

# Terra incognita

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS YD BAR-NESS



It's easy to let your eyes wander around a world map. It's a privilege that we have by being alive in this day and age, and with modern tools we can have a closer look at this lovely planet. As your gaze moves along the familiar outlines of the continents, a few strange islands seem mysterious and remote. On the edges of the giant continents, islands are home to unique cultures, places, and ecosystems. Some are wild and some are developed; all are unique.

Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Iceland, Vancouver Island, Tierra del Fuego, Hawaii, Hispaniola are destinations that any traveller would be wise to

investigate. But one island stands out to me as particularly remote, unknown, wild, and magical.

## KEEP YOUR FEET MUDDY

Tasmania, on the farthest corner of Australasia, is fortunate in being blessed with both extensive wilderness areas and highly developed cities. One of the states of the Australian Commonwealth, Tasmania is a rugged, mountainous island, with the lion's share of the glaciated terrain in Australia, and some particular alpine landscapes that have more in common with far-away Chile and New Zealand than they do with mainland Australia. The world's tallest flowering plants, deep and wild cave systems,

**Above: Panorama from the summit of Cradle Mountain.**

**Inset: The Derwent River and the city of Hobart, from the winter snows on the summit of Mt Wellington.**

Discover

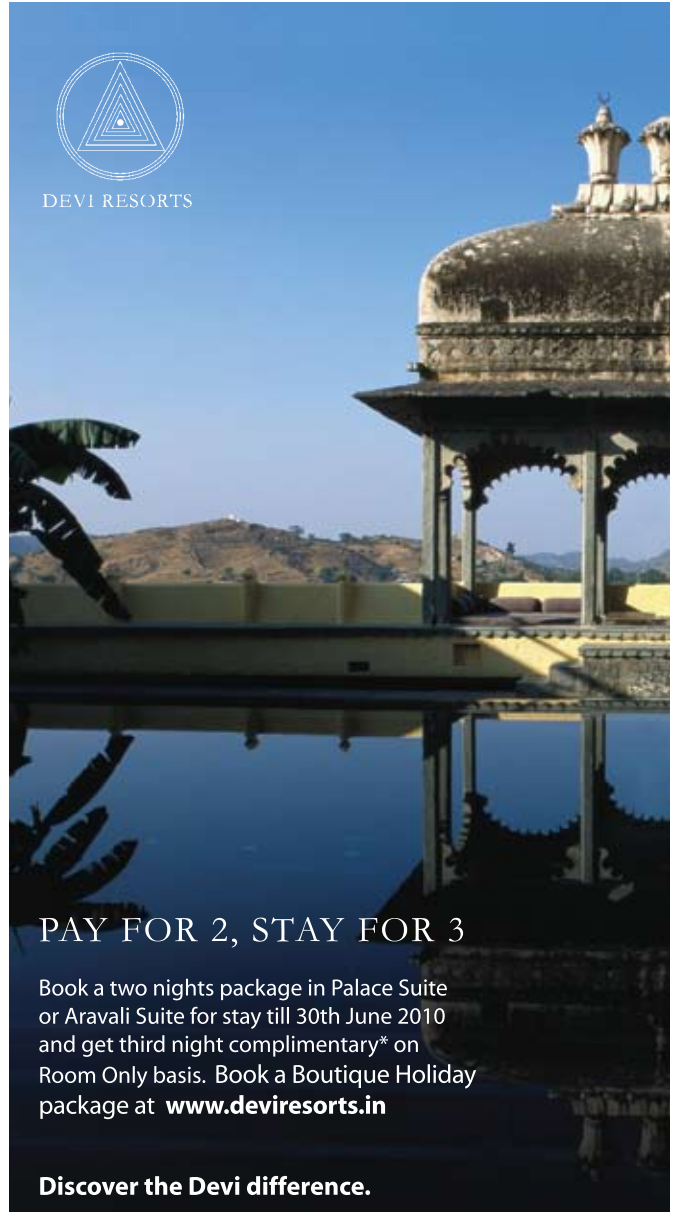
With its deep caves, untouched water bodies and unique biota, Tasmania's mountains are one of the last places on earth that can truly qualify as wilderness.



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## Discover

untouched rivers, and legendary walking tracks are all hidden in these mountains. The damage caused by exploitation in these mountains is unfortunately severe, but overall, Tasmania remains one of the most wild and natural islands on our planet.

We arrived in Hobart by air (an easy hop from Melbourne), and as we cross the Derwent Harbour Bridge we get our first view of the mountains. Mount Wellington rises up steeply from the harbour, and the city clings, picture perfect, to the forested slopes below. The best way to experience this landscape is by foot. Prepare for your journey by having a good look at some of the high mountains across the map. Afterwards, you can visit the vineyards of the Tamar Valley, dine on fresh fish at the harbour in the capital, Hobart, and see the sad remains of the British prison colony at the Port Arthur. Once you've gotten your feet muddy, you can climb into the forest canopy at the Tahune Airwalk, learn about the tragic extinction of the Tasmanian natives, and delight in the friendly mayhem of the Salamanca Farmer's Market.

### VERTICAL HAVEN

Mount Wellington is indeed Hobart's local mountain, and no other city in Australia has such an impressive backdrop. Snow-capped in winter, there's a road to the top that makes access easy in all seasons. But there are more challenging ways to the top. Countless trails lead you through eucalyptus forests and past waterfalls to the summit. There are simple huts en route where trekkers can spend a night. Rock climbing routes take you to the spectacular columnar cliffs of the Organ Pipes formed by volcanic dolerite. This is one of the two rocks that give the Tasmanian mountain its particularly craggy and unique landscape. It also makes for effectively unlimited exploration for



© David Hyde, Dreamstime.com

the vertically inclined and the intrepid adventurer can always find some sheltered caves between the shattered columns.

Charles Darwin climbed Wellington when the *Beagle* landed here in 1836, and while the city below has certainly grown, the view on the mountaintop plateau is still just as desolate and windswept.

From Wellington we can look into Tassie's southwest, one of the world's last remaining wildernesses and one of the most accessible. An army of mountains stand tall and catch the raging storms coming in over the Southern Ocean. Hartz Peak is one of the higher and most easily climbed of these mountains, and is protected in its own National Park.

**Above:** Double-masted schooner at dock, Hobart, Tasmania.

**Below:** Sunset on the summer solstice, from the summit of Hartz Peak.



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### ONE FOR THE FORESTS

As we travel through the eucalyptus gum forests, there is a difficult and complicated story to be told about the Tasmanian forests. The lowland forests, containing both the largest flowering plants (the

eucalypts) and the rare Southern Hemisphere rainforest, are the basis for Tasmania's forestry industry. Despite modern science being applied, the clearing of these ancient forests is a searing political controversy and is causing irreversible biotic damage to the island. The listing of the national parks in Tasmania has been impacted by this fight. Lowland areas of valuable forest are often left for utilisation and montane areas are protected as wild landscapes.



The communities nearest to Hartz Peak are still dependent on timber production, and there are no easy answers in forest management. After walking past crystal clear lakes, and seeing the ridges and valleys carved in the dolerite by Ice Age glaciers, we can make it to the summit and look even deeper into the wilds, towards the west coast of Tasmania.

One of the most famous walking tracks in Tasmania is the Overland Track, which winds through meadowlands, cutting grass marshes, and rainforest from the high double peak of Cradle Mountain in the north to the chilly, lapping waves of Lake St Clair in the south. We can approach either of these ends by car, and both are great places for short walks and exposure to the mountain conditions and biology.



Surrounding both places are strange, columnar mountains of dolerite, offering endless adventures for the mountaineer. The track itself is well maintained and has several cosy huts. Hiring a guide service will make this trip much easier, with fine cuisine, expert knowledge, and safe lodging along the trail. It's in these mountains that Tasmania reaches its highest point, with the dolerite pyramid of Mount Ossa reaching steeply into the sky.

Frenchman's Cap is one of the most striking of the southwest mountains, and it's our first real

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**Clockwise from left: The hidden jewel of Crater Lake, buried within the Mt Murchison massif, Southwest Tasmania; Sunshine on the summit of Mt Ida, above Lake Saint Clair; Top of Mount Wellington.**

Clockwise from below: Abby Barrows and Ben Jackson carefully traverse the summit ridge of Mt Murchison; Angus Munro looks over the early morning mists on the Sentinels Range of Southwest Tasmania; The quartzite masses of Frenchman's Cap Peak tower above the rainforest.

good look at the shining white quartzite geology. Seemingly razor sharp, these mountains of the southwest rise up from the soggy buttongrass moorlands with arrogance born of glacial carving. Frenchman's Cap is massive and its huge southern face is exposed to the fury of the storms. The walk will be a test of endurance, as we wade through the deep muddy pools in the sodden buttongrass plains. Once we climb out of it, things get steeper and steeper until we are walking the sharp ridges to the slightly gentler side of the mountain. And if you get spooked by rock scrambling, you can sit snug and cosy from the rains in one of the lakeside huts along the trail, drinking hot chocolate and cooking dinner desperately wishing for your socks to dry out.

### NATURE'S ANTIQUES

Southwest Wilderness is a region of World Heritage significance and has National Park status. It occupies almost a third of the island. Within the park is range upon range of mountains, some rarely seen or visited. Beneath the ground are Australia's most challenging and vertical limestone caves, and running in the mountains are the wildest and strongest rivers. It is far too rugged, storm-wracked, and infertile to ever



be settled in modern times and it remains an isolated, wistful place.

But within the park are some signs of prehistoric occupation by the now-absent Tasmanian Aboriginals. These people were annihilated by disease and aggression from British colonists, and only mere fragments of their language and culture remain. In the southwest, hidden away in protected and secret spots, rock paintings offer a reminder of their lives. These paintings are of world significance as evidence of the southernmost pre-Ice Age humans.

Frenchman's Cap is one of the most striking of the southwest mountains, and it's our first real good look at the shining white quartzite geology.

### UNIQUE TOPOGRAPHY

Continue down the west coast of Tasmania to the remote fishing and mining town of Queenstown. After driving through such lush rainforests, the route descending from the mountains is eerily bereft of vegetation. Rich and complicated metal deposits from nearby Mt Owen, forest cutting





Above: In downtown Hobart, at Salamanca Market looking up at Mt Wellington

Below: Climbing Mt Ossa, the highest point in Tasmania, looking outwards towards Mt Pelion East.

and rock smelter fumes have properly ravaged the entire valley. Down below, Queenstown is a unique destination, on the edge of the world. From here, it's easy to visit the smashing waves on the coast and to even arrange a boat to go into the natural harbours penetrating far inland.

Looking deeper and deeper, the quartzite and dolerite dance on in an array of strange and challenging mountains. There are likely peaks in the Southwest that have never been climbed, and it's this sense of wilderness, of truly untouched natural land, that makes Tasmania such a gem. No matter how deeply we are willing to dive in, no matter how much we would like to avoid the rain and mud, we are fortunate to be able to see such a place. Despite the damages that have already been caused to the landscape, it's an island that beckons the mountain enthusiast like no other place in Australia. We are all welcome visitors, if we take care to keep these mountains safely in trust for future generations.

Beneath the ground are Australia's most challenging and vertical limestone caves, and running in the mountains are the wildest and strongest rivers.

## QUICK FACTS

### GETTING THERE

Jet Airway has daily direct flights to Singapore from Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai. You can get onward connectivity to Australia with our codeshare partners Qantas.

### ACCOMMODATION

There are several hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts in Tasmania for all kinds of travellers. Whatever your budget or interests, you will find a range of accommodation to suit you.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to [www.discovertasmania.com](http://www.discovertasmania.com)

