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# east coast odyssey

Walk, swim, dine and  
quaff your way down  
Tasmania's other coast

Heading to Four Mile beach,  
Maria island

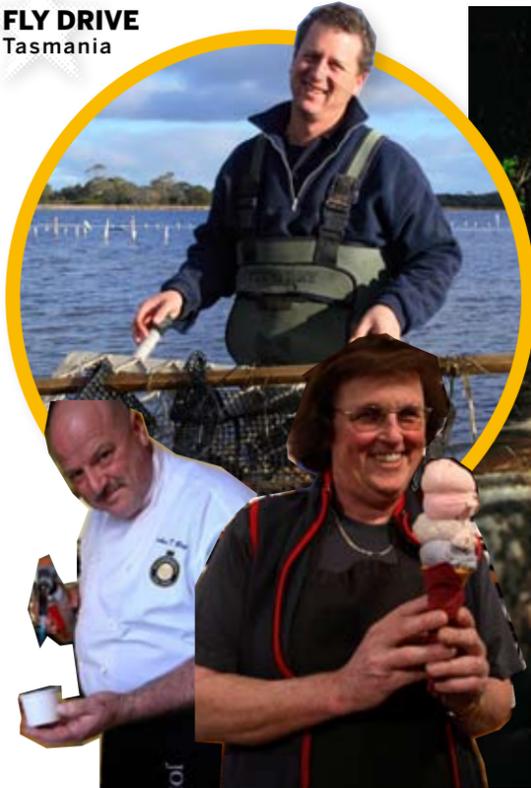
**When** you think of Tasmania, chances are powder-white beaches, azure seas, and long summery days are the last thing on your mind. But if that's the case, you're missing one of Australia's best-kept secrets: Tasmania's east coast, where islands, peninsulas, soaring cliffs and sandy beaches abound. Pretty towns dot the coastline, along with national parks where spotting wildlife is easy. This is just the place for a luxurious, romantic escape; though with plenty of attractions and things to do, it's equally fun when there are little ones in tow.

Start at Maria Island (pronounced *Mariah*), an hourglass-shaped island that's all national park. The island is vehicle-free, so park your

car dockside and make the short journey across the Mercury Passage by ferry. You'll find forests, mountains and pristine beaches as well as excellent diving and snorkelling. Spend a few days in rustic accommodation at the **Penitentiary** (Parks and Wildlife Service, Maria Island, tel: +61 (3) 6257 1420) – once home to the island's convicts. If that's a little too creepy, how about a guided four-day walk, featuring luxury camping and delicious food, with the **Maria Island Walk** (Lower Sandy Bay, tel: +61 (3) 6227 8800)? Even if you're on a whirlwind tour and short on time, you needn't miss this jewel of the east coast, try a day trip with **Once Upon Maria** (tel: +61 (3) 6227 8900).



**FLY DRIVE**  
Tasmania



Photos: Tourism Tasmania/Gary Moore



Photo: Tourism Tasmania/Geoffrey Lea

If you prefer being your own tour guide, the region is very accommodating. Jump in a car and head for the little town of Swansea; the drive is scenic and packed with things to do along the way. Stop for a swim at one of the white-sand beaches, and give into your appetite at the first snack stop – **Kate's Berry Farm** (Addison St, nr Swansea, tel: +61 (3) 6257 8428). Kate is a real Tassie gem, and makes berry ice creams, jams and sauces to die for: "Strawberries here actually taste like strawberries and raspberries have a sweetness and tang." Put her claim to the test with a punnet of fresh berries in summer, or try her speciality: a four-tier cone of blueberry, blackberry, raspberry and strawberry ice cream. It's as decadent as it sounds!

Swansea itself looks over Great Oyster Bay to the Freycinet Peninsula, and is another gourmet stop. Follow up a wander along the beach with a meal at **The Banc Restaurant** (7 Maria St, tel: +61 (3) 6257 8816). Chef John T Bailey will whip up fresh east coast produce that will make your mouth water! For somewhere seriously swanky to stay near Swansea, try the architectural marvel of **Avalon** (11922 Tasman Hwy, tel: 1300 361 136 within Australia) for steel and glass and endless sea views.

Next stop is the **Freycinet Peninsula** and the national park of the same name - Tasmania's most-visited park. The essential outing here is a walk to Wineglass Bay: the perfect curve of white sand and blue sea is the peninsula's most famous sight. There are plenty of easy day-walks and magical beaches along the peninsula, and for accommodation that's right in the national park, try **Freycinet Lodge** (Coles Bay, tel: +61 (3) 6225 7000) – the spa cabins are cosy and a super way to really unwind. After a little R & R, try quad-

biking with **All4Adventure** (tel: +61 (3) 6257 0018). Licensed drivers can ride while kids enjoy the ranger vehicle; it's a great way to see some of the further reaches of the peninsula without embarking on a major hike. For something a little more adventurous, try seacliff-climbing and sea kayaking with **Freycinet Adventures** (Coles Bay, tel: +61

(3) 6257 0500) to take in the peninsula's amazing seascapes. Romantics will love the secluded beach camp at Bryan's Beach, where **Freycinet Escape** (Coles Bay, tel: +61 (3) 6257 0018) offers three-day luxury camping and walking tours.

Visiting Tassie's east coast without sampling the seafood would be simply

scandalous – when in Freycinet, visit **Freycinet Marine Farm** (88 Flacks Rd, Coles Bay, tel: +61 (3) 6257 0140). Proprietor Giles Fisher will show you oysters growing in the crystalline waters, and if you come in a group, you can buy some fresh to take with you. "They've a subtle, briny flavour,"

says Fisher. "And they're just so plump and smooth." Wash the oysters down with a fine wine from nearby **Freycinet Vineyard** (15919 Tasman Hwy, Bicheno, tel: +61 (3) 6257 8574). Winemaker Claudio Radenti has been making wine since he was a youngster, and the vineyard offers tastings and an open cellar door. Try the Radenti, a beautiful sparkling wine.

If the east coast's breathtaking sights, food and wine aren't reason enough to visit, look up Bruce Englefield, aka the "Devil Whisperer", who runs **East Coast Natureworld** (Tasman Hwy, Bicheno, tel: +61 (3) 6375 1311) and is the region's unofficial number-one fan. "We get more hours of sun here than any other part of Australia," he enthuses. And it's not a tall tale: at 42 degrees south, the



**OPPOSITE PAGE: CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Giles Fisher at Freycinet Marine Farm, Kate Bradley of Kate's Berry Farm & John Bailey proprietor of the Banc Restaurant, Swansea; All4Adventure; Freycinet Lodge; THIS PAGE: CLOCKWISE TOP: Wineglass Bay; Bruce Englefield at Natureworld with Tasmanian Devils**

east coast of Tassie enjoys marvellously long summer days. In midsummer, it's not quite dark here even at 11pm! It's good news for beachgoers, though not for visitors wanting to spot native animals, which are mostly nocturnal. This is set to change, however: Natureworld will soon open a state-of-the-art nocturnal house for quolls, potoroos, bettongs, sugar gliders and other creatures of the night. Unsurprisingly, the "Devil Whisperer" also has a love affair with Tasmanian devils, and visitors can see feedings daily.

Bicheno is something of a hot spot for wildlife. This must be one of the few towns in Australia where road signs warn of penguins crossing! Visitors can also spy the diminutive penguins, Australia's smallest, with **Bicheno Penguin Tours** (Town Centre, tel: +61 (3) 6375 1333) nightly. For kids, there's also the **Bicheno Sealife Centre** (Tasman Hwy, tel: +61 (3) 6375 1121), which has seahorses, crabs, live crayfish and a huge collection of shells.

If you'd rather see your fish on a hook, head to **St Helens**. Tasmania's game-fishing capital is just 12 nautical miles off the continental shelf and offers tuna, deep-sea trevalla, harpuka and even marlin. Skipper Lionel Peters runs **Keen Angler Charters** (tel: +61 (409) 964 847) and says he can't think of a better job or place to live. "St Helens is the warmest place in Tasmania, and being out



on the water here is just magic. We often see whales and dolphins, and you're just about guaranteed a catch." Want to take the effort out of fishing? Go to **Salty Seas** (18 Medea Esplanade, tel: +61 (3) 6376 1252), the east coast's best fish shop. Choose your own live crayfish and owner Anita Paulsen will brave

**St Helens is the warmest place in Tasmania, and being out on the water here is just magic**

the snapping claws for you and haul it out herself. Tasmania's renowned scallops and mussels are also available, when in season. If you're after an even quicker bite, just pop in for mouth-watering fish and chips from **Captain's Catch** on the wharf (Marina Pde, tel: +61 (3) 6376 1170): look out for its bright sign.



**ABOVE:** Bay of Fires beach walk;  
**LEFT:** Azure waters on the east coast.

Photos: Tourism Tasmania/George Apostolidis

In the north-east corner of Tassie, the scenery becomes even more breathtaking, if that's possible. Binalong Bay and the Bay of Fires are fringed by deserted beaches of snowy sand and orange granite, and lapped by crystal-clear waters. You can't come this far without dining at **Angasi** (Main Rd, Binalong Bay, tel: +61 (3) 6376 8222). Try Tassie's native angasi oysters, lobster tortellini or the salt and pepper-fried oysters while you gaze over the uncanny blue of the bay.

Your east coast odyssey should end with a good long walk – you'll need it! **The Bay of Fires Walk** (tel: +61 (3) 6391 9338) is a four-day journey through Mt William National Park, staying first at a secluded beach camp and then at the magnificent Bay of Fires Lodge. This place has an edge-of-the world feel; the sunrises are like molten silver, the air is as clean as it gets, and it's a perfect way to stretch the legs on one last east coast ramble. ★

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**Gabi Mocatta says**



I'm based in Hobart, but spent a few blissful days on Tasmania's east coast soaking up the winter sun and becoming acquainted with all manner of seafood. At Freycinet Marine Farm, Giles Fisher put on his David Attenborough whisper to relate all sorts of fascinating facts from the secret life

of oysters. These plant-eating animals live for 20 years and can grow up to 40cm long. Imagine slurping that down with a sip of Freycinet Chardonnay! It's a frightening thought.