

Where to stay

Reviews of the month ★ Tasmania ★ India ★ Kyoto ★ Oxfordshire Plus Suite talk



TASMANIA SAFFIRE FREYCINET

Wake up in the wilderness

Jonathan Bastable is happy to be a jet-lagged early riser at a stunningly located luxury lodge

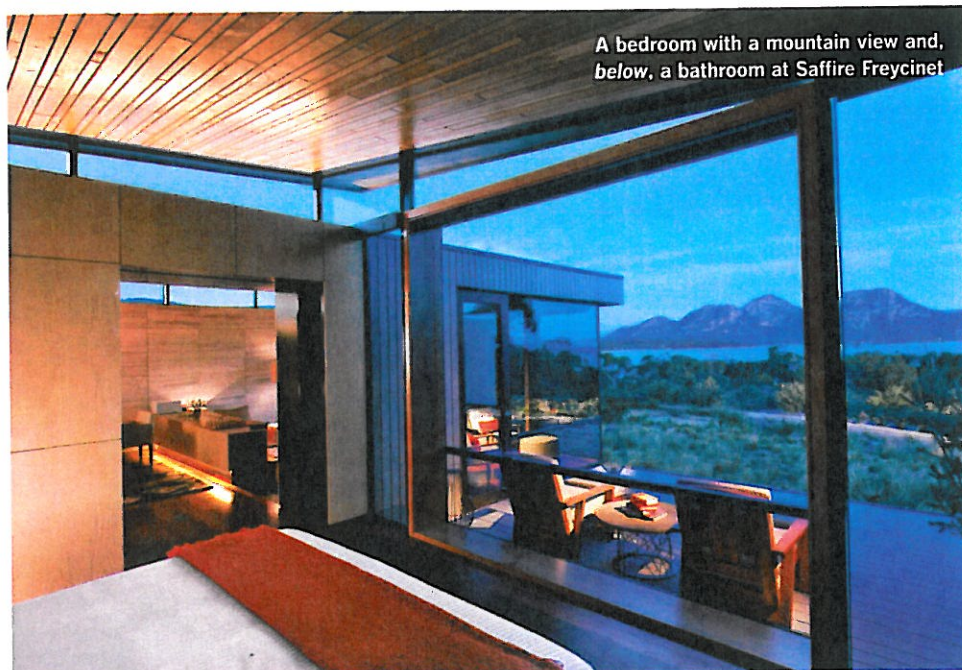
I WOKE UP LONG BEFORE DAWN on my first night at Saffire Freycinet, and was glad of it. From my bed, I could look out the window (not really a window at all, but a vast glass wall) at a sky filled with different and unfamiliar stars. I recognised nothing but the Southern Cross and the twisted silvery ribbon of the Milky Way. It was a magical sight, and at the risk of gilding the lily I went to the iPod and put on Beethoven's Sixth. Then I got back into bed to listen and watch as the slow-rising sun illuminated the five pink peaks of the Hazard Mountains. They emerged from the darkness

A view of Saffire Freycinet, Coles Bay and the Hazard Mountains

one by one, like members of a corps de ballet stepping out of the wings and into the limelight.

Saffire is almost as spectacular as the view it commands. It is a brand-new development of 20 unfeasibly luxurious suites. That iPod, for example, will be loaded with your favourite music before you arrive (the hotel calls in advance to ask about your tastes). In the premium suites, the large fridge is stocked with Champagne, Tasmanian pepperberry vodka, good Australian wines and beers, and a variety of snacks – all complimentary. This is what the management calls, with woeful understatement, a 'free minibar'. At night you ➤

Where to stay



A bedroom with a mountain view and, below, a bathroom at Saffire Freycinet

At night you will find a thermos of hot chocolate in your sitting room and a hot-water bottle tucked into your bed

➤ will find a thermos of hot chocolate in your sitting room, and a hot-water bottle tucked between the cool sheets of your bed.

Behind the suites stands the striking main building, its roof as curvaceous as a wallaby's spine. Here there is another free bar and a library where you can lounge in an Eames chair and read up on Tasmanian history. This is also a good vantage point from which to keep an eye on the corrugated waters of Coles Bay, just in case a humpbacked whale or a pod of dolphins happens by. They are not an uncommon sight here in the mild Tasmanian winter, between June and October.

Sooner or later you are going to want to get out into that landscape. I went with a hotel guide over to the Hazards. It takes about five hours to hike at a leisurely pace around the foot of Mayson, the right-hand peak as you look from the hotel. The first hour or so took us uphill and brought us out on the far side at Wineglass Bay. The name is partly a description of the goblet-shaped inlet, but it also refers to the sea-hunting work that used to take place here: at the time of slaughter, the waters were stained a deep claret with the blood of right whales.

When I got back to the hotel I went to see Hugh Whitehouse, Saffire's charming chef. He is happy to welcome curious guests into his kitchen 'though I might have to say no if it was in the middle of service'. He was making gnocchi and asked me if I wanted

to help. I preferred just to observe a master at work: cold baked potatoes through a ricer, a handful of flour, eggs, seasoning. He boiled up a few gnocchi for me, then tossed them in hot butter and sage. I ate them standing up, while chatting to him and trying not to get in the way. I had the finished dish later that evening (slow-cooked saddleback pork, potato gnocchi, apples, *boudin noir*), but it is the deliciously herby Lilliputian pillows of the afternoon that have stuck in my mind. 🍷



SAFFIRE FREYCINET, MAIN ROAD, COLES BAY, TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA (00 61 3 6256 7888; WWW.SAFFIRE-FREYCINET.COM.AU). DOUBLES FROM A\$1,250 (ABOUT £740)

4 MORE LUXURY TASMANIAN HIDEAWAYS

RED FEATHER INN

The Red Feather Inn is a 19th-century coaching house 13km from Launceston. There are just five big rooms, the best of which is perhaps the Library Suite with its book-filled inner sanctum. The inn's focus is on food. Terrific dinners are served at a shared table, and cookery classes are held regularly. 00 61 3 6393 6506. www.redfeatherinn.com.au Suites from A\$295 (about £175)

THE ISLINGTON

The Islington, right, Hobart's oldest luxury hotel, is a neoclassical house just south of the city centre. What really sets it apart



is the eclectic art collection in the library and the sitting rooms: among the pieces are a Matisse print and a couple of monochrome prints by Brett Whiteley. The conservatory breakfast room is delightful, as is the breakfast. 00 61 3 6220 2123. www.islingtonhotel.com Doubles from about £180

THE LAIR

This stunning architect-built house hangs off the hillside above Great Oyster Bay. The glass frontage lets in light and – when you slide the doors open – sea air. The architect himself, Rick Bzowy, will cook a fabulous meal if you want him to. If not, he'll leave you alone to enjoy the utter seclusion and the blue immensity of the view. 00 61 3 6257 8999. www.thelair.com.au From about £1,300 for two nights (minimum stay), sleeps four

EAGLES NEST

Des Brown, a lifelong dairy farmer, sold his business to build these two marvellously eccentric houses in the lee of Mount Roland. They are hidden away in the folds of the fields where his cattle used to graze. Eagles Nest II is larger, and each of its rooms is brilliantly themed for a different continent. Both houses make the most of the magnificent mountain view. 00 61 3 6491 1511. www.eaglesnestretreat.com.au. Doubles from about £310 (rates are lower for longer stays)