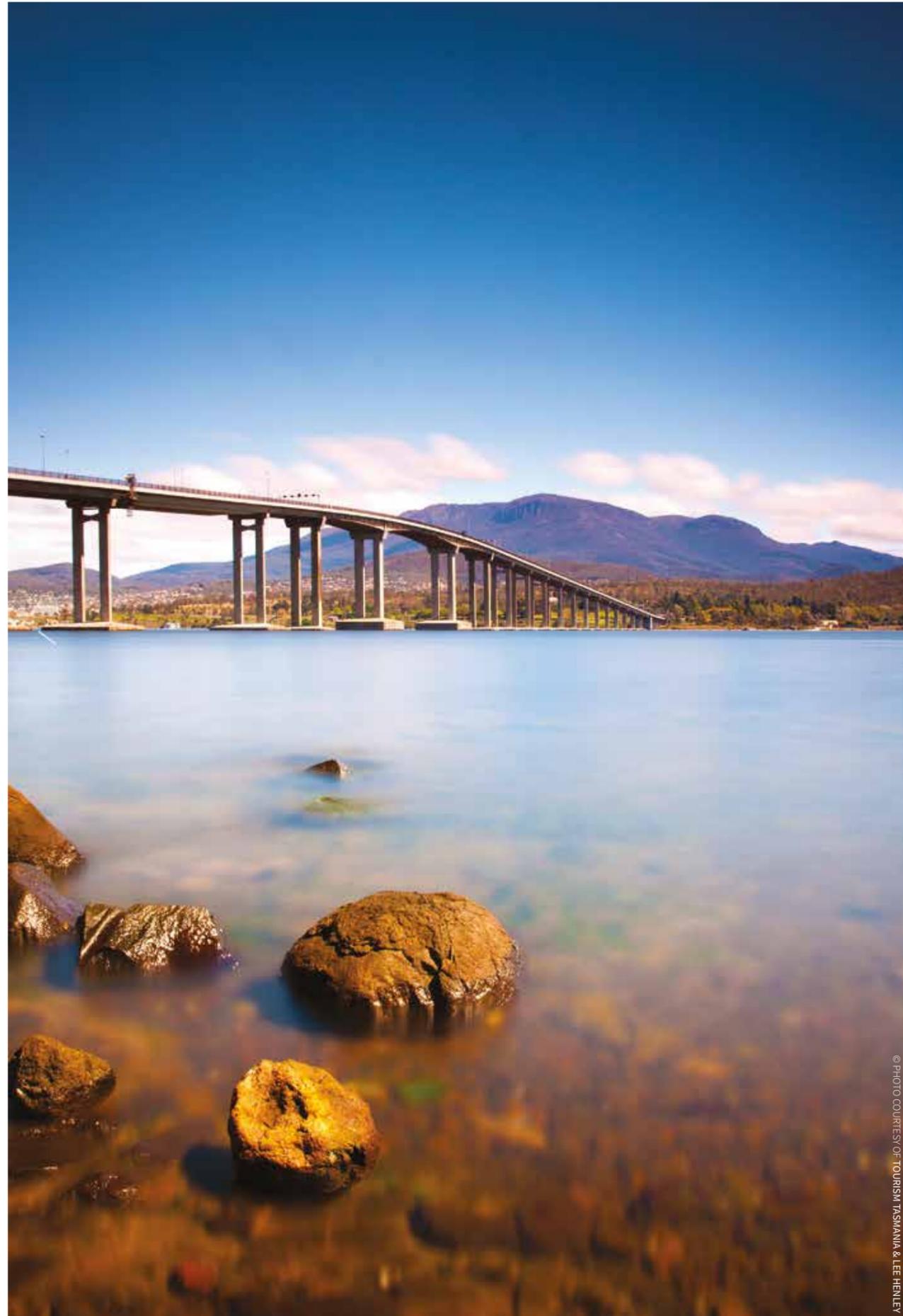


Good things, small packages

A city doesn't have to be a booming metropolis to be a great getaway. Giselle Whiteaker heads to Hobart, the capital of Australia's smallest state.





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Hobart, in Tasmania, Australia, is a rather small capital. It does command the lion's share – and the lion features on the state flag – of the island's 500,000-strong population, with 218,000 calling the city home. Celebrity chef Rick Stein certainly wasn't complaining about the city's diminutive size, when he visited as part of a tour of Tasmania for the BBC series *World on a Plate*. He hunted for wallabies – the latest game meat taking the world by storm, sampled arguably the best single malt whiskey in the world and tasted sustainably farmed salmon that has become a national obsession. And in the process, he lauded Tasmania's foodie scene, putting the state firmly on the gastronomic map. It's a long way from the old "Apple Isle" moniker.

It's not just the local produce that's put Hobart, and Tasmania, on the world stage, either. Sure, the seafood is fresh, the wallaby is tender and the distinct cool-climate wines are delectable, but there's also a lot happening in the arts scene. In fact, much of the credit for the recent surge in Hobart's popularity has been attributed to the Museum of New and Old Art (MONA). Opened in 2011 by professional gambler and philanthropist David Walsh, the bizarre subterranean collection of somewhat random and controversial works drew in 330,700 visitors in the last year alone, according to figures from the Tasmanian Visitor Survey – and that doesn't count the locals that visit time and time again. Well, the entry is free for Tasmanians and MONA is more than art-meets-science.

It's also a venue for all kinds of events, including *Mona Foma*, known as *Mofo*, MONA's annual festival of music and art, and *Dark Mofo*, a winter festival that celebrates the dark through large-scale public art, food, music, light, film and noise.

Alighting from MONA's fast service along the Derwent River, where punters can choose the *Posh Pit*, with complementary beverages and nibbles, or the standard service, which includes the option of sitting on a fiberglass sheep, the edifice squats above, chiseled into an escarpment. From the lobby, a spiral staircase descends 17 metres underground, ending in a cathedral-like basement bordered by a 250-million-year-old Triassic sandstone wall. Without giving the game away, what follows is three levels of a provocative and evocative jumble of art. Like it or hate it (which some do), it's undeniably fascinating.

There's more to Hobart than MONA though. Time it right and you may be there for the *Taste of Tasmania*, a weeklong festival celebrating Tasmania's food and wine that runs over the end of each year and the start of the

new one. The Sydney to Hobart yacht races finishes at the same time, so the streets are thronged with yachties and spectators, and on the bay, the sails of these sleek craft flap like colourful flags. Every second year, around March, *Ten Days on the Island* takes to the stage, with artistic performances in the theatres and on every street corner. Then there's the Australian Wooden Boat Festival, the Antarctic Midwinter Festival, the Festival of Voices and a road rally called *Targa Tasmania* that traverses the state, finishing in Hobart.

There are also the everyday sights. Hobart sits in the foothills of Mount Wellington. From the pinnacle, on a clear day, you can see across the Tasman Sea and into the wild South West National Park, a World Heritage Area. You'll also have a bird's eye view and realise that the city centre is wedged between the mountain and the banks of the Derwent, with the suburbs stretching across the water to the eastern shore. Wellington Park is threaded with tracks and trails that cover dry woodlands to windswept summits, offering short strolls and more extended walks into remote areas.

Every Saturday, the mellow sandstone facades of historic warehouses watch over Salamanca Market, with more than 300 stalls selling a medley of fresh fruit, the distinctive leatherwood honey, crisp organic vegetables, kitchen-wares carved from sweet-smelling Huon Pine, locally designed jewellery, clothing and crafts. Whether you want to kick back over a coffee and listen to buskers singing the blues or pick up a handcrafted souvenir, this is the place to do it. At night, the wine bars and pubs here are packed to the brim, as punters sip on sauvignon and dine al fresco.

On Sundays, come rain, hail or shine – and sometimes you'll get all three in one day – a busy street in the heart of Hobart transforms into a bustling farmers' market. It's all about Tasmanian produce and getting to know your farmer. If you can't eat it, drink it, grow it or meet the producer, you won't find it here. What you will find is an ever-changing array produce, and the true meaning of the word "provenance."

On the other side of the city, the equally verdant Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens are a haven for green thumbs, and if you time it right, you may catch one of *Directions Theatre's* Shakespeare in the Gardens productions. *Much Ado About Nothing* is currently tumbling its way around the gardens, the audience following in its wake, toting blankets and picnic baskets. Yes, Hobart may be small, but it's taken American author Napoleon Hill's advice: "If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way." This city does both. ■

Left: The Tasman Bridge crossing the Derwent River. Previous page: Hobart waterfront at dusk.



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Top: MONA from the water. Above: The sandstone buildings at Salamanca. Above right: The farmer's market.

> **STAY AT:** *The Henry Jones Art Hotel*

The Henry Jones is Australia's first dedicated art hotel. Created within Hobart's oldest waterfront warehouses, the hotel merges historic and modern, blending the original 19th century architecture of the city with ultra-modern design and contemporary art.
www.thehenryjones.com

> **EAT AT:** *Solo Pasta and Pizza*

Solo may not be one of the uber-glam waterfront eateries, but this casual Italian restaurant in Sandy Bay is always packed to the brim, due to its focus on superb service and fantastic home-style Italian fare.
www.solopastaandpizza.com.au

> **DRINK AT:** *Lark Distillery*

This funky cafe, bar and distillery is on the fringe of the CBD and at the back it opens onto a lovely lawn overlooking the docks. It is home to a range of live gigs and Tasmania's original single malt whisky.
www.larkdistillery.com

> **DON'T MISS:** *The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery*

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery is a combined museum, art gallery and herbarium. It's Australia's second-oldest museum, but a recent multi-million dollar facelift has transformed the collection of antiquities into a fascinating site with more than 2,000 square metres of public and exhibition spaces.
www.tmag.tas.gov.au

For more information, see www.discovertasmania.com.au

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◀ **The Links Resort**

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