

WEEKENDS

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TOTAL IMMERSION

A stay at Saffire Freycinet unlocks access to Freycinet National Park on Tasmania's east coast from a luxe base. Entering your chic suite is like stepping inside the frame of an Australian landscape painting, with the panoramic views taking in Great Oyster Bay and the jagged peaks of The Hazards.

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In the moment

A STAY at Saffire Freycinet, one of Australia's best *LUXURY* lodges in one of its most *BEAUTIFUL* landscapes, is a *SUM* of its *PARTS* and so much *MORE*, writes Imogen Eveson.





WEEKENDS | *Saffire Freycinet*



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: An Australian fur seal snapped yawning by Saffire guide Chris. Saffire Freycinet sits lightly at the gateway to Freycinet National Park; Enjoy locally sourced seafood and sparkling on Saffire's new cruise. OPPOSITE (from top): The luxury lodge has teamed up with Jansz Tasmania; Enjoy a cruise along the Freycinet coastline on purpose-built vessel, Saffire.



THERE'S A MOMENT ONBOARD Saffire Freycinet's Seafood and Sparkling Cruise when the afternoon light has cast us in honey. We're moored offshore from a solitary beach where Freycinet National Park's porcelain-white sands fringe grey-green bushland. We'd set off onboard the purpose-built vessel, *Saffire*, from our mooring at Great Oyster Bay half an hour earlier, eyes peeled for whales, with our guide Chris Theobald. A consummate host, Chris is equally at home working in the world's luxury lodges as he is in its wildest places: as an animal tracker by trade, he's latterly been following the paw prints of snow leopards in the Himalayas and pumas in Patagonia. But he's in his element here, too, on the east coast of lutruwita/Tasmania: pristine and teeming with nature, its sense of space unrivalled. Chris is also a passionate photographer. "I want to get a photo of him yawning," he says as we skirt small, rocky Refuge Island, occupied by a colony of sunbaking fur seals. He homes in on one. As if on cue, the sleepy pinniped yawns and our guide snaps.

And now our skipper has killed the engine and all is still. Chris produces a bottle of Pontos Hills Vintage Cuvée 2018 and pours a glass, the first of three limited release vintages we will try from Jansz Tasmania that have been specially selected for guests onboard *Saffire*. A mixture of chardonnay and pinot noir lent a robustness from pinot meunier sees it pair well with a skewer of black-lip abalone accentuated with daikon radish and a reduction sauce of Willie Smith's cider. A light and crisp Single Vineyard Vintage Chardonnay 2018 and pale gold Late Disgorged Vintage Cuvée 2015 – the colour of the honeyed light – interplay with the delicate flavours of other sustainable Tassie seafood. The selection is seasonal and might include pickled West Coast octopus with Tasmanian wasabi and crisp leek; Pacific Gold oysters complemented by native Tasmanian pepperberry vinaigrette; Stanley Bay scallops paired with Granny Smith apple. Chris pulls out another camera, a Polaroid, and captures me and my partner – sparkling in hand – against the bush and light sparkling off turquoise water. The image develops slowly on the film, the perfect memento of a Saffire moment.

This is a special-occasion place. Whether that occasion is a birthday or an anniversary or just a celebration of life, of beauty, of landscape. Renowned as one of Australia's top luxury lodges, Saffire Freycinet

became an instant classic when it opened in 2010, setting a new benchmark for architecturally designed and environmentally sensitive accommodation. It was designed by Circa Morris-Nunn Chua, the innovative Tasmanian architectural practice known for taking its cues from the fabric of the surrounding landscape.

The fact the lodge, above all else, pays deference to the spectacular pristine landscape it rests lightly in is evident from the first step inside the main building – the view framing the outline of the pink-hued mountain range, The Hazards, and echoing the shape in its undulating roof. The entire property is based around a conceptually organic conceit that reflects the surrounding environment – from the waves to the sand dunes and sea creatures; the main building itself is shaped like a stingray.

Twenty suites unfurl from the heart of the lodge, all poised to take in unfettered views of The Hazards. Our suite is ensconced by nature – bush, water, mountain, sky – its palette reflecting the very colours of Freycinet. Accents of pink granite, white sand, sapphire blue and grey-green are picked up in sumptuous soft furnishings, with Tasmanian timbers and Australian designer finishes similarly anchoring to place.

Thoughtful touches elevate the space further still: from the plate of freshly baked double chocolate and macadamia cookies that arrives with a personalised note from chef Paddy Prenter and the kitchen team to the morning paper delivered to our door each morning. And a minibar stocked full of Tasmanian goodies – such as Cajun cashews from the Huon Valley, dark chocolate from Coal River Farm and a bottle of bubbly from House of Arras – included as part of the lodge's all-inclusive, nothing-is-too-much, generous approach.

We visit in winter and find a hot-water bottle in bed when we retire for the night after dinner – the sweetest note to end on. And earlier, Chris had found us in the lounge and handed us a print-out of the photo he'd taken of the yawning fur seal along with a bottle of cabernet →

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS THEOBALD (AUSTRALIAN FUR SEAL)



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Sample a drop from Waubs Harbour Distillery; The dishes on offer at Palate sing of the seasons; A restaurant with a view; Saffire Freycinet is anchored by the landscape; Australian Traveller editor Imogen and partner Scott take home a memento from the Seafood and Sparkling Cruise in the shape of a Polaroid picture; Saffire's suites tune into the hues and textures of Freycinet; Beekeeping is one of the immersive tours on offer.



sauvignon. "I heard you liked red wine," he says with a smile. Saffire's highly attuned team, headed up by general manager Patrick Barrie, are adept at picking up cues from guests in order to surprise them with gestures like this that make for an all-the-more personalised and memorable experience. The appeal of a lazy few days spent here is certainly a sum of its parts: impeccable design, food and wine matched by eminently approachable but assuredly five-star service. But its essence lies beyond that – it's in these gestures and moments.

A stay at Saffire is a collection of these moments, divided between contemplative downtime and experiential, immersive experiences. There will be time spent soaking up the landscape from your suite or the inviting lounge, book in one hand, glass of wine in the other. There will be hours of complete unwinding at the spa. And there will be time spent savouring a long lunch and even longer dinner at restaurant Palate, where chef Paddy crafts individually tailored degustation menus drawn from the best local produce he has on his doorstep. From plump oysters and mussels farmed in Great Oyster Bay, Bruny Island cheeses to Robbins Island wagyu beef.

And then there will be the time spent jumping headfirst into the experiences that Saffire offers, all based around the central tenet of connection to place through nature, culture and produce. Experiences include a Connection to Country tour with palawa guide Mick Quilliam and the famous Freycinet Oyster Farm experience, which sees guests donning waders to stand knee-deep in water devouring the salty delicacies straight from the lease and washing them down with a glass of Tassic sparkling. And the Tasmanian Devil Experience offers the chance to encounter the endangered apex predators that live here in an open-range enclosure and learn about the lodge's work to protect them.

The second morning of our stay, we're pulling on apiarist suits to join Saffire horticulturalist Rob Barker on a tour of the small apiary of 10

hives he keeps onsite. As we put on the full-body gear, he gestures out to The Hazards by way of explaining how hyperlocal the honey is. "That geology, the erosion of the granite over millions of years has affected what's grown here," he says. "So I'm from Swansea, which is just across the water, and the honey from there to here couldn't be more different."

Running Wild Hives Honey, the idiosyncratic apiarist's passion and respect for bees and the natural environment they work within are infectious. "Why I'm here is that my bees forage three to five kilometres around this area and they gather all the nectar and pollen from this flora, which they preserve into honey, which I then supply Chef with, who uses honey from this environment for dishes at Saffire," explains Rob before adding modestly: "My bees are converting it and I am just the middle man, the go-between." Each hive houses about 40,000 bees this time of year and we identify worker bees, guard bees, newborns and even a queen. The experience culminates in a honey tasting, which casts the flora around us as a colourful pantry. Saffire honey is all kunzea, tea tree and other wildflowers: bolder, complex and deeper in colour than Swansea and Bruny Island's prickly box honey.

In the afternoon, we head to Bicheno for a tour of Waubs Harbour Distillery, where we see how this single-malt whisky, a direct expression of the maritime environment it's harnessed from, is made. The salt-battered distillery, once an oyster hatchery, sits on the edge of the ocean in the old fishing village emerging as a town with fresh energy. In the new tasting room, formerly a fish and chip shop, we taste whiskies while looking out to the harbour, water swollen against the rocks at high tide.

If a stay at Saffire is all about moments, those moments all connect back to place. Chef Paddy takes Rob's honey to weave into the menu that might include dishes like honey-and-elderflower-braised cabbage and ice-cream crowned by honeycomb. And he laces in ingredients such as the flowers from the kunzea shrub from the property to ground guests further in their surrounds. "Connection to place is super important, whether it's an activity or a conversation or an experience over dinner," he says. "That's what people are really looking for." 🍯





A traveller's checklist

Getting there

SAFFIRE FREYCINET is located at the gateway to Freycinet National Park, midway along Tasmania's East Coast, a two-and-a-half-hour scenic drive from Hobart and a two-hour drive from Launceston. Chauffeur services are available for guests travelling from either of the two cities and air transfers are available from Hobart. Begin your Saffire experience with a touch of luxury at its Hobart Airport lounge.
saffire-freycinet.com.au

Staying there

SAFFIRE FREYCINET, a Luxury Lodge of Australia, has 20 accommodation suites, including Private Pavilions, Signature Suites and Luxury Suites all poised to optimise views of the pink-hued Hazards mountain range.

Accommodation packages starting from \$2500 per night (two-night minimum) are all-inclusive. Restaurant meals and fine beverages, in-suite minibar, experiences and 'property credit' are included in the booking price. Saffire Freycinet has an equal-access suite.

Playing there

The all-inclusive guest experience at Saffire Freycinet includes experiences such as beekeeping, Connection to Country and

Freycinet Oyster Farm tours and various guided bushwalks around Wineglass Bay and Freycinet National Park. Signature Experiences such as Saffire Spa treatments and the Seafood and Sparkling cruise are at an additional cost.

The resort recently partnered with luxury expedition cruise operator On Board in a select series of exclusive adventures called Coast-to-Coast Luxury, combining a small ship navigation through the remote southwest corner of the Tasmanian Wilderness World-Heritage Area with a stay at Saffire Freycinet. The six-night package is available on set departure dates from Hobart (12–18 December; 29 March – 4 April; 4–10 May).

Eating there

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are offered at **PALATE** restaurant. Degustation dinners matched with local wines are tailored to guests' tastes and based on available and seasonal fresh produce. Guests can also choose from a daily à la carte menu.

saffire-freycinet.com.au

