



Woodbridge on the Derwent

Treasure Island

From Port Arthur to Peppermint Bay
- Rhonda Oxnam spends some quality time in Tasmania.

As part of my recent 50th birthday celebrations (which lasted from mid August until early October!) Derek and I decided to head to Tasmania for a mini-break.

Having arrived in Hobart on a cold, windy Thursday morning our first port of call was the Islington Hotel. Luckily the warm welcome we received at this magnificent boutique hotel more than compensated for the inclement weather.

The hotel's catchphrase – the last luxury outpost before the South Pole – proved to be something of a misnomer ... luxury it most certainly was, an outpost it definitely was not!

Conveniently located in the heart of the city, the Islington displayed a charming juxtaposition of olde world charm and modern amenities and

provided the perfect base for our two-night stay.

As our time in Tasmania was limited, we decided on a 'basic' tourist itinerary – Port Arthur, Salamanca Markets, MONA and Peppermint Bay.

Our road trip to Port Arthur was amazing ... with every turn in the road revealing something new. The scenery constantly changed from native bushland to English countryside (and back again) while the seemingly endless waterways provided a gorgeous backdrop around every corner.

Fortunately, our schedule allowed some time to explore and we wisely decided to visit many of the tourist spots signposted along the way – Remarkable Cave was indeed remarkable (and well worth the steep climb to bottom of the abyss to view it); Tasman's gravity-defying Arch

was breathtaking and the Tessellated Pavement was very impressive.

Port Arthur itself was also a revelation. Established as a penal settlement in the 1800s, and notorious as the scene of the 1996 massacre which claimed the lives of 35 people and wounded 19 others, the area is as beautiful as it is eerie.

Having spent most of the day rugged up in several layers of warm clothing, we could certainly sympathise with the prisoners who were allowed just two blankets and a rug to ward off the harsh Tasmanian cold.

On the way home we took yet another detour and discovered perhaps my favourite destination – although you probably won't find it on many

tourist maps. The imaginatively named Doo Town is a sleepy, yet picturesque, hamlet where all the houses are labeled to reflect the residents' personalities – Doo Little, Doo Me, Xanadoo, Nuthin' Dooin' ...

Derek and I spent much of the return journey trying to 'out doo' each other and come up with our own names. (For the record I settled on Yabba Dabba Doo, while he went for the more traditional It'll Doo.)

The weekly Salamanca Markets are something of an institution in Hobart, and if you are lucky enough to be in town on a Saturday morning are well worth a visit. The myriad of stalls stock everything from home made produce and handcrafted souvenirs to an eclectic collection

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of jewellery, clothing and woodwork. We spent an enjoyable few hours browsing the stands before making our way back around the harbour to board the ferry to MONA (Museum of Old and New Art).

Opened in January 2011, the privately owned museum features a multi-million dollar collection of contemporary art and antiquities – from original Whiteleys to Wim Delvoye's Cloaca, a machine that simulates the human digestive system and is commonly described as the 'poo machine'.

As challenging as it is remarkable, the museum comes with its own warning in regard to the 'sexually explicit and potentially confronting artworks', with parental discretion advised for children under 15. >>





The Islington Hotel

Despite this, I highly recommend a visit, if only to marvel at the bold, brilliant and bizarre nature of the artworks on display.

For the second half of our stay we headed out to New Norfolk and the stately Woodbridge on the Derwent.

Housed in a superbly restored, convict-built Georgian mansion, the Woodbridge has only recently re-opened after a two-year hiatus but retains its ranking as Tasmania's only Small Luxury Hotel. With the Derwent River flowing serenely by the back door, welcoming fires burning in the grates, and delicious local produce served in the Pavilion dining room, it's easy to see why.

(I must take this opportunity to apologise to our hosts John and Laurelle for falling asleep in the media room while watching the football – perhaps if the lounge wasn't so comfortable

we would have managed to stay awake until the end of the match!)

Our last day, Sunday, dawned bright and clear – perfect for our planned cruise to Peppermint Bay. While the knowledgeable guides pointed out local landmarks and dropped underwater cameras so we could view the marine life, Derek and I sat back and enjoyed the two-hour journey aboard the luxurious *Peppermint Bay II*. Once we reached our destination, we were treated to a delicious three-course meal overlooking the crystal clear waters of the bay.

Which brings me to another salient point ... Our taste of Tasmania getaway also provided the perfect opportunity to savour the tastes of Tasmania. Fresh Blue-Eye trevalla, grilled to perfection and enjoyed alfresco by the waterfront; organic blueberry and cinnamon icecream, sinfully rich and shared between us

on the return boat trip; slow roasted beef cheek, served with seasonal vegetables and eaten in the intimate surroundings of the Islington's conservatory; locally brewed beer, the perfect accompaniment to a delicious prawn bisque at the Woodbridge hotel ...

Having whetted our appetite during our all too brief stay in the Apple Isle, we can't wait to return and explore more of this beautiful part of Australia. ●

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E info@covetravel.com.au

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