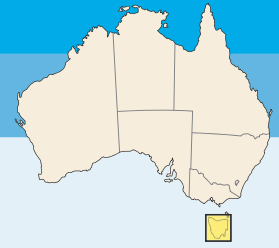


Your great Australian journey starts here

TASMANIAN JOURNEY



Length: 8–14 days Fly/drive option: Hobart, Launceston

To drive in a loop around Tasmania is to take two contrasting journeys: one to the tranquil beaches of the east and the other to the raw and rugged mountains that flank the west. Quiet highways ring the island and every bend in the road promises something: the perfect crescent of Wineglass Bay, Australia's highest sea cliffs on the Tasman Peninsula, the distinctive summit of Cradle Mountain, plentiful wildlife, Georgian architecture and a wealth of natural produce that's as fresh as the Tasmanian air.

Travel tips

Tasmania's busiest tourist season is summer, especially during school holidays, when bookings are essential.

Winters are cold, with temperatures in Hobart between 5°C and 13°C, but relatively dry – Hobart is the second-driest capital in the country. Summers can be delightfully warm, particularly in the north-east, but it's always advisable when hiking to have warm clothes and be prepared for a change in the weather.

A Holiday Pass (\$50) will allow you entry to all Tasmanian national parks for up to eight weeks. Application forms can be downloaded from www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/current_fees.html.

Websites

■ www.discovertasmania.com.au



Tasmanian Journey – Travel Times

Route	Distance	Duration
Hobart - St Helens	254 km	3hrs 20mins
St Helens - Launceston	155 km	2hrs
Launceston - Smithton	237 km	3hrs
Smithton - Wynyard	67 km	1hr
Wynyard - Queenstown	176 km	2hrs 20mins
Queenstown - Hobart	261 km	3hrs 30mins



A to B Hobart to Port Arthur

From Hobart (www.tasmaniasouth.com/hobart/index.html) it's straight onto the open road of the Tasman Highway, from where most visitors will want to make the short detour into gorgeous, Georgian-styled Richmond, set around the convict-built Richmond Bridge.

Past the Richmond turn-off, the highway crosses Pitt Water to Sorell. Turn south towards Tasman Peninsula, connected to the island by the 100 m wide Eaglehawk Neck isthmus. Across the isthmus, turn into the Blowhole and Tasmans Arch for a glimpse of Australia's highest vertical sea-cliffs. **Walking tracks** stride out across the cliff tops, though by driving south to

Fortescue Bay it's just a short walk to Cape Hauy for a **classic view** of the slender sea stacks known as Candlestick, Monument and Totem Pole. The latter is a dramatic rock-climbing site tackled by very experienced climbers.

At Taranna you'll find the **Tasmanian Devil Park** (www.tasmaniandevilpark.com), where you can view Tassie devils by day and take a guided walk in search of the creature by night. Bookings are essential for the Devils in the Dark walk.

From Taranna it's a short distance to **Port Arthur** (www.portarthur.org.au), Australia's most famous convict station, where you can wander through the beautifully preserved historic site or view it from above at Palmers Lookout. For a different perspective, you can **paddle** Port Arthur's waters with Blackaby Sea Kayaks (www.blackabyseakayaks.com.au) or join the nightly Ghost Tour through the convict station.

C to D Sorell to Coles Bay

From Sorell, the Tasman Highway swings inland, crossing the delightfully named Break-Me-Neck and Bust-Me-Gall hills to Buckland.

The highway reaches the east coast – a shoreline of tropical-like beaches – at Orford. Take a ferry from nearby Louisville Point to **Maria Island** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/maria), a car-free national park and former penal station. In the old township of Darlington you can spend the night in basic **accommodation** inside the penitentiary or **camp** amid a menagerie of wildlife – Forester kangaroos, wallabies, possums and Cape Barren geese – on the lawns. Bookings should be made through the Maria Island National Park office (03 6257 1420) in Triabunna.

From Darlington you can explore the fantastic natural patterns at the Painted Cliffs, the numerous fossils at Fossil Cliffs or, if you're feeling energetic, **climb** to the peaks of Bishop and Clerk. There's also the guided four-day **Maria Island Walk** (www.mariaislandwalk.com.au), in which you stay in beach-front camps and the historic Bernacchi House in Darlington.

From Orford the road journeys north along the coast, through Triabunna and past convict-built Spiky Bridge to the holiday town of Swansea. North of town is a line of **wineries** and to complement the wine there's the popular **Kate's Berry Farm**.

Rounding Great Oyster Bay, venture south to Coles Bay and **Freycinet National Park** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/freycinet). Freycinet's best beach is one of Tasmania's most famous landmarks: the perfect curve of Wineglass Bay. The short climb to the Wineglass Bay Lookout rewards you with the classic bay view, or you can continue walking to spend some quality beach time on Wineglass Bay itself. Bay views from the water come with a half-day **cruise** on the catamaran *Schouten Passage* (www.freycinsetseacharters.com).

There are some great **luxury accommodation** options in and around Coles Bay (www.freycinetcolesbay.com).

D to E Coles Bay to Launceston

Backtrack to the Tasman Highway, from where it's a short drive north into Bicheno, the bay invariably filled with the fishing boats that are Bicheno's heart and soul. The Foreshore Footway (3 km) offers the **best views**.

In the evening, head to the **penguin rookery** at the northern end of Redbill Beach. Tours should be booked ahead (03 6375 1333).

Bicheno is also Tasmania's **diving** capital, with an array of marine features, including the colourful Golden Bommies (www.bichenodive.com.au).

North from Bicheno, the highway passes **Douglas Apsley National Park** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/douglas-apsley/index.html), its eucalypt forests cut by crystalline streams. Shortly beyond, it's worth taking the higher route through St Marys,



Freycinet National Park

ROSS DUNSTAN



Bay of Fires

which is just 10 km, yet worlds away, from the beaches. On the way you'll climb over Elephant Pass, topped by the legendary **Mount Elephant Pancakes** (www.mountelephantpancakes.com.au).

Drop back to the coast and St Helens, from where it's a short jaunt north to the evocative **Bay of Fires**, rimmed by granite boulders and orange lichen that gives the bay a fiery appearance. Equally fiery are the sportfish that draw **anglers** to St Helens' inshore reefs. For a lingering look, join the luxury, four-day Bay of Fires Walk (www.bayoffires.com.au).

At St Helens the highway leaves the east coast, turning inland, where both foodies and nature lovers will want to veer into Pyengana. Just out of town is 90 m St Columba Falls, Tasmania's highest waterfall, while in town is the coveted clothbound cheddar at the **Pyengana Cheese Factory** as well as the atmospheric Pub in the Paddock.

The highway climbs on to Weldborough Pass, dipping back through Derby – check out the Derby River Derby if you're here in October – and the agricultural centre of Scottsdale before touching down in Tassie's second city, Launceston.

'Lonnie' is filled with attractions, from raging Cataract Gorge to tours of the **Boags Brewery**. For a full rundown on the city's attractions, drop in to the Tasmanian Travel and Information Centre on St John Street.

North from the city you can meander along the Tamar Valley Wine Route (www.tamarvalley.com.au), visiting **21 vineyards** and a choice of great **restaurants**. At Beauty Point, take a brief break from wine with a visit to **Seahorse World** (www.seahorseworld.com.au).

E to **F** Launceston to Stanley

West of Launceston, the Bass Highway skirts beneath the Great Western Tiers. Detour from Deloraine to Mole Creek Karst National Park (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/molecreek/index.html), where two **caves** are open to the public. Several others can be entered with Wild Cave Tours (www.wildcavetours.com).

Another short detour will take you into Sheffield, which has become Tasmania's outdoor art gallery. The process of painting murals on town buildings began 20 years ago and now the buildings that aren't covered in murals seem naked.

For a special treat on the way to Devonport, try the Belgian **chocolates** at the House of Anvers (www.anvers-chocolate.com.au) in Latrobe.

In Devonport, a visit to the Tiagarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Museum will reward you with a look at one of the State's few **rock-art** sites.

The drive then ambles along the north coast through Burnie to the wonderful north west. Come in spring and you can see Table Cape's kaleidoscope of tulips. Beyond it is the postcard setting of Stanley, crouched at the foot of the unusual Nut and, at the end of the road, the legendary **surf** at Marrawah.

G to **H** Burnie to Cradle Mountain

From Burnie it's a pleasant drive down the Murchison Highway to Cradle Mountain, a centrepiece of the **Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/cradle/index.html). The classic view across Dove Lake to Cradle

Mountain's summit is easily earned, with the road ending at the lake's edge. With a little more effort you can **walk** around the shoreline, climb to Marions Lookout, or scramble to the top of Cradle Mountain itself.

Australia's most famous multi-day bushwalk begins near Dove Lake: the **Overland Track** wanders south for 65 km to Lake St Clair. Permits to walk the track during the warmer months can be obtained at www.overlandtrack.com.au. The sweat-free way to see this remarkable landscape is with a **helicopter flight** with Seair (www.adventureflights.com.au). Enjoy a stop with wine and cheese atop one of Australia's deepest gorges.

On the roads into Cradle Mountain you'll find a range of **accommodation**, from basic camping to decadent rooms, and also the **Wilderness Gallery** (www.wildernessgallery.com.au), with 10 galleries of collections inspired by the landscape.

H to I Cradle Mountain to Queenstown

Back on the Murchison Highway, the drive heads south through the rugged mountainscape that defines the west coast. Turn into the mining town of Zeehan and then keep going to visit Strahan (www.strahanvillage.com.au), a peaceful interlude on an otherwise ferocious west coast. Once described by an American newspaper as 'the best little town in the world', Strahan is the quintessential holiday village, with gorgeous **accommodation** options, fine food and wilderness almost on tap. It's the base for **cruises** and **flights** along the Gordon River. World Heritage Cruises (www.worldheritagecruises.com.au) and Gordon River Cruises (www.gordonrivercruises.com.au) sail up the river to Heritage Landing, where you can wander through a beautiful section of rainforest.

Seaplanes venture further, with Wilderness Air (members.tassie.net.au/~wildair) flights landing beside Sir John Falls. And for that extra touch of idle luxury, you can **sail** on Macquarie Harbour at dusk aboard the 20 m ketch *Stormbreaker* (www.tasadventures.com/operator.asp?opid=47&ttid=w07), dining on crayfish as you watch the setting sun bronze the surrounding mountains.

If you just want to hang about in Strahan, be sure to check out *The Ship That Never Was* (www.roundearth.com.au/ship.htm), Tasmania's longest-running play, staged in the Strahan Visitors Centre amphitheatre.

This leg of the drive ends in Queenstown (www.queenstowntasmania.com), where the barren, lunar landscape betrays the town's fascinating mining history, although revegetation work is gradually softening the view.

The steam-powered rack-and-pinion **West Coast Wilderness Railway** (www.discovertasmania.com.au/home/index.cfm?SiteID=767) runs 35 km between Queenstown and Strahan, passing through deep gorges and thick rainforest.



I to A Queenstown to Hobart

Crossing back through the mountains, it's the anvil-like summit of Frenchmans Cap that dominates the scene while, below, the gorgeous Franklin River threads its way back towards Strahan. At the Collingwood River crossing you may see **rafters** preparing for the epic journey along the Franklin.

Turn north at Derwent Bridge to get to Lake St Clair, Australia's deepest natural lake, plunging to 167 m in places, and the southern end of the Overland Track. There's a range of **accommodation** at Lakeside St Clair Wilderness Holidays (www.tasadventures.com/operator.asp?opid=22&ttid=m06), and you can warm both your stomach and your body with a feed beside the **log fire** at the Derwent Bridge Wilderness Hotel.

Beyond Ouse, head towards **Mount Field National Park** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/mtfield/index.html) to enjoy Russell Falls or stretch your legs on the Tarn Shelf atop the mountain.

The road continues deep into Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area (www.parks.tas.gov.au/wha/whahome.html) and a couple of great adventure prospects. Junee Cave State Reserve contains Australia's deepest cave at 375 m. For hardcore **spelunkers** it also contains the longest single pitch – 191 m – of any cave in the country. At road's end is Gordon Dam, holding both water and **abseilers** – it's the site of the world's highest commercial abseil (www.aardvarkadventures.com.au), dropping 140 m from the dam lip to the floor of the Gordon Valley.

If the adrenaline is still flowing by the time you return to the Lyell Highway, end your journey with a dizzying **jet-boat** ride on the Devil Jet (www.deviljet.com.au) along the Derwent River from New Norfolk. ■