



Tasmania is an ideal destination for canine travellers.

Dog Friendly Travel: Tasmania



Ross's vintage sandstone bridge dates back to 1836.

With its endless stunning landscapes and charming, pedestrian-friendly towns with a refined European vibe and untrammelled by the hordes, Tasmania is a treat for the senses.

Story and Photography by Melissa Rimac

THE "WOWS" ARE GETTING LOUDER and more excited. On one side of us are snow-capped mountains; on the other, stately mansions ringed by picturesque gardens that could be straight out of a Jane Austen novel. Suddenly, the world seems a much calmer, quieter and more civilised place.

As our plane descended towards Launceston, we were struck by the lack of human meddling in Tasmania. Grand estate houses surrounded by lime-green lawns sprawled out below; it seemed we might be pulling into their driveway.

As soon as we breathe in air that's crisper and sharper than what we're used to, we're overwhelmed with the sense that visually, sensually and emotionally, Tasmania is a place apart. Keen not to appear too uncool, our pup Onyx surveys the scene regally then rolls his eyes at his parents' boisterous outbursts.

In less than half an hour, we're settling into our very spacious and comfortable home here: One Spencer, a cosy and atmospheric 1870s-era timber bungalow

situated in the prestigious suburb of East Launceston, perched upon a ridge which spills down to the compact city centre.

With its high ceilings, ornate plasterwork, wide Baltic pine floorboards, large Huon pine kitchen and fetching antiques, One Spencer sets the tone for our exploration of an island oozing with tangible links with its very colourful past. As this is our first urban getaway with Onyx, we're relieved to find the secure yard large enough to entertain him while we unpack.

One Spencer is tucked into a narrow lane and we're soon feeling like we're part of the inner-city neighbourhood. People greet us on their way to and from the corner shop and, feeling like locals in no time at all, we carry our coffee mugs to the large St George's Square park, situated just a few paces from the house. The park offers dazzling views of the snow-dusted Ben Lomond mountain range as well as the layer-upon-layer stacks of surrounding heritage houses and forested hills.

Bypassed by the clear-fell development

that blighted so much of our urban heritage, Launceston is said to contain Australia's largest and most intact concentration of 19th-century buildings. This architectural treasure-trove is omnipresent and, as we stroll past cute rosebush-shrouded cottages and a seemingly endless succession of grand Georgian mansions, I'm convinced that Launceston has the prettiest streetscapes I've ever seen. We follow enticing streets randomly, pass nearby cafes and delis and walk through parks fringed by wintry skeletons of deciduous trees which, as evening mist settles, take on gothic tones.

Even the sunsets here look straight out of an artist's sketch pad, shimmering with a drawn-out drama of metallic mauve, fuchsia and apricot.

Back in our cosy abode, I pour myself a glass of Tasmanian red and run the big bath, feeling every inch as if we've journeyed to another country.

We awake to the tolling of bells spilling from Launceston's countless cathedrals. There's ice on cars, frost in the park and even lichen on the side of the footpaths and on roofs. Making our way downhill to the city, we clasp the handrails placed to prevent people from slipping. Just a few blocks from home we've reached "town", where we pass impressive late-1800s facades which were once home to ironmongers and woolstores.

As the third-oldest city in Australia after Sydney and Hobart, Launceston exudes a palpable sense that you're part of a richly layered history. Life here strikes us as delightfully antiquated, more dignified and sedate in pace.

Thanks to the wraparound high ridges, there are always clear landmarks for orientation and, more than any other Australian city I've experienced, Launceston is perfect for discovering on foot. A blanket of mist is still hovering over the River Esk and the local hounds have hit the boardwalk, much to flirty Onyx's delight.

By early afternoon we've taken in riverside walks, funky urban scenes thick with galleries and alfresco cafes, numerous parks and charming suburbs crammed with architecture that elicits deep sighs — all within walking distance of our inviting home.

The mighty Tamar River, a critical shipping route for the early colony, meanders its way through green hills towards Bell Bay near Georgetown. At the historic Low Head Lighthouse and Pilots Station our cheeks are flushed by bracing breezes and ethereal arctic colours. For Onyx, there are several beaches where he can massage his feet in the sand.

Tasmania makes for great touring, as the distances are relatively short and the enroute intrigues diverse and abundant. As we make our way towards the famed sweeping beaches of the east coast, we're overlooked by a rugged, snow-shrouded mountain range and pass photogenically decaying abandoned farmhouses and sheds. So scant is the traffic, other drivers wave in greeting.

Surrounded by wind-brushed paddocks are picture-perfect hamlets with imposing stone churches and hollowed-out remnants of a long-gone mineral boom. In settlements such as Fingal and Mangana, we half expect a posse of primly dressed early settlers to rustle past.

Rolling from the mountains down towards the east coast, the lapis lazuli sky gets even bigger. Here, the sweeping stretches of sand stretch to infinity and are hugged tightly by folded mountains. Eagles swoop so close that we can make out facial expressions.

We're staying near the former whaling town of Bicheno at Sandpiper Cottages, where our comfy, self-contained cottage is just a few skips from the crest of the dunes. The soft, silvery sand squishes loudly underfoot — and under paw — and the gem-coloured water sends our heartbeats skipping.

At Bicheno's small harbour, we're hypnotised by the silky waters and surreal-looking, orange lichen-coated rocks. Small timber fishing boats bob in the water and huge Pacific gulls wail as they await the catch.

We're told the coast south is replete with mesmerising beaches, but we're captivated by Tasmania's tangible and

Tail-wagging digs

For One Spencer, Sandpiper Cottages and Lewisham Retreat bookings, visit www.takeabreak.com.au or phone 1300 134 004.

Chowing down

Most places that have outdoor tables are happy for you to sit outside with your dog. Some great options include Cube at Launceston's waterfront, Fresh in Launceston city, White Dog Cafe at Bicheno and IXL cafe on Hobart's historic Hunter street.

More musings

www.tasmaniatravel.com.au

Health matters

Dogs brought into Tasmania must be treated for hydatid tapeworm. Visit www.dpiw.tas.gov.au or call 1800 684 215.

evocative history, so we'll drive to Hobart along the Heritage Highway instead. Our big mistake is not having arranged to spend a night in one of the villages which, for all appearances, are unadulterated 1800s. There's too much lavish scenery on this route to risk driving after dark but it's impossible not to linger at Ross, with its 1836 vintage sandstone bridge and horses sunning themselves in paddocks in the main street.

As befits a city that clings to a massively outstretched harbour, we've chosen a coastal nest at Hobart. Spacious and beachy Lewisham Retreat is situated on a waterfront reserve near a coastal walking track and several dog-friendly beaches. We awake to shimmering water views and the relief of being able to let Onyx have a leash-free run before exploring Hobart.

Nestled into one of the world's largest and deepest harbours, Hobart is a maritime city to its core. Fishing boats chug by as we promenade from Old Wharf to Salamanca Place, which bursts into life each Saturday with its famed markets. We pass big wooden 18th-century schooners, yachts and icebreakers, relishing the fact that we're once again savouring a compact, pedestrian-friendly city that's alive with history and art.

Hobart is replete with gracious sandstone buildings, as well as early 1800s industrial relics reborn as eateries and galleries. The looming bulk of Mt Wellington is ever-present and casts a radiant glow come afternoon.

Hobart's narrow lanes have a vortex-like effect and we have to prise ourselves away to make sure we're back at Lewisham for sunset over the inlet. It's a time of almost hallucinogenic colour and intense awe. Tasmania is reputed to have the planet's cleanest air and water, but there's so much else about this varied and stunningly beautiful island that goes to your head. 🐾



Stay in surroundings reminiscent of the early days of the Hobart Town settlement. Built in 1890, this lovingly restored classic example of early Victorian architecture oozes charm and warm hospitality, offering a taste of yesteryear but renovated with convenience and the traveller's comfort in mind. Featuring stained glass windows and furnished with antique pieces and collectables, this cosy self-contained accommodation is your home away from home. Breakfast is included in the tariff. Rates and details at pecksonpine.net. We warmly welcome our 4-legged guests and a treat will await their arrival.

Peck's on Pine Victorian Cottage 25 Pine Street, West Hobart, Tasmania
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