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Breathhtaking beauty of Tasmania

A long weekend on the Apple Isle proves to be the perfect blend of natural wonders, delicious local fare and cultural indulgence, as KYLIE OLIVER discovers

BLUE skies, warm ocean swims and tropical breezes have always been my holiday go-to.

I'm a sun-lover, you see, and seeking out hot weather is a holiday habit. This might have something to do with the many holidays I spent in Queensland as a kid.

But a recent change of direction has caused a rethink.

A three-night escape to Tasmania – with a best friend in tow – proved to be a breath of fresh air and a wonderful surprise.

She had been to Tasmania before and knew what beauty awaited us.

I was a complete Apple Isle novice but keen to explore this state I'd heard so much about.

It did not disappoint.

Our girls' weekend began on the Friday evening with a trip across Bass Strait on board the recently refurbished Spirit of Tasmania.

They say Tassie is a place best explored on wheels so being able to take the car with us was ideal as we planned to make our way from Devonport to Hobart, visiting Launceston and Wineglass Bay along the way.

The aim was to pack as much in as we could without feeling too rushed.

We boarded the Spirit with ease at Port Melbourne, before dropping our overnight bags in the twin-bed cabin, picking up a glass of champagne from the bar and heading for the

nearest deck to watch the Melbourne skyline fade into the distance as we cruised along.

Although watching a movie in the cinema was an option, we opted to chat over a bottle of wine – Tasmanian, of course – in a cosy chair by the windows before eating dinner (with dessert) and getting an early night ready for what the next day would bring.

Thankfully it was all smooth sailing and we arrived in Devonport well rested and ready to hit the road.

Early morning coffee cravings were satisfied at a cosy café called Laneway Devonport. From there we made the half-hour drive to the Christmas Hills Raspberry Farm in Elizabeth Town for a delicious breakfast in pretty surrounds.



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Then it was time to make our way to Launceston. Blessed with a beautiful day, we arrived at our accommodation less than an hour later.

And what luxurious accommodation it was.

There were audible gasps as we opened the gate and set eyes on the gorgeous outdoor bath that greeted us upon arrival in our room at Hatherley Birrell Collection.

Carved from a single piece of volcanic rock, it sat beside a magnolia tree in the private garden that surrounds the Muse Garden Pavilion room.

Privacy and contemporary styling were just two highlights of the accommodation, along with special touches such as a sketchbook by the bed inviting guests to get creative.

While the temptation was to get straight in the bath and soak away our stresses, we instead ventured to Cataract Gorge – admiring the charm of this riverside city along the way.

Cataract Gorge is definitely a must-visit and is home to the world's largest single span chairlift from which you can take in the beautiful natural gorge and cliff grounds.

On a sunny day you can even pack your bathers and take a dip in the outdoor swimming pool. There is also a restaurant and cafe if you want to enjoy lunch in this picturesque spot.

We chose to venture into the city and check out the local market where you could do little salsa dancing or just check out the many stalls filled with wonderful local produce.

I'd recommend a wander through City Park with its resident monkeys (yes, I'm serious about the monkeys).

The nearby Design Tasmania Centre is also

worth putting on the itinerary. It features works by leading designers and a delightful gift shop featuring a large selection of locally made wares, perfect for any gifts you need to buy.

We decided a visit to Launceston would not be complete without stopping by the James Boag's Brewery where the staff were more than happy to chat about the history of the brewery as we tasted the various brews.

It proved to be a common theme everywhere we went in Tasmania that the locals were keen to talk about the local producers and with good reason – there is a lot to brag about.

This shone through later that evening when we dined at the beautiful Stillwater restaurant which is located in a renovated 1830s flour mill on the Tamar River.

The restaurant showcases local produce and wine and the dining experience became a favourite of our trip.

Of course, a soak in the outdoor bath was beckoning and, despite the distinct chill in the air, it was the perfect way to cap off our Launceston experience.

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While the easiest option would have been to make our way directly to Hobart the next morning, a look through a travel brochure convinced us we would be wise to spend some time at Wineglass Bay.

We decided against hiking – it was intended to be a relaxing girls' weekend, after all – and instead jumped aboard a four-hour cruise with Wine Glass Bay Cruises to take in the breathtaking scenery of the Freycinet Peninsula in comfort and style.

The travel brochures certainly didn't mislead us and Wineglass Bay, with its crescent of dazzling white sand, showed why it is considered to be among the best beaches in the world.

The cruise stops for lunch in the bay so you can soak up the scenery. In case we needed any more proof our detour was a great idea, a friendly pod of dolphins added some excitement to our return trip. A detour definitely worth taking.

Next stop, Hobart. I have to confess, I was immediately smitten with this city. In particular the Salamanca area where we stayed.

We arrived in the early evening and checked into our accommodation at the Salamanca Wharf Hotel. The boutique hotel has 22 apartments and, I have to be honest, would be lovely for a romantic getaway.

We shared a laugh about that before happily

venturing out to explore the wharf area and enjoy a sneaky margarita at the Barcelona Restaurant Bar.

In the morning we meandered through nearby shops before spending an afternoon at MONA Museum of Old and New Art.

It was my favourite part of the weekend and a must-see whether you love art, architecture or just have a curious mind.

Sitting on the banks of the Derwent River, a visit to MONA is a mind-blowing experience and even moreso when you learn that it is privately owned by Tasmanian David Walsh, an art collector and mathematician who made his millions by perfecting algorithms that enabled him to beat casinos and bookies.

Hours can be spent marvelling at the mind-boggling mix of ancient artefacts, contemporary artworks and inspired installations such as the "rain-painting machine" created by German born artist Julius Popp.

Unfortunately we underestimated how much time we would need at MONA.

Fortunately it has given me a reason to head south again to the Apple Isle. Even in winter.

Save up to 35 per cent on passenger and cabin fares on the Spirit of Tasmania for selected sailings until September 15, 2016. Visit spiritoftasmania.com.au for more details.



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*Clockwise from left: Stunning views can be seen from
Cataract Gorge in Launceston; boarding the Spirit of
Tasmania means you can travel the state by car;
the volcanic rock carved bathtub at Hatherley Birrell
Collection; Stillwater restaurant showcases local
produce; and the sandy beaches of Wineglass Bay.*



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The spectacular MONA Museum of Old and New Art is chiselled into the banks of the Derwent River and is a major tourism drawcard for Hobart. A highlight is the mesmerising “rain-painting machine” created by German born artist Julius Popp which creates cascades of water in the shape of phrases taken daily from online news sites.



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gt TRAVEL



The historic Salamanca area is home to the famous market, as well as many bars, boutique shops and eateries.