



Adventure Travel Australia Best of Tasmania Eastcoast

MARIA ISLAND WALK – TASMANIA

By Bruce Holmes



Maria Island Walk, Tasmania Photo: Bruce Holmes

Our skipper throttles back the engines to bring the boat in slowly to the landing point in Shoal Bay and all we hear is ... nothing, just peace and quiet. Boots off, we wade the last few metres till we feel the white sandy beach beneath our feet. Was it

EXCHANGE RATES

AUD - Australian Dollar

USD	1.3291
SGD	0.9512
CAD	0.9865

WEATHER

HOBART

Light Intensity Drizzle



13 °C

13°

13°

87% 0.8kmh 75%

TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
15°	10°	10°	12°	12°

only this morning we were picked up at our Hobart accommodation, organised our packs at the Maria Island Walk's office, drove up to Triabunna and boarded the boat? It seems worlds away.



DAY 1 – MARIA ISLAND

This beach is on one side of an isthmus that joins the larger north and smaller south parts of the island.

As we cross it one of our guides, Alana, explains that it's a fragile environment of sand beneath the banksias and a haven for birdlife.

We inspect the footprints of a [Tasmanian devil](#). In recent years 33 of these have been released here, creatures declared free of the tumour infecting many on the Tasmanian mainland. Now their population is estimated at 60 to 90.

Then we head south to the first campsite, the

HOBART AND SOUTH



Best of Tasmania

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Christina Pfeiffer

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Where?

Check-in



Day

Month

Check-out



Day

Month

I don't have specific dates yet

Guests

2 adults in 1 room

Casuarina Beach Camp.

The camps for nights one and two are similar and eco-friendly. Rubbish is carried out later and the toilets are dry composting, where sawdust helps the process.

Everyone laughs when the very practical sign is explained: T, T and W for toilets one and two and the washroom. Turning the wooden knob shows red or green for engaged or not, saving a short trip and any embarrassment.



LAUNCESTON AND NORTH



Launceston and North

TOP 10 THINGS TO DO IN LAUNCESTON, TASMANIA

Kerry Heaney

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LAUNCESTON INSIDER – A DESIGNER'S WORLD ANITA DINEEN

[UNAVAILABLE](#)

[\\$20/yr](#)





[UNAVAILABLE](#)

[\\$20/yr](#)

Accommodation is in twin "tents" with sturdy roofs, raised floors and foam mattresses beneath the sleeping bags and pillows (see photo).

[UNAVAILABLE](#)

[\\$20/yr](#)

There's a large dining tent and boardwalks join the areas, saving the environment from tramping boots.

[UNAVAILABLE](#)

[\\$20/yr](#)

[KimsGym.com](#)

After lunch our group takes the 9km return bush walk to Haunted Bay.

Our other guide, Sean, relates its history as a bustling whaling station from 1826-44, but it's now home only to a colony of little penguins, of which we spot one in a burrow.

The bay's Devonian era rocks, pushed up about 370 million years ago, make for a dramatic seascape.

Back at camp there's time for a swim in Riedle Bay. Being on the eastern side, there are small breakers to body surf.

Over a gourmet dinner prepared by our guides from fresh Tasmanian produce and accompanied by [Tasmanian wines](#), the long table setting encourages people to get to know each other.

DAY 2 – SHOAL BAY

Kookaburras wake us for our second day and a hearty breakfast. More opt for a swim this morning, being the first of the “five swim challenge” that Alana sets out as a goal. Packs on, we’re soon heading north.

At Riedle Bay we see varied birdlife, include the Pied Oyster Catcher, a black and white wading bird with distinctive red beak.

Here too, Alana points out the headland where in 1802 François Péron, a zoologist with Nicolas Baudin’s French exploratory mission, discovered a tepee-like structure with covered bones and ashes, which he concluded was an aboriginal cremation site. Pausing as we cross the isthmus, we inspect the remains of an aboriginal shell midden.

Back at Shoal Bay it’s time for swim #2, though it’s so shallow one mightn’t exactly call it swimming.



Then it's inland to French's Farm, where the French family ran sheep from the 1920s to 1980s. There's an old house, a disused shearing shed and a cleared area available for camping. Though the wombat busily grazing says it's his.

Further on, lunch is at Point Lesueur, at the convict ruins that were once the Long Point Probation Station.

There's a [wonderful view](#) over the bay, but doing hard labour by day and having doors to their single cells closed when at rest, I dare say the convicts didn't see enough of it.



Maria Island Walk, Tasmania Photo: Bruce Holmes

We walk next to Bloodstone Point, so called because of the red stone. The colour is caused by iron and the rock, technically laterite, is formed in tropical climates, indicating that 10-20 million years ago Maria Island had such a climate.

It's been used for body paint by the Aboriginal Oyster Bay tribe, whom we respect by not interfering with it, and after that by the cement works.

Swim #3 is here and #4 is across the headland. Day two concludes at White Gums Camp, with swim #5 at the most beautiful beach nearby, though the water is really cold.

By dinner time we've developed a camaraderie among new friends, a love of Tasmanian wine (especially the 42 Degrees South Pinot Noir) and an expectation that our two guides can cook up a storm.

Tonight we have to settle for miso soup entree, BBQ quail, roo and duck sausage and lamb chops

with ratatouille and couscous, then dessert of flourless chocolate torte with raspberry coulis. Life is hard.

DAY 3 – HOWELL’S POINT

The third day begins with easy walking in the morning, along an access road mostly.

We learn which is wombat poo and which is the excrement of the **Tasmanian devil**, things a walker on the Maria Island walk really should know.



At Howell's Point we see where convicts cut sandstone blocks for building at Darlington, then there's a visit to the Painted Cliffs.

This Triassic era sandstone cliff facing the sea has seen ground water containing iron oxide percolate down through the sandstone to create the stunning patterns and then sea spray and wave motion weathering has brought about the honeycomb effect.



An inland track takes us next to Oast House, part of the World Heritage listed precinct. Convict built in 1844, this brick building was used for drying hops and has a large circular kiln.



Late morning we arrive at Darlington, and our accommodation at Bernacchi House. It's a quick stop to organise a small pack as we'll be hiking up to the twin peaks of Bishop and Clerk.

The forest walk is cool and a comfortable climb with

pauses, but when we reach the scree slope it becomes more challenging. The rocky ascent leads us at last to the part where we leave packs and scramble up to the top.

There's a sense of achievement having made it to the 620m-high summit, but we're surrounded by low cloud, obliterating the view entirely.



Returning to Bernacchi House, we see a Tasmanian devil out back but he's not keen on visitors and makes a quick exit. Native hens and Cape Barren Geese are much more accepting of our presence.

The house was home to Italian entrepreneur Diego Bernacchi in the late 19th century as he tried his hand at wine-making and later cement production. Its interior has a wonderful old-world atmosphere. And hot showers!

DAY 4- DARLINGTON

On the morning of our last day of our Maria Island walk we explore Darlington individually. Some take

the walk to the Fossil Cliffs, renowned for fossils of sea creatures 300 million years old.

With time limited I explore the World Heritage listed convict settlement. A brochure from the ranger's office has all the information.

Buildings still standing from the first convict phase 1825-32 include the Commissariat Store and the long single storey Penitentiary. From 1842-51 the second phase saw the site function as a probation station and many structures remain from this era, including the Convict Barn that dominates the hillside.

The Religious Instructor's Quarters is a ruin with a view and it is here that Alana and Sean have laid out our farewell spread for lunch, including sparkling wine for a toast before our group photo.

As we prepare to board our boat to the mainland only one thing remains. Our guides Alana, aka the mermaid who has swum at every stop, and the have-to-be-in-it Sean, take a spectacular dive off the jetty for that one last swim.

Soon our boat is revving up and I look back beyond the wake to the island that has given us a wonderful four day experience. Goodbye Maria.

Bruce Holmes was a guest of Tourism Tasmania and Maria Island Walk

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Find out more about Tasmania here:

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places I've visited but the experiences of the traveller.



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