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P.53

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P.78

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by **CAMILO VILLEGAS**



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Tasmanian Delights

Tasmania might be Australia's smallest state by a considerable margin, but the Apple Isle has plenty to offer in terms of fine wine and food, gourmet getaways and intriguing golf courses, writes **Winsor Dobbin**.

Golfers drawn to the two Tasmanian world-class courses at Barnbougle Dunes, or maybe to Australia's oldest course, Ratho, at Bothwell, will discover plenty of places to enjoy fine food and wine.

While Hobart has fine hotels like the Henry Jones Art Hotel, the Salamanca Markets, the sensational new MONA museum and tantalising restaurants like Garagistes and Smolt, there is a lot more to Tasmania than just its capital city.

Small towns like Stanley, Tarraleah and Cygnet may be off the beaten track but they, too, have plenty to offer those in search of gourmet experiences, while the East Coast is home to two iconic resorts in Saffire and Freycinet Lodge.

From the Tamar Valley and Pipers River regions in the north to the East Coast and the valleys surrounding Hobart, Tasmania is dotted with vineyards and has been described as "the future of the Australian wine industry".

While the island state currently accounts for less than

1 per cent of our wines, its cool-climate vineyards have proved perfect for new-wave sparkling wines, brilliant pinots and stunning aromatic whites.

And it's not just the big names like Tamar Ridge, Moorilla Estate, Stefano Lubiana, Frogmore Creek, Pipers Brook, Bay of Fires and Josef Chromy producing great wines. Artisan producers are popping up all over the place, often making less than 1000 cases of wine annually. There are also several boutique breweries and distilleries.

As wine drinkers' tastes switch from big, oaky high-alcohol styles to more restrained cool-climate wines, Tasmania has itself perfectly positioned to please them all.

Leading wine writers are increasingly identifying Tasmanian pinots as being among the best in Australia, silky and sensuous on the palate with lovely fruit and earthiness, while the House of Arras 1999 EJ Carr Late Disgorged is Australia's most expensive sparkling wine, costing just a shade under \$200 a bottle.

There are four key winemaking regions of

Tasmania, the north, the south, the east coast and the north-west, along with several sub-regions.

The Tamar Valley, centred around Launceston, also includes vineyards at nearby Relbia, adjacent to Launceston Airport. The Tamar is often compared to Burgundy's Cote d'Or, with both regions sharing a cool, humid climate—and the Tasmanian wine industry delights in pointing out climatic characteristics the island shares with great wine regions of Europe. Star wineries here include Josef Chromy, Tamar Ridge, Velo Estate, Holm Oak, Goaty Hill, Moores Hill, Pirie and Stoney Rise.

To the north-east of the Tamar, and considerably cooler, is the Pipers River region that produces the fruit for sparkling wines including Arras, Kreglinger and Jansz, as well as aromatic whites that shine for labels like Pipers Brook, Delamere, Sinapius and Dalrymple.

There are wineries in the Coal River, Derwent and Huon Valleys surrounding Hobart, and visitors to Hobart can try many of them



at Grape, an excellent wine bar on Salamanca Place. Names to look out for include Frogmore Creek, Domaine A, Meadowbank, Winstead, Puddleduck, Stefano Lubiana, Moorilla Estate, Home Hill and Panorama.

There are only a handful of east coast wineries, with Apsley Gorge, Spring Vale, Coombend and Freycinet Vineyard the standouts, while further south at Marion Bay you'll find Cape Bernier and Bream Creek. The wineries of the emerging north-west—on the road to Cradle Mountain—include Barrington Park and Lake Barrington Vineyard.

British-based Jancis Robinson, one of the world's leading wine writers, is a huge fan of Tasmania's wines and predicts a bright future, saying: "The wines reflect the pristine atmosphere of the island state and Australia's coolest climate with crisp, fresh acidity and well-defined fruit flavours."

Highlights of the gourmet year include the waterfront Taste festival held annually on the Hobart waterfront, Festive each February in Launceston, Tastings at the Top



at Cradle Mountain and Savour Tasmania, a state-wide food and wine festival that runs from late May to early July.

Yet it is not only wine putting Tasmania firmly on the global gourmet map—there's also a range of superb fresh produce.

In an arc that stretches from Burnie, Devonport, Launceston and the Pipers River, you'll also find superb cheeses, seafood, venison, chocolates, fruit and vegetables and meat from sheep, cows and deer.

"I don't know of any other place in the world where the combinations of clean, fresh air, reliable rain, fertile soil, abundant sea life and an enthusiastic farming community all come together to provide such high quality outcomes," says Tetsuya Wakuda, regarded internationally as Australia's leading chef.

In the Huon Valley and Channel districts south of Hobart, the countryside is dotted with apple and cherry trees, organic producers, goat and sheep cheese farms, berries, mushroom producers and salmon farms. Tasmania's bounty seems endless.



Here are six of the best Tasmanian gourmet getaways:

Saffire is Tasmania's newest luxury resort. Situated at Coles Bay on the Freycinet Peninsula, the \$32 million resort has just 20 suites with water views, high-tech bathrooms and private decks—and it is on the doorstep of wineries like Freycinet Estate and Spring Vale. Several of the suites boast their own plunge pools. The Palate restaurant showcases Tasmania's fresh produce with Hugh Whitehouse, formerly of the two-hat Darley's at Lillianfels in the NSW Blue Mountains, in charge of the kitchen. The wine list showcases the state's best drops. Several activities, meals and drinks are built in to the all-inclusive tariffs.

saffire-freycinet.com.au

Cradle Mountain Lodge is an iconic wilderness retreat right next to the entrance to world heritage-listed Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. The Lodge has crackling fires in winter with comfortable nooks in which to relax. There are four styles of private timber cabins with luxurious King Billy Suites at the top level. The resort hosts regular food and wine events, including nightly cheese-and-wine matchings, and the Highland Restaurant showcases the best of Tasmanian food and wine—and has a walk-in cellar where you can choose your own bottle.

cradlemountainlodge.com.au

The Priory Country Lodge at Bothwell, an hour north of Hobart, is popular with trout fishermen, hunters, visitors to the nearby Nant whisky distillery and golfers keen to play Ratho, the oldest course in the country. Built in 1848 and beautifully refurbished, the restful lodge offers four bedrooms with en suite marble

bathrooms, a formal lounge, drawing room, library, hunt room, sitting room and a fabulous country kitchen to enjoy produce from the local area. Host Greg Peacock is a terrific cook and country breakfasts and dinner are included. There are two pavilions behind the main home with more modern-style accommodation.

thepriorycountrylodge.com.au

The Old Cable Station at Stanley is an atmospheric guest house and restaurant overlooking cow paddocks and the sea in the extreme north-west of the state. Host Charlotte Brown is a talented cook and she and her kitchen team host four seasonal degustation lunches a year, serving local seafood and produce matched to wines of producers like Chartley Estate, Barringwood Park and Stoney Rise. They are traditional long, lazy lunches that start early and finish late, and locals are smart enough to either share a minibus or check in for the night. Guests get the chance to chat with farmers and fishermen while enjoying their produce, making it a fabulous foodie experience. The next seasonal producers' lunches at Old Cable Station are scheduled for April 10 and July 10.

oldcablestation.com.au

The Old Bank Bed and Breakfast at Cygnet was previously a bank building constructed in 1909. It has just three newly refurbished queen-sized bedrooms, all with their own private bathrooms. Bedrooms are beautifully equipped and guests are offered complimentary tea and coffee, and a selection of homemade cakes and biscuits, on arrival. A hearty home-made breakfast with eggs from the owners' hens and locally cured bacon is included and, best of all, the Old Bank is situated in between two of rural Tasmania's best



eateries: the Red Velvet Lounge and the Lotus Eaters Café, both of which actively promote local produce, from organic beef to exotic mushrooms and locally made chocolates.

oldbank.com.au

The Lodge at Tarraleah is set on a remote plateau overlooking central Tasmania's highland wilderness and was built in the 1930s to house the executives of a huge hydroelectric system. Today the village is a tourist attraction, and the nine-room Art Deco-style lodge is the jewel

in its crown—popular with those keen on hiking, wildlife spotting and trout fishing. The lodge is comfortable, rather than luxurious, but offers indulgences including a cliff-top hot tub and a library containing one of the largest collections of malt whiskies in the country.

tarraleahlodge.com

The Ratho Golf Links at Bothwell was first laid out and enjoyed by the pioneering Reid family, who emigrated from Scotland and settled Ratho in 1822. It is Australia's oldest golf course, and the oldest remaining outside of Scotland. The Ratho Golf Links is a public golf course, open to all golfers throughout the year with green fees of \$15 for either nine or 18 holes. An honesty green fees box is located in the open foyer of the clubhouse, where visitors can sign the National Golf Register. rathogolf.com



Winsor's Affordable Picks:



Glaezter-Dixon 2008 Mon Pere Shiraz

Ben Glaetzer only produces around 300 cases of shiraz a year but believes this still makes him the largest shiraz producer in the state. This is a textbook cool-climate shiraz with laid-back red berry, blackcurrant and white pepper bouquet and raspberry, spice and smoky bacon characters on the palate. A savoury wine with velvety tannins. **\$42.**



Derwent Estate 2010 Rosé

Very much a new-wave rosé, made in the savoury, textural style that is now all the rage. It's fresh and spicy with a long, nicely balanced dry finish, but it also offers enough fruitiness (fresh strawberries, red cherries and nutmeg) to make it appealing to those who do not like their pinks ultra-dry. Chill and enjoy on a warm afternoon. **\$22.**



Arras NV Brut Elite

It is now widely accepted that Tasmania produces the best sparkling wine base material in Australia. This is the latest Tasmanian bubbly from Ed Carr of Constellation, arguably Australia's best sparkling winemaker. It's wonderfully bright and refreshing with great structure, elegance, persistence and an impressive mousse. A tremendous aperitif. **\$50.**



Goaty Hill 2009 Pinot Noir

Cool-climate pinot is a wine style that's growing in popularity although this pushes the boundaries just a little, coming from a very warm year. It's quite a big pinot in Tasmanian terms, richly textured, plush and plummy, with dark red berry flavours and plenty of fruit sweetness alongside a melange of Asian spices, soft tannins and savoury oak. **\$34.**



Moores Hill 2010 Riesling

Businessman turned vigneron Julian Allport demonstrates just how good Tasmanian rieslings can be. This Tamar Valley wine offers promise from the first fragrant aromas and delivers with punchy, vibrant freshness on the palate where Granny Smith apple flavours and lemon and lime zest are in abundance. There's plenty of lively, zingy acid, too. **\$25.**



Holm Oak 2010 Pinot Gris

Pinot gris is a style with immense potential in Tasmania. This is made in an attractive style midway between the richness of wines from Alsace and the crisp grigio styles of northern Italy. It's a delightfully drinkable wine with lovely balance between aromatics and soft, rich pear flavours. Natural acid gives the wine length and structure. **\$25.**



Bellwether 2009 Chardonnay

This was recently named as one of Tasmania's best chardonnays by wine guru James Halliday—a remarkable achievement given it is the first wine from the state produced by former Stonehaven winemaker Sue Bell. Beautifully balanced, it is a white of persistence and precision that gives pleasure from the first glass to the last. **\$50.**



Stefano Lubiana 2008 Merlot

Merlot can be a challenging grape variety from which to make good wine in Tasmania, but Steve Lubiana does it better than anyone, particularly in a warm year like 2008. It's a busy wine with dark berries, cedary oak and grainy tannins all in harmony. A dry, savoury red that will cellar well for several years and is versatile with food. **\$32.**

