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SAFFIRE FREYCINET,
COLES BAY, TASMANIA

World's your oyster

GREAT FOOD, DAZZLING SCENERY, WILDLIFE GALORE...
THIS LUXURY LODGE HAS IT ALL

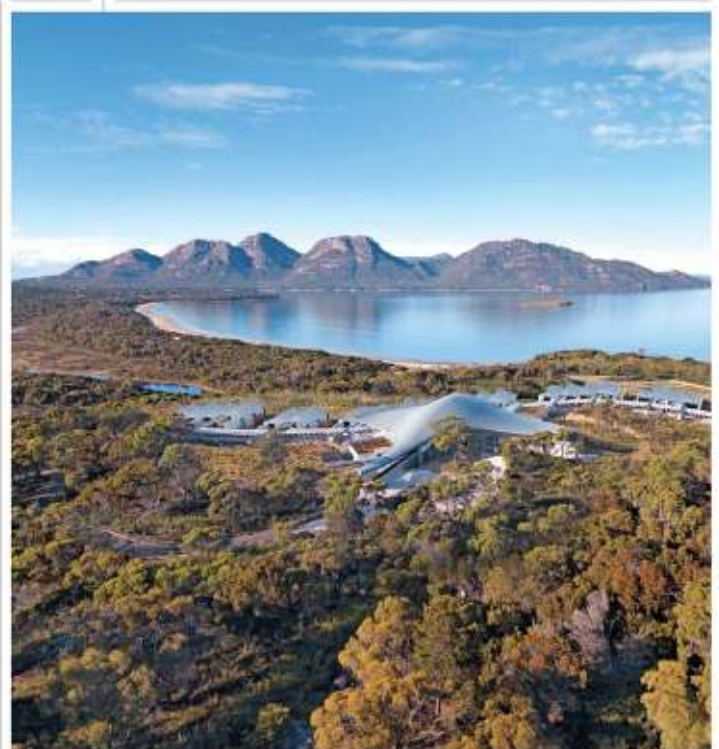
The oyster is gigantic, a monster of a mollusc bigger than your hand. Our guide plucks it from a submerged wire basket a stone's throw from shore and prises open the lid, the glossy contents eliciting gasps from our little group standing thigh-high in the Great Swanport estuary. "Is it edible?" I ask, as if I haven't just consumed the first of several extraordinary meals at one of the world's great luxury nature lodges and have room to knock off a creature of this size before afternoon tea.

"These are the pets," explains our guide – meaty Pacifics allowed to reach experimental proportions at Freycinet Marine Farm for the benefit, it seems, of visitors like us from nearby Saffire Freycinet lodge. They wouldn't float a chef's boat, unlike the array of bivalves now being laid out on a semi-submerged, white-clothed table nearby. In rubber-booted bib-and-brace waders, we slosh over for a shucking demo and a chat, slurping down oysters with lime wedges, ponzu or Tabasco and of course

glasses of Tasmanian bubbles. As is the case with many of the activities offered to Saffire guests, there's lots of brain food on the menu: we learn, for instance, that once the oysters reach a good size in their cosy estuarine beds they are relocated to ocean waters for a sabbatical. Molluscs, it seems, benefit from a change of scenery too.

And what breathtaking scenery it is. A seabird flying over the bays and capes of Freycinet National Park on Tasmania's east coast might spot, in a protected nook between Nine Mile Beach and Wineglass Bay, the pale, undulating roofline of Saffire Freycinet's main lodge, looking for all the world like a giant alien stingray resting among the trees. From the road, however, this architectural triumph and the 20 low-set luxury suites fanned out below it are completely hidden; 12 years after the retreat opened, nature has reclaimed the perimeter and its immersion is complete.

Saffire's renowned personal touch is apparent the moment I pull up at the driveway, where a staff member is at the ready to whisk



Wow, Saffire Freycinet and the Hazards; the lodge; a dish at Palais; oyster farm; cruise to Schouten Island



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Life

TRAVEL

BY CATHY OSMOND



away car and luggage; inside the lofty main lodge, under a stunning timbered ceiling and expanse of glass looking out to the pink granite peaks of the Hazards mountain range, it's just minutes before a glass of wine is offered along with my personal induction to planet Saffire. My suite, called Peregrine, is a beautifully designed array comprising a private entry courtyard, large bathroom and king bed zone stepping down to a sumptuous lounge area and private deck. Unbelievably, at 80sqm it's one of the more modestly sized suites but no less luxurious for it, and all have the same priceless views. There's a minibar brimming with local goodies, bubbles on ice... and too little time to luxuriate before lunch is served at Palate restaurant, its ever-changing menu a creative cornucopia that over two days simply refuses to be conquered.

Luckily for the waistline the emphasis here is on activities in nature, as gentle or strenuous as you like. In addition to package inclusions such as the oyster farm visit and unmissable Tassie Devil experience (the guided visit to the lodge's large enclosure for a few rescued seniors is fascinating, though brace yourself for feeding time) I opt for the Schouten Island Cruise. In Saffire's dedicated cruiser we trace the coastline down the peninsula, our guide pointing out black-faced cormorants, terns and eagles, seal colonies and ancient geological wonders. A bolsterous ocean swell adds to the exhilaration, the waves crashing against sheer tree-topped cliffs or boulders painted ochre by lichen, and for the sake of a few green-gilled guests we turn for home.

In calmer waters, I become fixated on spotting one particular creature: the white-bellied sea

eagle, of which there are a dozen or so breeding pairs on the peninsula. Brain food: the eagle, with its wingspan of up to 2m, will build a nest the size of a family beanbag in the fork of a great gum. Then, finding a lookout – perhaps in the pale bare arms of a tree high above the rocky shore – it will wait and watch, immobile for hours on end. Watching, watching, as if with all the time in the world.

Perfect for: Lovers of luxury in nature.

Must do: At least a couple of complementary activities: Tasmanian Devil encounter; oyster farm, beekeeping or Connection to Country indigenous experience; guided Freycinet Bays & Capes Walk, cocktail class or archery. The Schouten Island Cruise (\$325pp) provides an unforgettable perspective on the coastline and its ecology. If time allows, visit local cellar doors such as Pooley's on your way home.

Dining: All meals are in glass-walled Palate restaurant overlooking the bay, with exquisite dishes favouring local produce. The menu changes daily depending on the catch. A six-course degustation menu has wines matched to your taste, or go à la carte. Pre-dinner drinks in the lounge and in-suite minibar are also included.

Getting there: Saffire Freycinet is at Coles Bay, a 2.5-hour drive north-east of Hobart. Pick up a snack pack with map in the Saffire Lounge at Hobart airport.

Bottom line: All-inclusive package from \$2300 per person per night.

saffire-freycinet.com.au