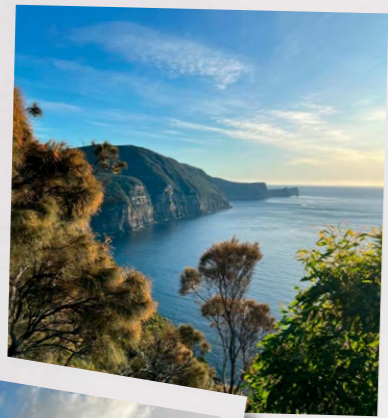


DESIGN DESTINATION

# whisky trail

Four days in the Tasmanian wilderness can change your mind. Add some local spirit and it could change your life...

The first night's accommodation is at Crescent Bay Lodge, a series of sensitively constructed pavilions designed to recede into their environments but boasting incredible views across the water to Cape Raoul. Eliza hits the trail (opposite).



PHOTOGRAPHY: LUKE TSCHEPKE

**M**ixing whisky and walks doesn't seem the most sensible holiday arrangement, but there's more than just hiking going on with Tasmanian Walking Company's Three Capes Signature Walk when award-winning whisky maker Bill Lark is involved. Both pursuits are embedded in the natural environment, as essential for superb whisky-making as it is for leisurely wild walking, and the one thing they both share is Tasmania. This kind of 'experience tourism' is at the intersection of sustainability and luxury, and Tassie is doing it brilliantly.

The Three Capes Track is a magnificent one-way journey, walking four days through the breathtaking Tasman Peninsula and staying three nights in sensitively built off-grid cabin complexes, Crescent Bay Lodge and Cape Pillar Lodge, along the route. It's the first and only walk authorised to offer the full track experience by Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife, and our guides are brimming with local knowledge and gentle encouragement. It's also a fully catered experience with chefs in residence and a massage therapist on site. And while it's high-end hiking all the way, you still have to clock the miles.

That's weighing on my mind beforehand as I consider the 46 kilometres of track ahead of me. I go into some hiking-gear anxiety during our 8:30am briefing at Tasmanian Walking Company HQ, where we meet guides Dandy and Mike, who check off items on our gear list, hand out walking poles and fit us for our backpacks. They've seen this kind of anxiety before and know how to calm nervous walkers before we depart.

Next, we board a boat for a short trip across to Denmans Cove from Stewarts Bay. It's bloody cold and involves wading ashore carrying our packs, which strikes me as a literal baptism for the walk. Once the boat pushes off from the beach, we are fully committed to the walk. In four days, we'll be picked up from a spot on the opposite side of the park – there's no way back now. (However, if guests do get sick or injured, they're easily choppered out to safety.)

And so, my days in the wild begin. I quickly adjust to my six-kilo pack and discover deep respect for the poles as I get into the groove of this hiking thing. The pace is good, and it's blissfully quiet as we crunch along the tracks through bushland and patches of wildflowers, looking back across the water toward Port Arthur and listening to guide Mike tell stories about convicts and great escapes on whaling boats.

Crescent Bay Lodge is a structure that is breathtaking in its simplicity. It's essentially a glass box jutting out over the view to Cape Raoul. Everything is made with sustainability and efficiency in mind, and it's all best practice environmental technology here. Food and provisions are heli-dropped monthly and clever inclusions abound – like warm mist showers that reduce water usage by 70% and suspended floors that ensure minimal ground disturbance. The energy is solar but supported by bird-safe Archimedes wind turbines.

There are only seven guest rooms, and they are chic cocoons made of plywood with a wall of glass open to the view. The main pavilion is a combined kitchen, dining and lounge room with a roaring fire to welcome us into the view with a slice of warm orange cake and glass of sparkling wine. This is a magical space to watch my first Tasman National Park sunset.

After plates of local charcuterie and Clover Hill sparkling, followed by slow-cooked beef cheeks and Tassie pinot noir, our

**FROM TOP** Cape Pillar Lodge is home base for two nights of the journey; the main pavilion has lounge, dining and shared kitchen areas for guests. Bedrooms are simple sanctuaries of plywood. Day trekking will take you through microclimates such as rainforest filled with mosses, ferns and other vibrant greens. Three Capes offers some of the highest-standard walking tracks in the country.



PHOTOGRAPHY: LUKE TSCHARKE, CHRIS GREER, BRETT BOARDMAN

group retires to the oversized lounges to settle in for Bill's true tales of the whisky business he and wife Lyn built, accompanied by whisky sours and Old Fashioneds. My fellow walkers turn out to be quite serious whisky aficionados, and I pick up pretty quickly that Bill is a bona-fide super star in these circles. It's then that I start to appreciate how special this experience is. When he produces a small-run limited-edition whisky to taste, the anticipation in the room is palpable. It's fragrant and nutty and warm. Hey! Whisky is fun!

It's this rhythm of (slightly) tough day trekking and decadent meals around the fire in the evening that I really relax into. The next three days of hikes takes us through various microclimates and steep ascents to breathtaking cliff-top views and tricky corners, and I find the steady, silent walking deeply meditative.

Cape Pillar Lodge could possibly be even more impressive than Crescent Bay Lodge. That night, we take our canapes and drinks in a pavilion with a spectacular vista and then make the chilly dash back to the main cabin for another cracking meal of delicious Tasmanian produce and wine.

There is an opportunity to opt out of Day Three's walk and just... be. I take it, and Bill decides to stay as well, so we share a day of cake and conversation in pavilions among the trees. His stories are gold, but we are both nervous about tomorrow's 23-kilometre hike out of the park and want to be as rested as we can. I'm the least experienced walker here and, though the guides are reassuring, I also like a day of calm before the storm.

As it turns out, the next day is exhilarating and the pace is good. There are some steep ascents to our lunch spot of extraordinary beauty, but it's the last push that really tests me. The descent seems never-ending – not hard to walk, but long. I find myself going into animal mode – where I just bear down, grasping my poles and putting one foot in front of the other to reach our waiting bus at the gloriously pristine Fortescue Bay.

The Three Capes walk is beautiful and primal and was hard (for me), so when I take my last steps off the trail at the bay, I burst into tears in relief and a wash of wonder. I did it. I loved it. And now I want to do it all again. **10**

See [taswalkingco.com.au](http://taswalkingco.com.au) for more information



**BE STILL**

The adventure begins in Hobart the evening before our departure, with a whisky tasting at The Still, the city headquarters of award-winning brand Lark Whisky – the first carbon-neutral distillery in Australia. The bar is a temple to all Tasmanian whisky, which is the perfect initiation to the walk and a great intro to Hobart's incredible food and wine scene. A must-visit for experiencing some truly outstanding whisky, but also a warm spot for a casual catch-up accompanied by local beers, wines and an impressive cocktail list.

**THE STILL (LARK WHISKY BAR) IS AT 30 ARGYLE STREET IN HOBART, TASMANIA; LARKDISTILLERY.COM**

**WHISKY WALKS 2024**

Join the next Lark Whisky Walk at Three Capes with head distiller/blender Chris Thomson. Scheduled for May 22 to 26 next year, it costs \$4195 and includes an exclusive whisky tasting at The Still on May 22. Book online at [taswalkingco.com.au](http://taswalkingco.com.au) or email [bookings@taswalkingco.com.au](mailto:bookings@taswalkingco.com.au) for more information.