

Hobart remakes itself as cultural hot spot

Continued from Page 1K

civilization. Tasmania's capital, Hobart, isn't often mentioned in the same breath as Sydney or Melbourne, sprawling centers for culture, food and fashion.

But with the emergence of the world-class MONA; an increasingly vibrant restaurant and cafe scene; and at least one hotel that deserves to be ranked among the world's finest, Hobart's reputation is transforming. Still a tad sleepy, yes — on the weekend we visited, the city was mostly deserted by sunset. Yet given the size of its population (approximately 200,000) and its remote location (75 minutes by airplane from Melbourne), Hobart's sophistication feels astonishing.

Our visit to Hobart actually began 20 miles outside of town, in the tiny village of Richmond. It is the site of the oldest bridge in Australia, built by convicts in the 1820s. The handsome, wheat-hued structure, still traversed regularly by cars and pedestrians, is also a reminder of this state's sorrowful history: Tasmania was where British judges dispatched their most irredeemable and unruly prisoners in the early 19th century.

From Richmond we made our way another 10 miles west to Brighton and the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary to meet with director Greg Irons, who is working diligently to save the Tasmanian devils from possible extinction.

We were easily able to cover both of these sites — and even pet one of the devils — before lunch. In Hobart and its surroundings, you can journey from past to present, and from rural to urban, in about 20 minutes.

After working up an appetite, we took a tour with Gourmania to sample Hobart's fare. Over the course of three perfectly paced hours, Tasmania-born pastry chef Mary McNeill guided us to six popular places in the central business district.

At Ethos, in a refurbished 19th-century horse stable, we nibbled on butternut squash with blue cheese and house-made crisps. At Garagistes, a sleek wine bar that wouldn't look out of place in Dallas or San Francisco, we sampled oysters from nearby Bruny Island. At Yellow Bernard cafe, we met a pair of 20-



Photos by Christopher Kelly/Special Contributor

Hobart's Salamanca Market offers a variety of fun stuff, from clothes to pottery to local delicacies, and draws a large crowd every Saturday morning.



Yellow Bernard is one of a number of trendy cafes that have sprung up in recent years in Hobart.

something proprietors who are even more obsessive about their coffee than the notorious bean-heads of Melbourne.

Any notion that we might be visiting some backwater land was erased when we checked into Villa Howden. Located about 10 minutes outside of Hobart, the hotel is nestled alongside the shimmering blue North West Bay. Outside, winding footpaths provide an opportunity to enjoy a lazy bayside stroll. Reception areas with fireplaces offer a relaxing setting for a game of Trivial Pursuit. Best of all was our dinner in the hotel's restaurant, where head chef Terry Clark serves a number of native delicacies, including plump Spring Bay mussels with black pudding and chorizo, and lamb from Bruny Island.

Hobart hosts the weekly outdoor Salamanca Market on Saturdays. Hundreds of stalls line cobblestoned Salamanca Place, selling goods ranging from pottery to licorice and vegetables to handcrafted cutting boards. Families picnic on the grass. Buskers play music and peddle their CDs.

We foolishly scheduled just one hour to explore the market and nearby Constitution Dock. Three hours later, we were still puttering around, sampling leatherwood honey and pecorino cheese, cursing ourselves for not having come to Hobart sooner. This is no longer the forgotten corner of Australia that you should even think of skipping.

Christopher Kelly is a Fort Worth-based writer.



Only 10 minutes from Hobart, Villa Howden is a luxury hotel that overlooks North West Bay.

When you go

Getting there: There are no direct flights to Hobart from Dallas/Fort Worth, so you'll probably stop in Melbourne or Sydney. Multiple carriers fly there, including Qantas, Virgin Australia and United (Qantas does offer a direct flight to Sydney from D/FW.) If you're traveling from within Australia, Qantas, JetStar and Virgin Australia fly to Hobart from most of Australia's major cities. A visa is required for U.S. citizens to travel to Australia, but is easily obtained online and linked electronically to your passport. For visa information, visit immi.gov.au/e_visa/visitors.htm. The fee is approximately \$21.50.

Stay: Villa Howden, 77 Howden Road, Howden; villahowden.com.au
In Hobart's central business district, there is also a wide range of well-regarded options, from luxury properties such as the Henry Jones Art Hotel (thehenryjones.com) to lower-priced B&Bs and motels.

Eat: Ethos Eat Drink, 100 Elizabeth St., ethoseatdrink.com
Garagistes, 103 Murray St., garagistes.com.au
Yellow Bernard, 109 Collins St., yellowbernard.com

See: The Museum of New and Old Art (MONA), 655 Main Road Berriedale, mona.net.au
Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary, 593 Briggs Road, Brighton, bonorong.com.au

Gourmania Food Tours, gourmaniafoodtours.com.au
For additional information: discovertasmania.com.au

Christopher Kelly

Heli-hiking a beautiful thing

Continued from Page 6K

of it we'll have climbed up and down 1,600 feet a couple times over.

My father's outing doesn't require special equipment or a high level of fitness. He'll even manage to sneak in a couple of naps in a sunny meadow by the end of the day.

Back at the lodge we'll compare notes while lounging in the rooftop hot tub.

I never thought I'd be on a hiking holiday with my dad at his advanced age, but that's the beauty of heli-hiking with CMH Summer Adventures. Canadian Mountain Holidays is the company that invented heli-skiing. If you can walk, you can hike. Whether you like to go hard and fast or slow and easy makes no difference to them.

Hans Gmoser, the founder of CMH, built the first of his 11 lodges here in British Columbia's Bugaboos, a subrange of the Purcell Mountains. In winter the Purcells get more snow than the Rockies. In summer, they offer spectacular hiking amid glaciers, turquoise lakes and soaring peaks. The Bugaboo spires —

distinctive granite towers sculpted by glaciers over the eons — are part of the jaw-dropping scenery.

On our first afternoon, we're grouped according to fitness. I hike with two young retirees: Mark, 60, a former real estate lawyer from Vancouver, and Cindy, 56, a former chemical engineer from Denver.

Dad's group includes another octogenarian and a couple of middle-aged physicians from Ohio. The guide-to-visitor ratio is so low that one day when Dad wants to take it extra-easy, he has a guide all to himself.

The company happily accommodates older, slower and single travelers, like the elderly man from California who comes every year for nine days of heli-hiking. "We're his extended family," CMH guide Hans Hortenhuber tells me one evening as we relax in the lodge's dining room overlooking the Bugaboo glacier.

In many ways it does feel like a family here. Breakfasts and dinners are eaten communally at large tables, guides and guests together. The lodge is small and luxurious enough

to make you think you're at your rich uncle's chalet in Aspen, but big enough to comfortably accommodate 50 hikers. The week we visit there are just 24 guests, including some professional and aspiring artists who are flown to a scenic spot each morning for a day of painting.

We easily get into the groove: breakfasting in the dining room at 8 each morning, packing a picnic lunch from gourmet fixings, then being whisked away by the Bell 212 helicopter to a different hiking area each day. On our return, a cold beer followed by the outdoor hot tub works wonders to soothe any aches and pains.

Near the end of our final day's hike, Mark, Cindy and I are again roped together and carefully follow Bob up a rocky spine protruding above Pyramid glacier. Looking over one edge, we find ourselves directly above a deep crevasse in the ice. The gaping black hole is big enough to swallow all of us. We gulp and look the other way, taking in the jagged peaks and green forests beyond, memorizing every detail of this special place.



Suzanne Morphet/Special Contributor

Guide Bob Sawyer leads the way to a small glacial lake to refill his water bottle during a hike in the Purcell Mountains of British Columbia.

I picture Dad somewhere nearby, enjoying — as he confided later — "one of the best days of my life."

Too soon it's time to go. Bob radios the pilot. "We're in the heart of the Quintets if you want to fire up and come and get us."

Suzanne Morphet is a freelance writer in Victoria, British Columbia.

When you go

CMH Summer Adventures begin in early July and run through early September. A three-night stay at the Bugaboo or Bobbie Burns lodge, including daily helicopter flights and meals, costs about \$2,640 per adult (less for children). cmhsummer.com

Departure: Trips begin in Banff, where you'll be picked up and driven to the company's helipad. Before and/or after your hiking adventure, stay at the Fairmont Banff Springs hotel, Canada's historic "castle in the Rockies" with 12 restaurants and lounges, two golf courses, a spa, shopping and panoramic views. fairmont.com/banff-springs