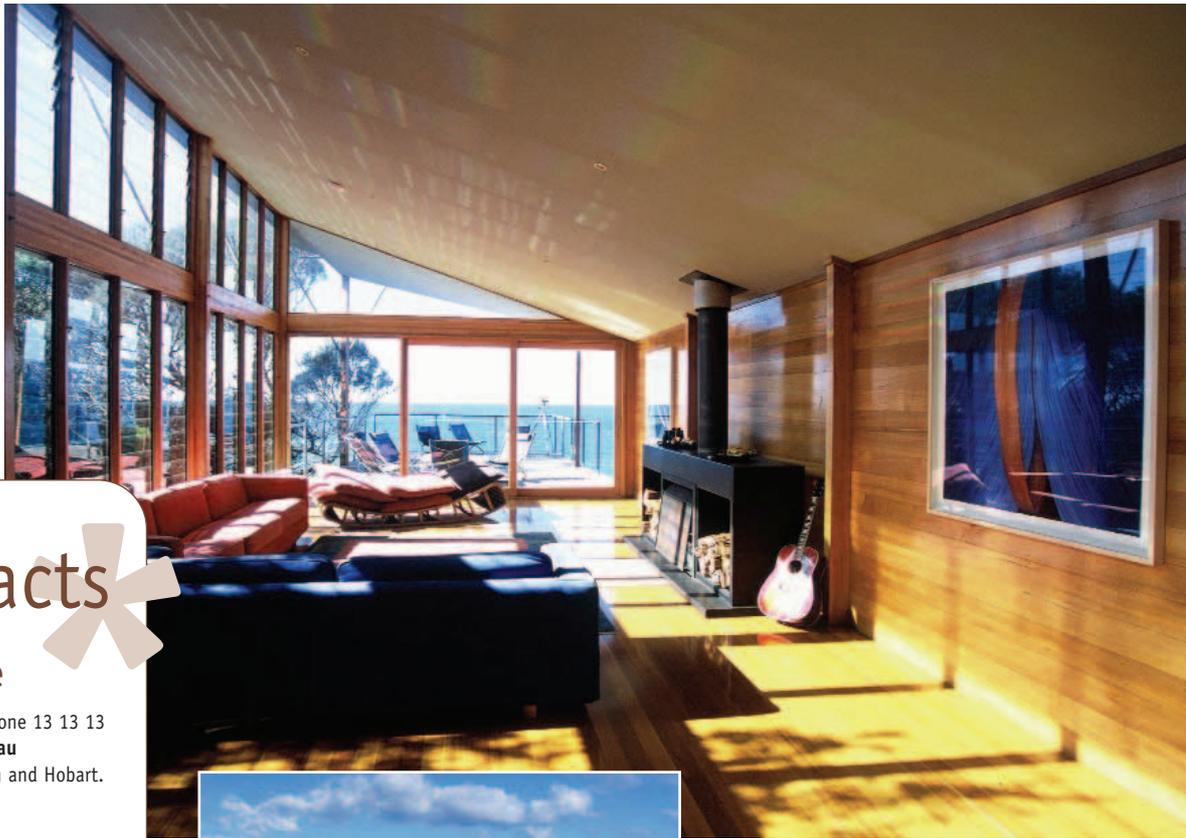
Cradle Mountain Huts: A six-day fully-catered and guided walk through the alpine environment of Tasmania's Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park. Accommodation is in private cabins and all meals and most hiking equipment is provided. The package costs \$2450 per person. Season runs from 26 October to 1 May. Phone (03) 6391 9339 or visit www.cradlehuts.com.au

Bay of Fires Walk: This is a four-day guided walk along the white sand beaches of Mount William National Park. One night is spent in a tented camp, and two at the spectacular Bay of Fires Lodge. The package costs \$1750 per person. Season runs from 26 October to 1 May. Phone (03) 6391 9339 or visit www.bayoffires.com.au

Maria Island Walk: This is an easy walk in this island national park off Tasmania's East Coast. Two nights are spent in comfortable tented standing camps, and the third in a historic house in the island's only settlement, Darlington. The package costs \$1799 per person. Phone (03) 6227 8800 or visit www.mariaislandwalk.com.au

Freycinet Experience: This is a four-day lodge-based walk in the Freycinet National Park, East Coast Tasmania. Guests stay at the secluded Friendly Beaches Lodge and take boat/waking trips covering the length of the peninsula. The package costs \$1975 per person. Season runs from November to April. Phone 1800 506 003 or visit www.freycinet.com.au

The Freycinet Escape: This two-night/three-day escape to the secluded southern end of the Freycinet Peninsula is a walk with a difference. Based at a luxurious safari-style tented camp, guests can do as much or as little walking as they like. There's also sea kayaking and snorkelling. The package costs \$1595 per person. Season runs from November to April. Phone (03) 6257 0018 or visit www.freycinetscape.com.au



travelfacts

gettingthere

Qantas flies to Hobart. Phone 13 13 13 or visit www.qantas.com.au

Jetstar flies to Launceston and Hobart. Phone 131 538 or visit

www.jetstar.com

Virgin Blue flies to Hobart and Launceston. Phone 136 789 or visit

www.virginblue.com.au

gettingaround

There are many car-hire options, including Avis, phone 13 63 33 or visit

www.avis.com.au

Vroom Vroom Vroom – visit

www.vroomvroomvroom.com.au

tip

- One constant of the outdoors in Tasmania: the weather changes in the blink of an eye. Expect sunburn or snow flurries on any given day, in alpine areas especially. Dress in layers. Synthetic is best in the outdoors here. Avoid cotton, jeans especially. Bring one or two pairs of polypropylene thermals, waterproof jacket and overpants, quick dry shorts or walking pants. Tasmania's East Coast has a hotter climate: a good hat is essential, as is a change of light walking clothes in mid-summer. Don't forget your swimming costume. The Tasmanian sun is harsh and a good sunscreen is essential. Bring sturdy walking boots and walk them in before a long foot journey.

furtherinformation

For more information, contact Tourism Tasmania on 1300 655 145 or visit

www.discovertasmania.com

Call Tas Travel on 1300 303 259 or visit

www.tastravel.com.au



Main: Bay of Fires Lodge

Left: Bay of Fires walk

Top right: Accommodation in the tented camp at Maria Island

home that speaks of the island's colourful past.

There's past of a different kind evident all over the Freycinet Peninsula, also on Tasmania's East Coast. Like Maria Island, this area was once the abundant home and hunting ground of Aboriginal Tasmanians. This is seen in the shell middens and stone tools still found all over this land, and it's one aspect of this area that guides on the Freycinet Experience Walk discuss with guests as they walk and boat around the inspiringly beautiful peninsula.

The Freycinet Experience is a lodge-based walk. Guests stay at the secluded Friendly Beaches Lodge and head out to different parts of the peninsula each day. At

Freycinet, just as on Tasmania's other luxury walks, care for the environment figures large. The lodge is built with the environment closely in mind, and being inside it, one feels close to nature with thundering waves audible and tiny wrens flitting in the bush that surrounds the camp. The lodge feels like a relaxing oasis. There's a library, log fires and after a long day's walking, one can relax in a deep clawfoot bath before a sociable candlelit dinner.

At the far southern tip of the Freycinet Peninsula is the newest edition to the Tasmanian luxury walking constellation. Hidden in the coastal forest overlooking breathtaking Bryan's Beach, Freycinet Escape is about as luxurious as camping can get. Here, stylish tented



“There’s excellent snorkelling in crystalline waters close to the camp ...”

pavilions with double beds, real linen and ensuite bathrooms are nestled in the privacy of the bush.

Trips cater for just eight people, and there’s a chef as well as a guide

with each group. Menus are ambitious with a sumptuous five-course dinner the highlight. The wonderful thing about Freycinet Escape is that it’s truly that – an

escape – and that means no obligation to take part in any prescribed activities at all. Guests can walk the length of the peninsula if they wish, or simply stroll the beach with a picnic hamper.

There’s excellent snorkelling in crystalline waters close to the camp, and there are even kayaks to paddle if walking seems like too much of a chore. Guests reportedly like the camp so much they sometimes barely leave it – and that’s fine with the hosts. Complete freedom to relax is the essence of this new brand of bush camping.

From mud and leeches with lashings of porridge to serene safari-camp-style luxury, Tasmanian bushwalking has come a long way. Of course, there are still Tasmania’s toughest walks, with bogs up to the armpits, precarious peaks, and blisters guaranteed for all. But for relaxation, pampering and soaking up this state’s gorgeous outdoors, it’s hard to pass up one of Tasmania’s luxury walks. •

Island of Inspiration.



The Freycinet Experience Walk – all inclusive package \$1975*

A four day guided walk along the entire length of the Freycinet Peninsula, including the iconic Wineglass Bay. Return each night to splendid meals and regional wines at the breathtaking Friendly Beaches Lodge. For more information call 1800 506 003 or visit www.freycinet.com.au

The Maria Island Walk - award-winning 4 days for \$1799^ inclusive

Explore fascinating convict history and rare Tasmanian wildlife on this beautiful island national park. Unwind walking along pristine beaches and through enchanting forests, then at night relax with gourmet dining and tasteful accommodation. Call (03)6227 8800 or visit www.mariaislandwalk.com.au

The Maria Island Walk and The Freycinet Experience Walk on the east coast of Tasmania, have been voted ‘best’ and ‘runner-up’, respectively, in Australian Gourmet Traveller’s Eco Tourism Travel Awards. For information and bookings visit www.tastravel.com.au or call 1800 649 011.

