

Tasmania - The Wilderness Isle

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London	Day 9	Cradle Mountain - Lake St.Clair National Park
Day 2	In flight		
Day 3	Arrive Hobart	Day 10	Launceston
Day 4/5	Bruny Island	Day 11/12	Freycinet National Park
Day 6	Mount Field National Park	Day 13	Hobart
Day 7	Strahan	Day 14	Depart Hobart
Day 8	Strahan to Cradle Mountain	Day 15	Arrive London

Dates

November

Grading

A/B. Wildlife walks, some moderate but optional, and cruises

Focus

The unique fauna, flora and wilderness regions of Tasmania



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

Tasmania, which separated from mainland Australia during the last Ice Age, has developed a character all of its own. It is a beautiful, dramatic island, whose rugged terrain nurtures an often exclusive anthology of Australian mammals: the archetypal Tasmanian Devil, wombats, kangaroos, wallabies, quolls, pademelons and even the bizarre platypus all inhabit the island. It is also an ornithologist's paradise, home to 12 endemic bird species which inhabit a wet temperate forest, a substantially diminishing habitat in today's world. These species include the Tasmanian Thornbill, Scubtit and Black Currawong. Of special interest elsewhere in Tasmania are the Tasmanian Native-hen (a flightless rail), Green Rosella and Forty-spotted Pardalote. Two other species which breed only in Tasmania are the Swift Parrot and Orange-bellied Parrot. The latter, a summer visitor to the south-western coastal region of Tasmania, is one of the world's rarest and most endangered species of wildlife, with a population of just 15 or so pairs left.

Tasmania, rather like a rugged version of New Zealand, is also blessed with exceptional habitat diversity. Surrounded by rich oceans favoured by many sub-Antarctic breeding birds and marine mammals, the island is also endowed with spectacular mountain landscapes and forested wilderness (both eucalyptus and rainforest), as well as rivers, lagoons and lakes, coastal heaths, wet sedgelands and buttongrass plains.

Our tour around and through Tasmania celebrates the island's landscape in all its diversity: Mount Field National Park, with its striking mountain scenery and wondrous alpine plant communities; Lake St Clair, where forests of Black Peppermint grow against a spectacular backdrop of quartz mountains; the mighty and stunningly picturesque Macquarie Harbour; the beautiful bays and granite outcrops of Freycinet National Park and Mount Wellington, which towers above the attractive state capital city of Hobart.

Intertwined with this abundance of natural beauty, Tasmania has a rich, but tragic, social history associated with the penal colony at Port Arthur, the largest in Australia. In addition there have been battles between those that believe the need to protect the superb wilderness areas from flooding for dams and logging was far greater than the need to exploit and destroy so rich a natural heritage. When the south-western region of Tasmania was nominated for World Heritage listing it was described as "the last great temperate wilderness remaining in Australia and one of the last in the world". The great attraction of Tasmania for the naturalist is the ability to view many of its wildlife inhabitants at such close quarters, without feeling in any way that you are impinging on their natural behaviour.

Days 1 & 2

In flight

You will depart London Heathrow on a scheduled flight to Melbourne. Flights may also be available from regional airports. Please enquire with the Naturetrek office if you would be interested in these options.

Day 3

Hobart

On your arrival at the international airport in Melbourne you must transfer to the domestic terminal for the short onward flight to Hobart. There you will be met by your locally-based tour leader and taken to your city hotel. Hobart is a very attractive city set against a backdrop of the imposing Mount Wellington and straddling the clear aquamarine waters of the Derwent River.

Hobart is Tasmania's state capital and the second oldest city in Australia after Sydney. It is the largest city in the state, with the population of the Greater Hobart area approaching 200,000. First settled in 1804, the early population consisted mainly of convicts and the city's first buildings were established around the waterfront, frequented by whalers, sealers and colonial traders. It still retains a quiet colonial character, epitomised by the many historic buildings which have been sympathetically restored and maintained.

During the afternoon we will take a drive up nearby Mount Wellington. This will offer us wonderful panoramic views over the city, the Derwent Estuary and the surrounding countryside, as well as an opportunity to begin to familiarise ourselves with some of the birds of this fascinating island. In particular, we will look for our first Tasmanian endemic birds; such species as the Black-headed Honeyeaters in the forest canopy, the Strong-billed Honeyeaters that busily search for insects and spiders, and the Green Rosellas that flash past us or overhead. Dusky Robins and small flocks of Scrubtits, White-browed Scrubwrens and both Brown and Tasmanian Thornbills are amongst other species that we shall hope to see, whilst, higher up the slopes, we will search for Yellow-throated Honeyeater and Black Currawong. We will also look for other interesting species which, although more widely distributed across Australia, occur more commonly in Tasmania. Amongst these species are the uncommon Olive Whistler, the beautiful Pink Robin and the Beautiful Firetail. Near the summit of Mount Wellington, we will look amongst the boulder-strewn slopes and stunted shrubs for one of Australia's most beautiful birds, the Flame Robin. We return to our city hotel for dinner and an overnight stay.

Day 4

Bruny Island

Hopefully with a good night's sleep behind you, you will be met after breakfast by your tour leader and embark on the short coach journey to Kettering. From there, a short ferry ride will transport our group onto Bruny Island, home to many of Tasmania's 12 endemic birds, amongst them – most notably – the Forty-

spotted Pardalote. Today will provide our best opportunity to see this species, one of Australia's most endangered and localised birds, for Bruny Island holds several small colonies of this Tasmanian endemic. Amongst other endemics found on Bruny Island that we shall look for today will be both Black-headed and Strong-billed Honeyeater, Green Rosella, Yellow Wattlebird, Black Currawong, Tasmanian Thornbill and Tasmanian Scrubwren. Dusky Robins are also likely to be seen, since they make themselves quite evident by perching on wayside fence posts.

During our time on Bruny Island we will focus our attention particularly on the variety of birdlife to be found in its most densely forested areas. It is here that we may also hope to see Swift Parrot, the scarce Olive Whistler and Beautiful Firetail, three endemics of south-eastern Australia.

We will break the day with a picnic lunch amongst the tranquil landscapes of this attractive island. Later, we will settle in to a hotel on the island, taking an early dinner before we set out again, this time to a nearby beach where we hope to enjoy the spectacle of Little Penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters as they come in from the ocean at dusk. Then, on our way home, we will spend time spotlighting for such native mammals as quolls, possums and wallabies to conclude an eventful day!

Day 5

Bruny Island

After breakfast, we will head by coach to Adventure Bay to join the morning boat trip, the Bruny Island Cruise, which spends three hours on the water in search of such seabirds as Wandering, Shy, Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, White-faced and Great-winged Petrels, Fluttering and Short-tailed Shearwaters and Australasian Gannets, amongst other pelagic species. Being so far south, this is one of the best places anywhere in Australia to search for seabirds, and we may also encounter dolphins, seals, and perhaps even a whale.

We return in the early afternoon to Adventure Bay, where we will have a warming lunch. We will then have the rest of the day to resume our exploration of the island in search of its birds and land mammals. With a chance of Tasmanian Native-hen and/or the rare Hooded Plover along the way, we will keep a watchful eye open on our return to our hotel cottages this evening.

(Please note that on Bruny Island we will be staying in small cottages, each of which accommodates between 4 and 6 people. The cottages are very comfortable, but their facilities are shared.)

Day 6

Mount Field/New Norfolk

After breakfast we will return to the ferry in order to cross back over to the mainland and travel back to Hobart and then on to the Lyell Highway for our journey to New Norfolk. We will enjoy a packed lunch en route, to provide the flexibility needed for any birding stops, and, prior to an afternoon visit to Mount Field National Park, we will stop off at our accommodation at New Norfolk to leave our luggage.

Mount Field is one of Tasmania's oldest and most diverse national parks. Established in 1917, it is best known for the magnificent Russell Falls, accessed by a path that leads through a forest of towering tree ferns. The park's environment also offers the visitor an array of natural wonders, from the tall forests that lie at the base of Mount Field, to the Tasmanian high country with its Snow Gums, alpine moorlands and glacial lakes. The winding road that leads to the higher slopes of the mountain passes, particularly, through an ever-changing succession of plant communities. Interestingly, Mount Field is unusual in that plant diversity increases with altitude, and on walks around some of the alpine lakes we will discover some of the park's bizarre alpine plant species.

We will also take a stroll along 'the Tall Trees Walk' which winds through stands of giant Swamp Gum, one of the largest hardwood tree species in the world, towering to 100 metres in height. This forest contains giant 250-year-old gum trees, sassafras, huge tree ferns, the unique 'horizontal scrub' and a variety of mosses, ferns, lichens and fungi. Amongst this myriad and density of vegetation we will look for Pink Robin and Scrub-tit.

Birds have taken advantage of the range of altitudes and habitats available here and, consequently, many species are found within the park and surrounding reserves. They include 11 of the 12 Tasmanian endemic species, amongst them the Tasmanian Native-hen, the ecologically important, but not endemic, Black Currawong which is a key disperser of fleshy-fruited plants. Other species will include the Noisy Black Cockatoo and Yellow Wattlebird.

It is the diversity of habitats within the park's relatively small area that is the reason why so many of Tasmania's native terrestrial and arboreal mammals occur within the park. Species that are either extinct or endangered on the mainland are found here, including the Eastern Quoll and the Eastern Barred Bandicoot. The last known Tasmanian Tiger, which sadly saw out its days in Hobart Zoo, was trapped in the nearby Florentine Valley in 1933.

We will complete our day in the high alpine meadows of Mount Field National Park, searching for Striated Fieldwren and Flame Robin. As we ascend, the scenery changes from the soft greens of the rainforest to the harsh, glaciated landscape of the mountains, producing some spectacular scenic highlights.

Day 7

Strahan

Following breakfast, and our departure from New Norfolk, we continue our way along the Lyell Highway to Strahan. Strahan, with a population of just 700, lies at the edge of the unspoiled waters of Macquarie Harbour, the second largest natural harbour in the southern hemisphere after Sydney. This is the last outpost of civilisation on the island, and the only safe anchorage on its west coast. It is surely one of the loneliest places on earth. Strahan's history is a showcase of Tasmania's, its penal colony on Sarah Island perhaps the most brutal in the state, a place to which the most unruly convicts from Port Arthur were transported; a place from which they would never escape. Strahan was also the port used during the west coast's mining boom, and was additionally used for the export of Huon Pine from the surrounding forest. These days, the harbour provides an anchorage for crayfish, abalone and shark fishing fleets and is a centre for the ever-growing number of tourists wishing to visit its surrounding wilderness regions.

The town was named after Major George Strahan, the Governor of Tasmania from 1881 to 1886, and was officially proclaimed in 1892, two years after the government had constructed a railway to it from the booming mining town of Zeehan. The railway line from Queenstown to Strahan was then opened in 1899 and, at its peak during this mining boom, the town had a population of over 2,000 people and was the second busiest port in Tasmania.

The first European to explore Macquarie Harbour was James Kelly who, with four companions, entered Hells Gate in December 1815. James Kelly and his group spent three days exploring the huge, 285-square-kilometre harbour, and it was on the basis of their descriptions of the vast stands of trees that, within a year, timber cutters had entered the harbour and were cutting down the magnificent Huon Pines. It was the Huon Pine, a superb fine-grained wood, ideal for shipbuilding, which brought the first Europeans to the harbour. It was the Huon Pine also, which was the reason behind the establishment of a penal colony on Macquarie Harbour's Sarah Island in 1821. This penal colony, known everywhere as one of the most appalling and cruel of all the convict stations, operated just until 1833, when it was closed down and the recidivists were all removed to Port Arthur on the east coast.

The town continued to prosper as a port until the 1950s and 1960s. Then, when the rail link to Zeehan was closed down, and three years later the same fate befell the Queenstown rail link, the town's importance diminished and it became something of a backwater. This all changed in the early 1980s, when the Tasmanian Government announced its intention to permit the Tasmanian Hydro-Electricity Authority to dam the Gordon River. However, an extensive period of local and international environmental protest followed, supported by Britain's David Bellamy, and this forced the Federal Government to intervene in 1983, ruling against the dam and that the whole area, including the Aboriginal art in the Fraser and Kutikina Caves, dating back over 15,000 years, and the white waters of the dangerous Franklin River, would be preserved under a World Heritage order. The Aborigines had had a very long history with the area, extending back at least 20,000 years, but tragically by about 1830 there were none left in the area and the preservation of their artwork now provides us with one of just a few significant insights into their lifestyle and culture. Today, the whole area is known as the Franklin Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and the ecologically significant rainforest and stunning scenery attract tourists from around the world.

After enjoying a packed lunch, we will join the West Coast Wilderness Railway train for a four-hour River and Rainforest tour taking us from the shores of Macquarie Harbour into the rainforest and mountains of Tasmania's rugged west coast. Here we will soak up the stunning views of Macquarie Harbour as we travel along the foreshore from Regatta Point Station in Strahan. As we enter the rainforest, we will follow the course of the King River to Teepookana – once the fourth busiest port in Tasmania, and the place where construction of the railway first began.

The extraordinary engineering achievement of this railway will be evident as we cross historic bridges, including Iron Bridge, and see the remains of the 244-metre trestle bridge at Quarter Mile. We will visit some of the stations along the line, and have the chance to walk in the rainforest, and taste wild leatherwood honey, harvested from the wilderness. During our journey, our guide will tell us the stories of the railway and the resilient people who lived and worked along its length. From the men who laboured to build the line and keep the trains running, to the families and children that made a life in the forest, and the two visionary Irishmen whose fierce rivalry and undaunted ambition brought the railway to life.

Day 8

Strahan to Cradle Mountain

After an early breakfast, we will check out from our rooms.

We will board the new vessel, *Spirit of the Wind*, for the award-winning Gordon River Cruise. Here we will feel as though we're perched at the edge of the world, as we navigate the calm waters of one of the last great touched wilderness areas on earth. Our expert naturalist guides will talk us through the points of interest as we cruise across Tasmania's majestic Macquarie Harbour - the only safe harbour early settlers found on the west coast of Tasmania.

On our return to Strahan, we will drive up the Zeehan Highway to Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, where we will be based at Cradle Mountain Lodge for the next two nights. Part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, this national park encompasses rugged mountain peaks, glacial lakes, deep gorges, rainforest, wet sclerophyll forest, scrub, heathland, sedgeland, bog communities and high moorland, all of which combine to provide one of the most dramatic and untouched landscapes in Australia. The park holds a rich flora, including some endemic species and others with a restricted range, such as Huon Pine, King Billy Pine, Pandani, Whitey Wood, Myrtle Beech, Sassafras, Celery Top and Pencil Pine.

Day 9

Cradle Mountain

Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park is also an outstanding place in which to encounter Australian mammals – perhaps the best in the world! Of the eighteen indigenous mammal species recorded in the park we will hope to see Short-beaked Echidna, Eastern Quoll, Common Wombat, Common Brushtail Possum and Common Ringtail Possum, Long-nosed Potoroo, Bennett's Wallaby and Rufous-bellied Pademelon. We will also enjoy the birdlife, which may include such species as Yellow Wattlebird (the world's largest honeyeater), Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Ground Parrot, Azure Kingfisher, Southern Emu-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Tasmanian Thornbill and possibly even Orange-bellied Parrot. The latter is one of the world's rarest birds, breeding only in Tasmania and with a population estimated at around 50 pairs only.

We will spend as much of the day as we can in the field, in order to enjoy to the full the varied habitats and associated wildlife of this stunning national park. Then, after dinner at the Lodge, we will venture back into the field to spend the late evening spotlighting, looking in particular for such nocturnal species as Tasmanian Devil and Spot-tailed and Eastern Quolls.

Day 10

Launceston

After breakfast we will leave Cradle Mountain and drive along country roads and through small towns to Deloraine, with a stop en route for our picnic lunch.

We will visit Narawntapu National Park, a peaceful coastal refuge, with inlets, small islands, wetlands, sand dunes, lagoons and a variety of plants and animals. Located on Tasmania's central north coast, Narawntapu stretches from Greens Beach on the mouth of the Tamar River to Bakers Beach in the west and is known for its ease to view free-ranging wildlife. The park boasts a rich array of easily observed animals that come out in the evening to graze on the grasslands, including Forester (Eastern Grey) Kangaroo, Bennett's Wallaby and Common Wombat. We will listen for the growls and screeches of Tasmanian Devil. Water birds flourish on the shores and lagoons at Springlawn and can be easily observed from a bird hide. The park is also the feeding ground for the endangered Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle and White-bellied Sea Eagle is often seen gliding overhead.

We will then continue on to Launceston, the second largest city in Tasmania, where we will settle into our overnight hotel accommodation.

Day 11

Bicheno Freycinet Peninsula

Today we will drive a long distance to the south, (with a stop en route for lunch which you will purchase today) to Freycinet Peninsula, one of the State's most scenic coastal areas and known worldwide for its stunning Wineglass Bay. The imposing Devonian granite peaks – known as the Hazards – and the many white sandy beaches that fringe the peninsula are amongst the highlights of the park. The combination of the mild, maritime climate, the scenic beauty of the area, and the abundance of birds and mammals to see on the walks around the park make it a fascinating place to explore.

It is most noticeable that the vegetation of the park is very different from that which we have seen up to now. Predominantly this is a heathland region, with a low overstorey of wattle (*Acacia* species), banksias, paperbarks (*Melaleuca* species), casuarinas (sheoaks) and species of eucalyptus.

Many species of birds live in, or stop over at, Freycinet and the surrounding area. We may be lucky enough to see a White-bellied Sea-eagle gliding overhead, or an Australasian Gannet diving for fish in the ocean. In the bushy and forested areas we should see and hear such small, nectar-feeding birds as Eastern Spinebill and Yellow-throated, Crescent and New Holland Honeyeaters, whilst the raucous sound of the large Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos can often be heard as they drift by in their groups.

Mammals known to occur in the park include Short-beaked Echidna, Tasmanian Devil, Eastern Quoll, Common Wombat, Common Brushtail Possum and Common Ringtail Possum, Long-nosed Potoroo, Bennett's Wallaby and Rufous-bellied Pademelon.

We will stay in the delightful Freycinet Lodge, the only accommodation within Freycinet National Park – and the view from the Lodge's balcony is spectacular.

Day 12

Freycinet Peninsula

We will spend time birding in the local area this morning before boarding Schouten Passage II for an unforgettable 4 hour Wineglass Bay cruise. The experienced and friendly crew will guide us through the sights and history of the Freycinet Peninsula; from the gentle shores of Coles Bay, to one of the world's most beautiful beaches. We will stop for lunch at Wineglass Bay and enjoy some of Tasmania's finest fresh produce, selected by the head chef at Freycinet Lodge.

Today we will hope to see Humpback and Southern Right whales and their calves as they begin to migrate South. Orcas might also be possible today as they follow the Humpback and Southern Right whales hoping to find a weak or unprotected calf. During Spring, the Australian Fur Seal pups can be seen both in the water and on the rock formations and we may even be treated to seeing the calves of Bottle Nose and Common Dolphins.

Birding highlights of the day may include Short-tailed Shearwaters, otherwise known as the Mutton bird, which arrive in incredible numbers from Siberia to breed along the Tasmanian coastline. Little Penguin chicks may also be spotted standing under rock ledges waiting for their parents to return with food. White-bellied Sea Eagles pair and make repairs to their nest and we will have the opportunity to visit a nesting site.

Following the cruise, we will explore more of this spectacular area with our guide.

Day 13

Maria Island

We will depart early this morning from Freycinet Lodge to travel to the small village of Triabunna. Taking our picnic lunch packs & water bottles with us (there are no shops on Maria Island), we will take the 30 minute ferry ride to Maria Island, rich in indigenous and European history, abundant in wildlife, and boasting spectacular views and remarkable geological features.

From Darlington, we will take the Reservoir Circuit. This easy walk is sheltered from the coastal winds and provides a glimpse of Maria Island's wildlife and history. The walk takes us through open woodlands into tall eucalypt forest, and returns via ruins of the old cement works. The area near the reservoir is a pleasant place for a picnic.

On this walk, we will pass through some historic ruins before entering a woodland containing Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Tasmania's floral emblem, where we may hear the endangered Swift Parrot. We will continue on to the open forest to look for Strong-billed and Black-headed Honeyeaters, and arrive at the Reservoir, constructed by convicts in the first convict period (1825-32), to look for Fairy Martin. Near the Reservoir look for the endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote – as well Spotted and Striated Pardalotes. We will then see some ruins dating back to 1889, including the Cement Works, Manager's House and Workman's Cottage. And from the track you may come across wallabies and pademelons.

After taking some time to view other parts around Darlington, we will board the ferry for the return trip to Triabunna and from there, travel south through Orford and on to Hobart for overnight.

Day 14

Hobart/in flight

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Melbourne and onward international flight to London Heathrow.

Day 15

London

We are generally scheduled to arrive at London's Heathrow airport in the early afternoon.

Tour grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of Tasmania's fine selection of habitats (indeed, some of the very best that Australia has to offer). There will be some long of drives during the tour, but we will be travelling on good, metalled roads and enjoying generally short wildlife walks at a gentle pace. The relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour make it suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Weather

The month of November is early summer in Tasmania, similar to May/June in the United Kingdom, with similarly unpredictable weather! Daytime temperatures are likely to range from 15 to 23°C, whilst at night it will be cooler, especially at such high sites as Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park.

Food & accommodation

The accommodation we use consists of a variety of comfortable hotels/motels, lodges and chalets, all rooms with private facilities except on Bruny Island. All meals are included in the cost of the holiday, with the exception of lunches on Days 3, 11 and 14. Drinks and additional snacks are generally not included.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

If you would like to extend your stay in Victoria, we can highly recommend a visit to Gypsy Point Lakeside, or take a guided tour along the Great Ocean Road, visit the Fairy Penguin colony at Phillip Island or enjoy an extended stay at the Little Desert National Park.



Wedge-tailed Eagle