

WALK, EAT, SLEEP, REPEAT



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Three days to experience Bruny Island's bounty

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There's not a cloud over Cloudy Bay. The sky is a polished blue, and the surf, so often thunderous along Bruny Island's south coast, has dulled to a whisper. At the beach's southern end, I swim over the sandy seabed and have to remind myself I'm not here for a beach holiday. I'm here to walk, and eat.

"Are we on time?" one walker asks as our group returns along the hard-packed beach.

"There is no time here," replies guide Sam Barnett, "so, yes, we're on time." It seems a good motto for a trip languidly named the Bruny Island Long Weekend.

Thirty minutes by road and then ferry from Hobart, this holiday island is big on natural beauty and arguably even bigger on flavours. Threading the two together is a three-day Tasmanian Walking Company outing combining a trio of day walks with a bounty of Bruny produce; almost the entirety of the menu is sourced from the island.

At the Dennes Point jetty, after a private boat transfer from Hobart, we step ashore an island of two halves. North and South Bruny are held together by a thread-thin isthmus known as the Neck. It's a divide as definitive as a national border, separating the rural north from the spectacular cliff and beach-lined south.

Excellent day walks abound, particularly in the south, and our first is arguably the most impressive. Midway along Bruny's main road, which is like a drive through the aisle of a gourmet grocer, passing oyster farms, Bruny Island Cheese Co, vegetable stands and a honey producer, the track to Cape Queen Elizabeth sets out for the coast.

"This track is really good for seeing the forty-spotted pardalote," Barnett says, referring to one of Australia's rarest birds. "There's one white gum here they love."

Bruny is home to all 12 of Tasmania's endemic bird species, but this small, endangered beauty is the prize sighting in the state. There's even a local gin distillery named after it. Sure enough, as we pass through a narrow strip of gums beside a lagoon, a pair of pardalotes flits overhead. It's the finest of welcomes to the island.



Walkers on the Bruny Island Long Weekend, above; Cape Bruny lighthouse, left; arch at Cape Queen Elizabeth and in-camp dining, below; forty-spotted pardalote, inset; fresh oysters on the trail, top right



IN THE KNOW

The three-day Bruny Island Long Weekend is a return trip from Hobart, with private boat transfer to the island; from \$1795 a person, twin-share. Departures until April 30, then from September. taswalkingco.com.au

At low tide, the Cape Queen Elizabeth walk beelines to the beach along Moorina Bay (at high tide it climbs over an inland ridge), squeezing through gaps in the cliffs to a high rock arch that curls out of the sand like a stony rainbow. Scrubbed clean by the tide, the sand is almost free of footprints, and by the time we reach its end, weaving through mutation-bird rookeries towards the tip of the cape, Bruny has begun to feel about as secluded as Crusoe's atoll.

At walk's end, there is one more stop to make before we head to camp. A few minutes' drive from the Cape Queen Elizabeth trailhead is Great Bay, a notch in the coastline that produces the island's finest oysters.



Barnett wades into the shallow sea, refrigeration bag slung over his shoulder, and collects a feed of oysters from the racks of a private farm with which the company collaborates. Back on shore, among the modern middens of past visits, we savour their briny freshness and sip elderflower cordial atop rocks blazed in a natural tablecloth of orange lichen. Distant kunanyi/Mt Wellington can be seen over the island's headlands. Our Bruny feast has begun.

Nights on the Bruny Island Long Weekend are spent in a private camp on the side of the island's highest mountain, Mt Mangana. Glamping tents on wooden platforms are sprinkled through a clearing in the forest, which rises from the slopes in great florets.

The two-room tents have a king-size bed in one zone, and a bathroom sink and deck chairs in the other. With the flaps of the windows rolled open each night, I wake to the sight of the forest glowing with dawn and a soundtrack of birdsong. The grassy clearing is



trimmed to a putting-green finish by the multitude of wallabies that bounce about the camp. The only view to match that from the tents is the one from the camp shower, which is set into the forest with an opening peering into the canopy providing one of Tasmania's finest ablation outlooks.

Each night, we dine in camp, with the island's flavours delivered to us. We sample cheese, olives and beer as a lamb roasts over coals on a deck made from local celery top pine. Overflowing plates of vegetables come fresh from a local resident's garden, which guides help plant.

Each day on the Long Weekend is designed with flexibility in mind. Guests can walk long, walk little, or not walk at all. At Cloudy Bay, on our second day, we set out to trek to East Cloudy Head, a 12km hike to a headland at the bay's southern point. Before we've even reached the end of the beach, a decision has been made to cut the outing short in favour of a swim on this perfect summer day. We splash about in the lagoon-like shallows before climbing to a rocky clearing midway along the headland, taking in a view over the water and Cape Bruny, topped by the fourth lighthouse built in Australia. We drift back to the beach to swim again.

Our day's work has barely cost us a bead of sweat, and the evening promises a meal of Tasmanian wallaby fillets with haloumi, garden greens and pomegranate, followed by panko-crumbed local flathead and Persian love cake baked by the Jetty Cafe at Dennes Point, where our trip will conclude over lunch the next day. First, though, there's one more walk to undertake: a climb to the summit of 571m Mt Mangana, the highest peak on the island. From the road that climbs over its shoulder, a short walking track ascends through a mossy mat of cool temperate rainforest.

"This is the most threatened forest type in the world," Barnett says as the dark canopy closes in, immersing us in a world of sassafras, mountain pepperberries, celery top pines and waratahs. Even on the summit, which is quickly reached, the tree cover barely breaks open.

Barnett leads us to the summit's edge, where a tiny boulder field sits like an opera box above Cloudy Bay and the distant mountains of southern Tasmania.

There is lunch to come, and a boat ride back to Hobart, but Barnett drops his pack and begins to boil water.

"Time is irrelevant here," Barnett assures us again. I take the coffee that is handed to me and lean back against a lichen-splashed boulder. The world can wait.

Andrew Bain was a guest of Tasmanian Walking Company. discovertasmania.com.au