

# SHE'LL BE APPLES

In Tassie, everything falls into place – and what a place. SIMON WALKER writes.



**Y**ou only need a vague plan when you get away to north-eastern Tasmania; Tassie takes care of the rest. Even when it's in flood, which it was as we flew in low over Launceston mid-August.

Our vague plan was to fly down from Newcastle, grab a hire car from the airport, drive up to a holiday house we'd found online called Tam O'Shanter Views, on the northern coastline, and kill a few days.

We'd done a bit of Googling and knew the house looked promising, that northern Tassie was wine country, that there were a few golf courses nearby, and that the Apple Isle was foodie heaven, so what could go wrong?

Apart from not going, we discovered, nothing.

Getting there was a simple three-hour hop, skip and jump from Williamstown to Launceston (Lonny to the locals), via Melbourne, all booked online using discount fares. Very quick and economical.

Getting around was also as easy as picking up the hire car at the airport, which was upgraded at no extra expense on request.

As usual, within minutes of hitting the road, I found myself asking why the hell I hadn't moved down there yet.

To quote the label on Boag's Premium, Tasmania is wild, isolated and pure.

As was our accommodation, Tam O'Shanter Views, perched directly on Bass Strait, all of 55 kilometres north of Lonny.

An architect-designed, four-bedroom, five-star luxury beach house sumptuously appointed in splendid isolation on a rocky coastline.

It's yet to feature on *Grand Designs*, but in terms of concept and execution, it's worthy of Kevin McCloud's attention.

It's certainly caught beautifulaccommodation.com's, and tripadvisor gives it a big rap, too.

I'm glad it caught ours, because for what you get, and where you get it – right on the beach, a 30-second stroll down a bush track to the water – it's fantastic value.

Contemporary design, soaring ceilings, light and airy, Tasmanian oak flooring throughout, large well-appointed kitchen with stainless steel everything incorporated into a pavilion dining and lounge area that easily accommodates 12 or more people, all leading out through glass doors to a deck with 180-degree views of the ocean.

Magnificent.

Apart from being a place to escape, Tam O'Shanter Views provides the perfect base to tour the Tamar – if you can rip yourself away.

North Tassie is famous for its cool climate wines and the Tamar Valley Wine Route weaves you past more than 20 cellar doors.

We thought it would have been rude not to sample a few while there, so we did, rather

enthusiastically. As you drive to these vineyards through languid rural pastures you notice sheep and lambs, ducks, pigs and cattle grazing everywhere. And it's hard not to imagine them making the perfect accompaniment for some of those cool climate vinos you're about to imbibe. "Yum" was a word oft-remarked on our journey.

By chance the guys from *Gourmet Traveller* had been at Janz Vineyard the day before we popped in, cracking a few vintages.

Consequently we got to taste some classic

O'Shanter Views. For something a little more rustic closer to home, Tam O'Shanter's nine-hole course is just three minutes down the road from the house.

This sleepy little layout, maintained fastidiously by the locals for the past 30 years, runs on thereabouts time. Thereabouts each Friday between 6pm and 8pm you can get a meal and a beer in preparation for comp the next day.

As the sign out the front says, if it's quiet, the joint will close earlier; if it's busy, the place will

We knew it had been wet. We just didn't realise how wet.

But armed with this serendipitous warning we made our way down to Lonny, and what an awe-inspiring natural phenomenon we witnessed.

Niagara in proportion and literally a stroll from downtown Launceston.

We'd had no plan to see it, but by virtue of being there, it had all rolled out.

In typical laid-back Tassie fashion, they have a chairlift draped across the normally



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**LUSH LIFE:** From left, the Tamar Valley; the five-star lodging Tam O'Shanter Views; Cataract Gorge before and, right, after the floods.

pinots and chardies normally off limits to the masses: one of many pleasant surprises during our short stay which underlined the notion that good things flow in Tassie if you let them.

Into our glass on this occasion. And into our mouths nearly every time we stopped to eat along the way.

Talk about a "fast food" heaven.

At rustic roadside joints across the Tamar Valley we dined on home-made lamb shank pies; scallop, crab and prawn fritters; spinach, mushroom and blue cheese quiche; and the odd awesome pasty.

Five-star cottage fare that would pass for swank mains on the mainland.

Golf was high on the agenda. Nearly every town has a scenic public course in tidy order.

And if you're really up for a challenge, Barnbogle Dunes – a world-class links course – is just 30 minutes pleasant drive from Tam

close later – manager's discretion rules.

Lulworth, five minutes drive from Tam O'Shanter, has a renowned surf break when conditions are right.

Nearby Weymouth, situated on the mouth of the Pipers River, and Bridpoint are popular for fishing and sailing, while Narawntapu National Park is known as the "Serengeti of Tasmania" for its abundance of wildlife.

Our travel narrative took another superb turn while strolling up to Lilydale Falls one morning.

We bumped into a local who urged us not to miss Cataract Gorge.

We hadn't been planning to visit this normally placid trickle which flows directly into Launceston CBD off the nearby plateau.

But this guy advised us a once-in-50-year flood was due to roll down the mountain the next day.

quiet lagoon of the gorge. On the day we were there that lagoon was up nearly 30 metres, and according to the local rag, the equivalent of 16 million Volkswagen Beetles worth of water was pouring down the gorge every second.

A truly bizarre description for what was truly an amazing sight.

But so typically Tasmania.

And if you wanted to talk wild, isolated and pure, the chairlift, administered by what looked like two volunteers from the local Lions club, defied any modern-day liability concerns for certain death should something malfunction.

But you know you're living when you're nearly dying.

And as we idled across the maelstrom below it was hard to deny that in northern Tasmania, we were living large.