



Five routes. Five delicious ways to sample Tasmania's world-class produce, wine and whisky. David Leser explores the food trails that will expand your horizons – and possibly your waistline (sorry).

TRAIL #1
THE EAST COAST

HOBART > SWANSEA > CRANBROOK >
APSLAWN > FREYCINET



Coles Bay's rugged coastline (opposite); Basque-inspired tapas at Milton Vineyard's Mahasti restaurant (above); Devil's Corner Cellar Door incorporates seafood café The Fishers (right)

IN TASMANIA they call it the Great Eastern Drive but if you didn't know any better you'd swear it was "La Grande Route Française" (The Great French Road), given the names that jump from the history books as you travel this glorious stretch of coast north of Hobart.

From Marion Bay up to Cape Bernier through to Louisville Point and Cape Bougainville. Then all the way to Mount Freycinet, the highest peak in The Hazards mountain range, looming over the Freycinet Peninsula. This might not be France's Mediterranean coastline but with its green meadows and wild promontories, its convict bridges and stone walls, its oyster coves and wildlife rookeries, all framed by the forbidding grandeur of the Tasman Sea, it is equally – if not more – spectacular.

And what lends enchantment to the view is something the French would also be proud of – vineyards producing fabulous cool-climate wines and food that any Michelin-star restaurant would be pleased to plate up.

At Milton Vineyard (miltonvineyard.com.au) in Swansea, a former sheep farm settled in the early 1800s, you can find an enticing range of sparkling wine, riesling, pinot gris, pinot noir and shiraz while also savouring a traditional Basque lunch of lamb seasoned with Moroccan spices, crayfish croquette and guindilla peppers at Jahan Patterson-Were's Mahasti restaurant (mahasti.com.au).

"These are crazy-good peppers," says Patterson-Were, like a crazy-good adopted Basque son, "and the rest is pretty dangerous, too, so keep calm."

We do just that and head north to Adam and Grainne Greenhill's Gala Estate (galaestate.com.au), an 11-hectare vineyard



Wine country:
Gala Estate's
Reserve
Pinot Noir

enfolding a Federation home that once served as a 19th-century post office and general store. Here are wines to buy at the cellar door (most notably the pinot noir but also pinot gris, chardonnay, riesling and sauvignon blanc) while you flip open an old, dusty bible and find – as I do – the following words from Genesis 13: *Is not the whole land before thee?*

Yes, it is so we move on to the Devil's Corner Cellar Door (brownbrothers.com.au) to drink in the views of the Moulting Lagoon wetland area – a shedding place for black swans – with the pink-tinted Hazards in the background. Opened late last year, this new addition to Tasmanian drinking pleasure features a lookout that places the arresting mountain panorama before you. (Friendly warning: it's best to sample the wines *after* ascent and descent.)

We arrive at Freycinet National Park at dusk and check in to our rooms at the delightful Freycinet Lodge in Coles Bay (freycinetlodge.com.au), with its cabins nestled in the maw of the bush. From there we continue to Honeymoon Bay, where – as if on cue – we find a couple canoodling on the rocks, bathed in the rose-coloured light and ancient silence.



SAVE THE DATE

Dark Mofo
June 10-21

Tasmania's winter solstice festival celebrates the dark through large-scale public artworks, a program of films and music, exhibitions and installations in and around Hobart. For more details, see page 32. darkmofo.net.au

TRAIL #2 THE WHISKY TRAIL

HOBART > CAMBRIDGE > COAL RIVER VALLEY >
PONTVILLE > HOBART

BRETT Steel was 21 when he was introduced to his first single-malt whisky. It was down in London's West End and Steel's friend wanted to know what he was drinking. "A Scotch and Coke," replied Steel. "No way," his friend said and, instead, bought Steel a 10-year-old Ardbeg from the famous distillery on the Scottish isle of Islay. "I was smacked across the face with this peaty, smoky whisky and from that point on I was hooked," says Steel.

That was 13 years ago and that waft of peat smoke at the back of Steel's palate transformed not just the story of his life but also the story of Tasmanian whisky.

In his black jeans, leather jacket, scuffed boots and granny sunglasses, Steel looks like a cross between John Lennon in his rocker days and Bruce Springsteen on any old day. With the blessing of Bill Lark, the so-called "godfather" of the Australian whisky industry, Steel launched his Drink Tasmania Premium Tours (drinktasmania.com.au) in 2014, using Lark Distillery in Hobart as base camp.

Which is why at 10am on a nippy, grey Wednesday morning I am sampling my first whisky of the day in preparation for a guided tour of three of Tasmania's 14 distilleries. If you think that's a lot of distilleries for one island state, you'd be right. It's one of the reasons Tasmanian whisky has become world-renowned. There are, in fact, an astonishing five Tasmanian distilleries – Lark, Overeem, Nant, Belgrave and Sullivans Cove – whose whiskies have, at various stages, been placed in the top two per cent of the spirit worldwide by *Jim Murray's Whisky Bible*, the international authority on whisky.

Our first stop takes us north-east across the Derwent River to Cambridge, where the Sullivans Cove distillery took the whisky world by storm two years ago by winning the London-based World Whiskies Awards' first prize for single-malt whisky.

It's not even midday but I am duty-bound to see what the fuss is all about. Nose to whisky first. Pick up early aromas. Pause. Sip. Take in flavour profiles. Feel that French oak at the back of the palate.



Brett Steel and Myfanwy Kernke at Shene Estate & Distillery, maker of Poltergeist Gin and Mackay Single Malt Tasmanian Whisky

Thank goodness Steel is driving because no sooner have we left Sullivans Cove than we're heading to Lark in the Coal River Valley to hear distiller Chris Thomson expound both the scientific rigours of whisky making and the philosophy of whisky drinking.

"Whisky isn't a commodity," he observes. "It's an experience. When your child is born or you get married or someone you love dies or you're having an important birthday, you often crack a whisky. So as whisky

producers we are inviting you into the most important part of your life."

It's not my birthday, nor am I getting married but I crack a Lark single malt before being spirited north to Shene Estate & Distillery in the Southern Midlands, where the engaging Myfanwy Kernke regales us with the rich 200-year history of her family's sprawling property.

That's before a superb lunch in the stables of antipasto, meats, salads and Ashgrove cheddar and a tour of the distillery where Tasmania's only triple-distilled Irish-style whisky is made – by distiller Damian Mackay.

By the end of the day, Brett Steel is stone-cold sober and I've had the time of my life, although I'm still waiting for him to start singing *Born to Run*.

TRAIL #3 HUON VALLEY

HOBART > HUON VALLEY > HOBART



SAVE THE DATE

Festival of Voices

June 30-July 17

A remarkable annual line-up of singers, choristers and conductors brings soaring harmonies to concert halls, theatres and public spaces across Tasmania.
festivalofvoices.com

ON THIS lovely, green and melancholy island, there's history and nature's bounty at almost every turn. And in the fragrant, often sun-kissed Huon Valley – a mere 30-minute drive south-west of Hobart – you can literally touch and taste this convergence through its most iconic symbol: the apple.

Speak to Andrew Smith, a fourth-generation Tasmanian apple grower, and you quickly learn how this humble, nutritious fruit came to exert an almost mythical hold over the collective imagination of our most southern state. "This place is named after my great-grandfather Willie Smith," he says, guiding me through Willie Smith's Apple Shed (williesmiths.com.au), where visitors can taste three different types of organic

apples, along with three varieties of organic apple cider, an apple-cider vinegar, schnapps and a new Calvados-style brandy.

"And here," he says, "are our orchards, which produce two-million kilograms of apples each year. Today, we're the largest certified organic apple supplier in Australia."

It's quite a story here in the pristine shelter of the gloriously named "Sleeping Beauty" mountains: from Willie Smith, son-in-law of a convict, to his son, Ron Smith – a survivor of Singapore's notorious Changi Prison and the Burma Railway – who returned to Tasmania following World War II to rebuild the business. The tale moves on to Ian Smith, Andrew's father, who took over at the age of 21 at a time when ships sailed from the wharves of Hobart and Port Huon for London laden with Huon Valley apples. (That was before fires roared through the valley in 1967, cooking the fruit on the trees and destroying Ian Smith's packing shed, as well as large parts of Hobart.)

The 1942-built Apple Shed – a ciderhouse, museum and provedore – at Willie Smith's





(Clockwise from above)
Miellerie's unprocessed
Lake Pedder's Nectar
honey; the Huon River;
freshly picked apples
on their way to
storage in Cygnet



Ian passed the reins to Andrew, who convinced his father in the early 1990s to triple the planting density then trial organic farming. "I told Dad I wanted to go organic," he says with a toothy grin. "He said it wouldn't work but by 2001 we were fully certified."

From Smith's organic apple orchard we go south – with our bellies full of Bay of Fires cheddar cheese and organic sourdough, paired with a cool, spritz apple cider, all courtesy



of Andrew Smith – to Ranelagh. In the drizzle and mist of a late autumn afternoon, we sample produce from the Huon Valley, D'Entrecasteaux Channel and Bruny Island. This is the site of the annual Taste of the Huon (tasteofthehuon.com), a festival where you can taste everything from apples, berries and cherries to oysters, salmon, truffles, pickled onions and an amber-coloured, thick-textured Miellerie honey produced by Yves Ginat, who began his beekeeping career as a young boy in France before bringing his techniques to Tasmania.

Taste of the Huon now attracts more than 20,000 visitors each March for its two-day program. What to do but follow the lovely Huon River south to Franklin – famed for its wooden boats – cross over to Cygnet, home to an annual folk festival, then make our way back to Hobart via Snug. How sweet is that?



SAVE THE DATE

Huon Valley Mid-Winter Fest

July 15-17

This family-friendly event celebrates the region's apple-picking history. Enjoy craft cider, wine, cheeses and live music. huonvalleymidwinterfest.com.au

Devonport Jazz festival

July 28-31

Catch a jazz set at Devonport's pubs, clubs, vineyards and churches. Vocalist Emma Pask will be headlining the four-day festival. devonportjazz.com

with produce and blessed with primeval, unspoiled beaches; scrub that gorgeous short-sighted white wallabies poke their heads out of; dolphins on leisurely patrol; and birdlife that includes one-third of the world's population of swift parrots and 240,000 breeding pairs of short-tailed shearwaters (who achieve the astonishing feat of an annual 30,000-kilometre return journey to the Arctic Circle).

It is all here: the terrible wound and weight of history; the rivalry of old empires (British and French); the drama of convict settlement and Indigenous extinction; the long, solemn swells that roll northwards from the South Pole; the farmlands of the north, the bush and temperate rainforest of the south; the sheer wild beauty and utter isolation of the place...

No wonder tourism is up by about 25 per cent on last year. (The island has a permanent population of 700 but there were some 3000 campers this Easter!)

Add to that the provenance of food. "There's so much fresh food here," says Barry Geard, our guide from the award-winning Pennicott Wilderness Journeys (pennicottjourneys.com.au), who conducts tours to Bruny Island two to three times a week. "People walk along the beach and pick up oysters and they can't believe it." And neither will you.

Huon salmon fillet with cashews, lemon-and-herb pesto and salad at Bruny Island Premium Wines (below); Halsey Swetzoff from the Bruny Island Cheese Co.



TRAIL #4 BRUNY ISLAND

HOBART > KETTERING > BRUNY ISLAND

AS OUR ferry edges its way across the D'Entrecasteaux Channel from Kettering, 32 kilometres south of Hobart, to Bruny Island, I am reminded of a quote long misattributed to the great American author and humorist Mark Twain: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

It's uncertain who actually uttered these memorable lines but as the two land masses of North and South Bruny Island come into view, I decide I could do a lot worse than follow these instructions.

I mean, what's not to like about a food tour that includes cheese tasting at the Bruny Island Cheese Co. (brunyislandcheese.com.au); Pacific oysters from the pure waters of Great Bay; fresh berries at Resolution Creek, where captains James Cook and William Bligh once replenished their water supplies; a sampling of cool-climate pinot noir and sauvignon blanc from Bruny Island Premium Wines (brunyislandwine.com), together with a lunch of grilled salmon from across the channel; followed by sweet indulgences at the Bruny Island Chocolate Company (hiba.com.au)?

Well, actually there's nothing not to like, except an expanding girth, which you can walk off if you climb the few hundreds steps to The Neck lookout to then admire the majestic 360-degree views over Isthmus Bay and Adventure Bay, as well as the long slice of sand dunes where little penguins return to their burrows at dusk.

Just imagine: two islands in one, joined by an isthmus at the very bottom of the world, that you can traverse in quick-smart time (not that you'd want to). It's bursting





Travel Insider

Tasmania
GO BEHIND THE SCENERY

TRAIL #5: NORTHERN TASMANIA

LAUNCESTON > LONGFORD > LAUNCESTON

THIS is a love story in many parts. It begins at Chatsworth Farm, south of Longford, in the rich agricultural Northern Midlands of Tasmania, near the confluence of the Macquarie and South Esk rivers. It ends on a share dinner plate, 20 kilometres to the north, at Geronimo Aperitivo Bar & Restaurant (geronimorestaurant.com.au) in the heart of Launceston.

The farm belongs to the Kode family, who bought this 182-hectare property nearly five years ago with the firm commitment to love the land back into productivity and, together with other local suppliers, bring fresh produce to their newly opened restaurant at the gateway to northern Tasmania.

There are 150-year-old pear and oak trees growing on this farm, along with quinces, apricots, apples and plums; herb gardens of rosemary, lemon thyme and lavender; as well as 250 ewes, 100 Angus heifers and a 1000-kilogram, fullblood Wagyu bull that happens to be involved in his own unchecked love story.

Listen to Jeremy Kode, owner-manager of Geronimo and son of farm owners Gary and Monique Kode, and you learn that this is no ordinary farm-to-plate story. "Hello, big girl," he says to one of the cows as he takes us into the paddock to survey the mighty bull and his harem of heifers. "The way in which we treat the animals really affects the quality and taste of the product," he explains. "We are trying to create as stress-free an environment as possible where the animals can grow and be happy. I want my chefs to come out here and touch them because we want a relationship between producer, land and animal."

Kode has been joined in his heartfelt enterprise by his partner, Victoria Black – who divides her time between her studies in Melbourne and helping out in the restaurant – and his sister, Lauren Kode, who's swapping life as a lawyer for the courtship of this wonderful family enterprise.

And a mere eight months after opening, I'm here to report that Geronimo Aperitivo Bar & Restaurant is not only a revelation of design – weathered Tasmanian oak



meets Italian furniture, Austrian glassware and Israeli ceramic lights – but also a revelation of culinary excellence, courtesy of chef Sam Pinkard.

How to choose between the ocean trout tartare from Macquarie Harbour, the lamb ribs from the farm, the locally grown heirloom tomato salad with fresh basil and white anchovies, the handmade squid-ink tortellini or the pork fillet with charred cauliflower and smoked paprika? I know. Try them all. And while I'm at it, remember to thank Jeremy Kode for the courage of his conviction and passion.

"What better way to get to know people than over food and drink," he tells me as

Geronimo Aperitivo's
growers' salad and
wood-fired lamb ribs

we share the tomato salad and squid-ink pasta. "I'd like to think the food and service experience here is on par with what is happening nationally."

I have to agree and the next time I get a chance to cross Bass Strait into northern Tasmania, this will be my first port of call. ●

Explore Tasmania's Cradle to Coast Tasting Trail at travelinsider.qantas.com.au.