

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL



Australia's southernmost state is one of the country's foremost gastronomic hot culinary streak. Pay a visit to the 'Apple Isle' and you can sample oysters, meats, PHOTOGRAPHY BY EWEN BELL





spots, thanks to a vast array of natural produce and a creative wines and whiskies that are a world apart, says Alicia Miller

Above, left to right: lunch at Saffire Freycinet; clouds above the nearby mountains; Saffire's Palate restaurant; lunch at the hotel; wallaby, Wineglass Bay; Palate plate; Saffire. Below: sunrise at Saffire on the east coast





Left to right:
Kettering harbour;
Hobart's Ethos Eat
Drink; beaches on
Bruny Island

'Once famous for its convicts and devils, Tasmania has long drawn visitors on the promise of azure-fringed white sand beaches, craggy mountains and ancient forests'

Declan plunges his hand into the cool waters, and pulls out the largest oyster I have ever seen. Intrigued as much as just plain greedy, I hurriedly step forwards across the bed of bivalves, which sends waves lapping around our waders and ripples radiating gently across Oyster Bay. It takes only moments for his seasoned hands to coax it open – one, two, three slips of the knife and it's done; a top shell removed to reveal a gleaming interior of pearly white encasing a plump, saline pillow. I cup the oyster in my hands and raise it to my lips. 'Just a moment,' Declan urges, pulling a bottle from his bag. Setting it down with ceremony on a stilted table above the water, he pops the cork and pours a splash of sparkling wine – grapes grown less than an hour up the road – into the oyster. There's an instant briny sweetness, a sparkle of fizz, a cucumbery, nutty flavour. Declan chuckles, then says, 'Want another one?'

This is Tasmania, where the water is so clean, they eat oysters straight from the seabed. It's where the rainwater is so pure, it's bottled and sold. This is where trees are heavy with apples and avocados, where walnuts and wasabi thrive and pantries overflow with island-grown quinoa and barley. Thanks to an almost incomparable cross section of geography, geology and climate, this island is a modern-day Garden of Eden, tucked at the edge of the world. And being on the fringe (no really, next stop south is Antarctica) for a long time it was Australia's secret.

Once famous for its convicts and devils, Tasmania has long drawn visitors on the promise of azure-fringed white sand beaches, craggy mountains carpeted in wildlife and thick, ancient forests, replete with monstrously large hardwoods. Those tourists still come, but now they're not alone. The foodies have landed. As mainland Australia becomes hotter and drier, the promise of bounty from this provincial backwater has propelled it to the top of culinary bucket lists. As more than one local puts it, 'They used to joke that down here we had two heads. But now everyone wants to be Tasmanian.'


Once we have had our fill of oysters (it does take a while), Declan drives us along a road of crushed shells back towards Saffire Freycinet. Stretching out like an enormous stingray floating towards the purple silhouette of The Hazards mountains, this is one of Australia's most luxurious resorts, built with a new kind of visitor in mind. It's integrated into the coastal landscape

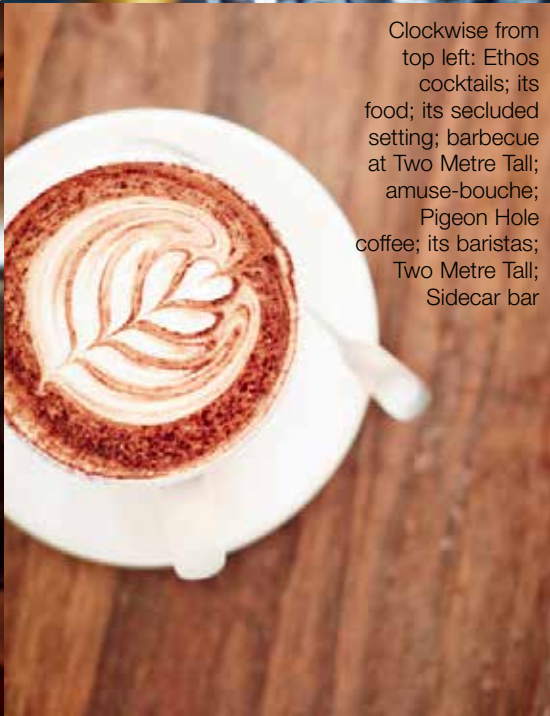
of Coles Bay as though it has risen from the red-tinged soils. Tonight it's illuminated by a kaleidoscopic sunset throwing golden tones through the floor-to-ceiling windows, as chef Simon Pockran brings out a platter of gleaming abalone.

Tasmania provides 25 per cent of the world's wild supply of these sea creatures, and when shipped to China they are sold for thousands of pounds a kilo. But in Tasmania all the locals have to do is what they always have done – take a dip in a carefully chosen bay, and pluck their dinner straight from the seabed. The typical Tassie way is thinly sliced and grilled, and fanned over toasted bread; but whisked back into the kitchen, Simon's is transformed into a delicate *chawanmushi*. Slivers of just-cooked flesh, tasting gently of the sea, rest on a silky dashi custard flecked with local calamari, scallops and purslane, and the crunch of almond. This is cooking that wouldn't be out of place in London or New York.

The demand for places like Saffire, the locals say, is up ever since Mona opened. The Museum of Old and New Art, founded by eccentric Tasmanian multi-millionaire David Walsh, sits like a Bond villain's lair just outside Hobart's compact centre. The museum's theme, 'sex and death', shocked at first. Now the locals say how lucky they are to have it. There is no quantifying the exhibits, which range from a row of stones that survived the blast at Hiroshima to a machine that replicates a working digesting stomach. When Walsh got married recently at the gallery he commissioned a penis-shaped banquet table for the occasion. But it's not all out to shock – thanks to Walsh, the vineyards that have long existed on the site are producing smooth chardonnays, a brewery is turning out one of island's most popular beers, Moo Brew, and Mona boasts its own top-end accommodation and regular food festivals. Not to mention an acclaimed on-site restaurant, The Source, because when you have a world-class museum raking in jet-setting visitors, you really do need somewhere decent for them to eat too.

This fact has not been lost on the chefs in town. At Garagistes, chef Luke Burgess has become something of a poster boy for Tasmanian cooking. Looking for a change, he migrated down from Sydney to open his Hobart restaurant in 2010 and now it's consistently named as one of the country's finest.

'I just cook food I like to eat,' he says, leaning 



Clockwise from top left: Ethos cocktails; its food; its secluded setting; barbecue at Two Metre Tall; amuse-bouche; Pigeon Hole coffee; its baristas; Two Metre Tall; Sidecar bar





Left to right: John Bullock mans the bread oven on Bruny Island; a dozen of Bruny Island's best oysters at Get Shucked; a glass of sparkling white wine meets the freshest oysters; wading in ready to shuck at Freycinet Marine Farm

'He pours a splash of sparkling wine – grapes grown just up the road – into the oyster. There's an instant briny sweetness, a sparkle of fizz, and a cucumbery, nutty flavour'

against the slick wooden bar, a focal point in a dining room of clean Scandinavian-style lines. 'And it's important for me to use Tasmanian produce. Though we've had to change from à la carte to a set menu, because we were going through so much food my suppliers couldn't keep up!' Being adaptable is part of the game here, and so it might not be until colourful heirloom tomatoes land on Luke's doorstep that he decides to enhance them with a vinegary hit of pickled kombu and a smoky iced *salep dondurma* (Turkish ice cream) made with angasi oyster. With flavours such as these, it is easy to see why people come.

Dedicated as he is to the sourcing of local produce, it's hard to outdo Iain Todd at Hobart restaurant Ethos Eat Drink. Occupying an old chemist's that had been bricked up and forgotten about for a century, before construction workers revealed it, there's a worn-in feel not always found in this part of the world. However, the food is modern, and exclusively local: an immaculate bay trumpeter with cured radish and crème fraîche; Bruny Island pork with apple, lettuce and quince; and oxtail on a smoky grill with pickled brown onions and Bismark potatoes all hail from Tasmania.

'There has been a big time change in the last two years,' says Iain. 'Mona is bringing people that expect more. I wanted to do something totally different: simple and refined and cooking with what is good to eat now. Until recently, Hobart wasn't ready for it – I needed to get people to trust me.' Trust is big for Iain who buys only from producers he knows personally and, because quantities are small, the menu changes daily. About 70 different suppliers bring in a bit of this or that. Often they are just friends with something good from their own garden, who want to see it treated with respect and finesse.

One of those 70 is Richard Weston, a Tasmanian horticulturalist turned farmer and café owner with an infectious smile. We settle down together for breakfast at his place, Pigeon Hole, whose dusty jade green walls are complemented by wood panelling. There are ribbons of grilled courgette with lemony local Tongola cheese, and spelt porridge topped with slices of the juiciest ever greengages. Over this spread, Richard gives me his take on the gourmet boom. 'At first we used to grow the standard stuff, but now chefs like Luke and Iain are asking me what I can do next. I hadn't appreciated it until I travelled, but in Tasmania

Travel information

The island of Tasmania is a state of Australia and is situated to the southeast of the mainland. Currency is the Australian dollar, and the time is ten hours ahead of GMT. November weather is relatively mild, with average lows of 8°C and average highs of 18°C. Journey time from London is about 27.5 hours.

GETTING THERE

Qantas (qantas.com.au) flies daily from London Heathrow to Hobart, with a stop in Sydney.

Emirates (emirates.com) flies from London Heathrow to Hobart via Dubai and Melbourne.

RESOURCES

Tourism Australia (australia.com). The national tourist board provides information on events, history and culture, and is an invaluable resource for planning your break.

Tourism Tasmania (discovertasmania.com.au) is the local tourist board and can help with designing your itinerary or booking tours, as well as providing essential travel information.

FURTHER READING

The Agrarian Kitchen by Rodney Dunn (Lantern, £34). The first cookbook from chef and writer turned food hero Rodney Dunn celebrates the field-to-fork ethos of his Tasmanian cookery school. The book allows the reader to follow his farm through the seasons, and was beautifully photographed by chef Luke Burgess of Garagistes restaurant, which puts some of Rodney's surplus produce to good use in its dishes (see Rodney's winter-warming recipes on page 38).

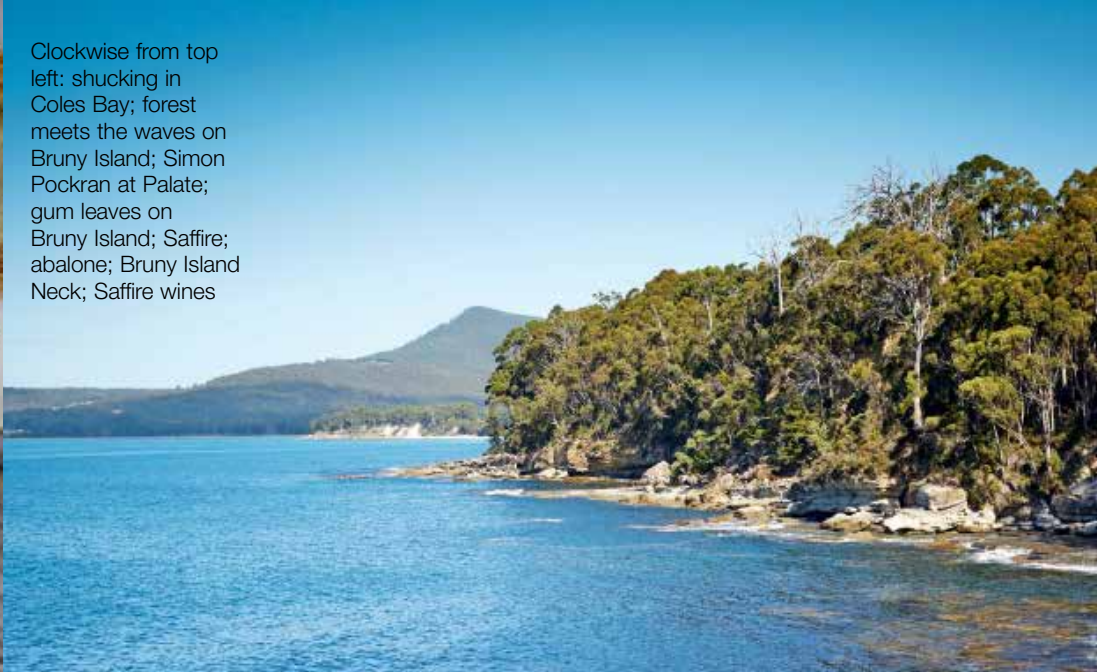
The Gourmet Farmer Deli Book by Matthew Evans, Nick Haddow and Ross O'Meara (Murdoch Books, £28). A kitchen must-have, this book celebrates artisan methods used in making delicatessen favourites such as smoked meats and pickled fish and vegetables; then shows how to use them in simple, rustic, yet inspiring, dishes.

CARBON COUNTING

Conscious about your carbon footprint when flying to Tasmania? Then visit ClimateCare (climatecare.org), where you can make a donation to support environmental projects all over the world. Return flights from London produce 5.79 tonnes CO₂; cost to offset is £43.44.



Clockwise from top left: shucking in Coles Bay; forest meets the waves on Bruny Island; Simon Pockran at Palate; gum leaves on Bruny Island; Saffire; abalone; Bruny Island Neck; Saffire wines





Clockwise from top left: cooking at The Agrarian Kitchen; Rodney Dunn; greenhouse tomatoes; geese; Rodney milks the goats on the farm himself; this way to the kitchen; bee-friendly gardening; Rodney's pigs; The Agrarian Kitchen is nestled in the hills



Left to right: cellar door at Gala Estate Vineyard; its young wines come with immense charm; invitation to taste and linger at Gala; stepping into the kitchen at Agrarian



‘Richard’s offering has swollen to the likes of white asparagus, finger eggplants, tomatillo, nashi pear, burdock, Padrón peppers, Russian kale and white peaches’

we have the best soils in the world and an amazing climate. We’re experimenting with everything.’ Chefs text him a shopping list every week, knowing that whatever is picked makes it from the ground to their kitchens in a little over an hour. From tomatoes and cabbages Richard’s offering has swollen to the likes of white asparagus, finger eggplants, tomatillo, nashi pear, burdock, Padrón peppers, Russian kale and white peaches. The next challenge will be a rare cardamom, which sells at several hundred Australian dollars per kilo.

Experimentation is becoming a familiar theme. Tasmanian wines, from champagne doppelgängers to elegant pinots, have been on the map for a few years now, especially as big mainland wineries snap up vineyards producing in-vogue cool-climate styles. But the latest success story is whisky. After just 20 years at it, the industry celebrated a coup in March when one of the state’s seven distilleries, Sullivans Cove, was crowned world’s best, beating the Scottish and Japanese. The water helps, but so too do the flourishing fields of barley and the peat bogs. We head for a tasting at the island’s newest distillery, Redlands, located amid a farm and gardens on a beautiful, historic red-bricked estate in the lush Derwent Valley, northwest of Hobart.

Each of the island’s offerings is bright yet delicate, rich with aromas of golden apples. Redlands’ own isn’t ready yet, it needs another year, but that doesn’t stop us opening a barrel for a preview. Bright top notes sing through, and it’s clearly destined to be something special when it is ready.

Where there’s barley, there’s bound to be beer. Rumbling across the undulating Derwent countryside, past rolling fields of skyward-reaching hops and wind-rustled barley, the shift in landscape from the Freycinet mountains or the flatness of Hobart is marked. As we turn into the drive of Two Metre Tall brewery, Jane Huntington strolls down to meet us, before cracking open a few bottles at the outdoor bar. After studying winemaking in France, Jane and husband Ashley moved to the island with a dream to plant a vineyard. They bought their plot, then saw the local hops and changed their minds.

‘At first we had to explain to everyone what a craft brewery

was,’ she tells us. ‘Now there are about ten others doing what we’re doing.’ Few are doing it quite like them, though. Ashley, who brews the beers, likes to have fun. There’s wine yeast in this beer; morello cherries grown across the road in that one. Another is a soured ale designed for ageing; then there are the ciders. Jane steps behind the bar and reappears with a marbled steak, 30 days aged since it was taken from one of their beer-fed Angus-wagyu cows.

As the afternoon sun radiates down, illuminating the grassy hills around us, we grill the steak on the barbecue until the

Where to stay

Islington A Regency manor turned 11-room boutique hotel, the Islington is full of character; antique aficionados wander through its eclectic rooms with gaping mouths. Half the rooms are in the original house and the rest in a well-executed extension; they come with lots of complimentary items too such as iPads, cookies and barista coffee. Doubles from £221. 321 Davey Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6220 2123, islingtonhotel.com

Mona Pavilions If eating, drinking, and wandering around the exhibits at Mona isn’t enough, you can sleep here too. Like everything at the Museum of Old and New Art, quirkiness pervades at these eight high-tech abodes on the River Derwent. Not only were they designed by notable Australian architects and feature original artworks, but they offer panoramic views, and access to a pool, sauna and gym. Doubles from £336. 655 Main Road, Berriedale, Hobart, 00 61 3 6277 9900, mona.net.au

Saffire Freycinet Total luxury and seclusion in an outstanding setting overlooking Freycinet National Park. With just 20 suites, all boasting views across Oyster Bay to the Freycinet mountains, it can be very difficult to leave. Some come kitted out with extras such as plunge pools too. The hotel operates on an all-inclusive basis meaning that three excellent meals per day and most drinks are included, and rooms also come with vouchers for use in the decked-out spa. A host of complimentary experiences is on offer, including a visit to Freycinet Marine Farm where you’ll be able to sip bubbly and taste bivalves straight from the water. Doubles all-inclusive from £1,006. 2352 Coles Bay Road, Coles Bay, 00 61 3 6256 7888, saffire-freycinet.com.au



Left to right: dropping in at Frogmore Creek Wines; its drinks are paired with fine food

outside is caramelised and the inside is like ruby butter. Along with a salad of Pink Eye potatoes and a loaf of fresh sourdough, it's a meal we'd be happy to last forever. And so, anxious not to rush things, we tip a bit more cider into our glasses.

The next day we're bowling along 'up the hill' west of Hobart to The Agrarian Kitchen. The home and cookery school of Rodney Dunn – who was previously a food editor and chef before relocating with his family from Sydney seven years ago – has become somewhere of a pilgrimage for mainland Australians. As he takes us through his organic, near-self-sufficient farm, he excitedly points out grapes and melons, asparagus and Padrón peppers, amaranth and borlotti beans, lovage and corn for meal. We see the pigs he rears for smoked meats; the goats he milks to make labne; the bees for honey. And we taste his homemade triple-fermented beer. He has learned as he goes. 'In the last year we've planted 200 different varieties of plant, just to see what works,' Rodney says. 'And 95 per cent of what we use in the classes comes from our garden.'

We chat about farming tips he's picked up from Richard Weston, a friend, and how Luke Burgess from Garagistes introduced him to his wife. He's another link in this new gourmet network; a pioneering food brigade anxious to stretch the culinary limits of this island as far as it can go. Because here at the end of the world, for the moment anyway, there are no boundaries. So when I ask Rodney what the next project is, a smile just broadens across his face. □

Alicia Miller and Ewen Bell travelled courtesy of Tourism Australia (australia.com) and Tourism Tasmania (discovertasmania.com.au).

Left to right: lightly chilled riesling at Frogmore Creek Wines; last light through the forests on Bruny Island



Where to eat

Prices are for three courses excluding wine, unless otherwise stated.

Bruny Island Premium Wines Australia's most southerly vineyard is a worthy lunchtime stop if you're visiting Bruny, as its dishes showcase much of the island's produce. Devour Bruny salmon teriyaki kebabs, pan-fried Bruny wallaby and possum sausage with Bruny olives, or Bruny beef overlooking the vineyards. £25. *Wayree Estate, 4391 Main Road, Lunawanna, Bruny Island, 00 61 3 6293 1088, brunyislandwine.com*

Ethos Eat Drink The ultimate Tasmanian dining experience – chef Iain Todd only serves produce from local suppliers he knows well, and the tasting menu (the only option) changes daily to reflect what he has received. We tried smoky oxtail with pickled eggplant, pickled brown onions, and Bismark potatoes. Located in a historic former pharmacy, there is a Brooklyn-style exposed-brick vibe; after dinner, sneak upstairs to the slick new cocktail bar, which features house-made bitters with Tasmanian ingredients such as sweet woodruff. £42 for six courses. *100 Elizabeth Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6231 1165, ethoseatdrink.com*

Freycinet Marine Farm Tasting Room Unpretentious, no-frills outdoor café in Freycinet serving up freshly shucked oysters, lobster, scallops and mussels. Open up a bottle of Tassie sparkling wine and devour them by the plati-load. £8 per dozen oysters. *1784 Coles Bay Road, Coles Bay, 00 61 3 6257 0140, freycinetmarinefarm.com*

Frogmore Creek Overlooking vineyards, undulating purple hills and a serene lake, the setting here would be enough to justify lunch even if the food wasn't great. But it is: Dutch chef Ruben Koopman creates artful, refined plates from the likes of the vineyard manager's own lamb or the greenskeeper's suckling pig. Feast on roasted lamb loin with slow-braised lamb shoulder, sweet potato purée, braised cabbage and bacon with rosemary and garlic jus and baby vegetables – all washed down with Frogmore's fine wines, including their fruity Evermore pinot noir. Lunch only, Thursday to Monday. Four courses, £45. *699 Richmond Road, Cambridge, 00 61 3 6274 5844, frogmorecreek.com.au*

Garagistes Chef Luke Burgess's Hobart restaurant is a must. There is only one option, a five-course tasting menu, which changes daily and can include sake pairings or (mostly) organic and biodynamic wines from around the globe. Before dinner pop around the corner to Sidecar, the tiny sister wine bar on Bathurst Street, a destination in its own right, for a drink and nibbles. Five courses, £50. *103 Murray Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6231 0558, garagistes.com.au*

Get Shucked This oyster caff is a must-do while on Bruny Island. 'Naked' oysters (£8 a dozen) are nothing short of superb, while there is also a range of tasty oyster nibbles, from pâté to panko-crust bivalves (£9.50 for six) on offer. *1735 Bruny Island Main Road, Great Bay, Bruny Island, 00 61 4 28 606 250, getshucked.com.au*

Pigeon Hole A fabulous breakfast spot owned by farmer Richard Weston, who supplies produce to most of the top restaurants in Tasmania, and bakes some of Hobart's finest loaves. Breakfast, £12. *93 Goulburn Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6236 9306, pigeonholecafe.com.au*

The Source (see Where to Stay) Mona's signature restaurant is approached with the same vigour as the rest of the project. It is perched at the top of the museum with panoramic views, and serves innovative cooking – think Tasmanian venison with red cabbage kimchi, chocolate and basil glaze and baby beetroot. Ask staff to pair your meal with their very own Moorilla wines (chardonnay Muse is a winner). £42. *655 Main Road, Berriedale, Hobart, 00 61 3 6277 9900, mona.net.au*

Two Metre Tall Farm Bar Trained winemaker Ashley Huntington makes unusual ales and ciders which are served from an outdoor bar. Buy one of their beer-fed Angus-wagyu steaks and grill on the communal barbecue while draining a few brews. Fridays and Sundays only. Beer, £3. *2862 Lyell Highway, Hayes, 00 61 3 6261 1930, 2mt.com.au*



Clockwise from top left: whisky tasting at Lark Distillery; Devil's Corner vineyards; Lark Distillery; Phil Fitzpatrick at Redlands; Phil offers excess malt to the geese; Redlands; Frogmore Creek Wines; Bruny Island





Left to right: Bruny Island Premium Wines; casual dining; sharing plates; picking the pinot noir

‘At The Agrarian Kitchen we see the pigs Rodney rears for smoked meats; the goats he milks to make labne; the bees for honey. And we taste his triple-fermented beer...’

Don't miss

Bruny Island Once an artist's enclave, Bruny Island, south of Hobart and a short ferry ride from Tasmania's 'big island' has become a gastronomic hot spot with dozens of small producers. Come to eat, but also to laze on white sand beaches, spot penguins and white wallabies, and stand at Captain Cook's landing place. Worth a full day. brunyisland.com

Bruny Island Cheese Company Made famous by its celebrity cook owner, Nick Haddow, it produces the only unpasteurised cheese in Australia. Fruity tomme, creamy washed rind and a nutty Alpine-style raw milk cheese are among the delicious offerings. 1807 Main Road, Great Bay, Bruny Island, 00 61 3 6260 6353, brunyislandcheese.com.au

Bruny Island Smokehouse Stock up on Bruny Island salmon, trout hot-smoked over beechwood or wallaby and pomegranate pâté. 360 Lennon Road, Bruny, 00 61 3 6260 6344, brunyislandsmokehouse.com.au

Freycinet National Park This area on the east coast is a hiker's heaven. Don't miss the relatively painless trek up to see Wineglass Bay, perhaps Tasmania's most iconic white sand-skirted azure bay. Lots of wallabies hanging around the carpark looking for nibbles provide tourists with ample photo opportunities. parks.tas.gov.au

Gala Estate Oozing character, this historic tasting room belongs to a family-owned winery off the road from Hobart to Freycinet. Worth a stop to have a look around the premises with a clapboard exterior and vintage vibe. Stay to sample their pinot gris and pinot noir. 14891 Tasman Highway, Cranbrook, 00 61 408 681 014, galaestate.com.au

Lark Distillery Founded by the father of modern Tasmanian whisky, Bill Lark, this distillery was launched following a law changed in 1992 (distilling had been outlawed in the state since 1839). Its elegant whiskies are among the very best on the island, but there are also a number of other interesting products coming from the stills including an unusual, smoky rum. Stop by the 'cellar door' in Hobart for a tasting or to pick up a bottle to take home; prices are from £30/100ml and the quality is high.

You can also arrange to visit their distillery premises in the Coal River Valley. 14 Davey Street, Hobart, larkdistillery.com.au

Markets (Salamanca, Mona and Tas Farm Gate) Food markets are flourishing in Tasmania. The sprawling Salamanca market, on Saturdays, offers the likes of leatherwood honey (a speciality only produced on the island) and salmon 'fish dogs'. Art gallery Mona runs its own food market on Saturdays with music, art, and food such as Willie Smiths cider or wood-fired pizza. Meanwhile, the Tas Farm Gate market on Sundays has everything from superb sushi to cheese sellers.

Redlands One of only two whisky distillers in the world to grow its own barley for malt, Redlands' first bottle is due out in early 2015 (it's been busy maturing since 2013). In the meantime, it's still worth visiting to taste the extensive range of other Tasmanian whiskies on offer – and to explore the picturesque historic grounds, which include convict-built tobacco and hop-drying ovens and an impressive garden. 759 Glenora Road, Plenty, 00 61 3 6261 5728, redlandsestate.com.au

Sweet Envy A former Gordon Ramsay chef from Tasmania opened up a bakery and it's an obsessive favourite with locals. 341 Elizabeth Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6234 8805, sweetenvy.com

The Agrarian Kitchen Former Sydneysider Rodney Dunn's dream farm and cookery school features 'paddock-to-plate' experiences, where you can explore his extensive garden, where he grows everything from Padrón peppers to asparagus. You then go into the pretty kitchen, a 19th-century schoolhouse, to cook up a storm. He makes everything from goat's milk labne to his own excellent triple-brewed beer; courses are for up to nine people and book up very far in advance so plan ahead. Classes from £215. 650 Lachlan Road, Lachlan, 00 61 3 6261 1099, theagrariankitchen.com

Yellow Bernard A tiny café that whips up great flat whites, the Aussie favourite. The owner's mum makes the macarons and she does a mighty fine job. 109 Collins Street, Hobart, 00 61 3 6231 5207, yellowbernard.com

Left to right: Saturday market at Mona; fine art greets diners at its restaurant, The Source; Mona conceals the finest works of art deep below ground

