



SAFFIRE SETS THE STAGE

Tasmania's long-awaited jewel, the stunning Saffire Freycinet boutique resort, is shining brightly in this already picturesque region, writes Louise Jarvis.

PHOTOGRAPHY :: STEPHEN HARVEY, TOURISM TASMANIA

Unbeknown to many of us, a drama has been playing out on the east coast of Tasmania. With a plot line filled with political rows, tribunal appeals, delayed developments and granted extensions, it's a wonder the Federal Group's latest \$32-million project was completed at all. However, some seven years later, with a complete design rethink in consultation with the Coles Bay community and a cast that features some of the nation's pre-eminent architects and designers, Australia's newest premium boutique resort, Saffire Freycinet, opened to the public this June.

It is perhaps fitting, then, that my first encounter with the resort is pure theatre. At the end of a long, thin walkway flanked

by water, the front doors open to reveal a dramatic view of The Hazards mountain range burning orange in the afternoon sun. Speechless, I walk along the interior 'jetty' to marvel at the scene, forgetting where I am until I look around to discover the decor is as impressive as the view.

Designed by award-winning Tasmanian architects Morris Nunn + Associates, Saffire was created to fit seamlessly into its setting while capitalising on the views. All the buildings flow over the landscape and the main building is shaped like a giant stingray – the long, thin entrance is its tail, and the building's sides flow down like two curvaceous wings. The roof line mimics the topography of the mountains while the villas resemble lapping waves.

While the buildings' parameters are grandiose, the interiors evoke a sense of intimacy. A palette of greys, olive greens and oranges, coupled with warm timbers, reflects the landscape outside and brings the outdoors inside. Many of the materials have been sourced locally, such as the celery-top pine, Tasmanian oak and Huon pine that feature in the furniture, wall panelling and floors. Despite the clean lines of the luxurious interiors, it is a tactile place. As I walk around the lobby and lounge, I can't keep my hands to myself. The rough sandblasted marble walls and

The Hazards mountain range is the star of a spectacular lightshow, changing from dusky purple at dawn to fiery orange at dusk.



Far left: The interiors of Saffire Freycinet resort are designed to bring the outdoors inside. Left: Explore the lush grounds of this resplendent resort. Below: Be greeted by The Hazards on arrival.

smooth Sydney blue gum railings invite more intimate interaction.

My reverie is broken by the concierge, Andrew, who greets me like an old friend. In fact, by now he probably knows more about me than many of my real friends do. After I made my booking, I was contacted by Trudy from Saffire, who prepared my itinerary by asking me about my memorable holiday experiences and what I wanted from this trip. This is all part of Saffire's highly personalised service.

The resort's 20 villas are just a short stroll from the main building and the path is illuminated by light pillars made of crushed glass set inside perspex tubes.

The three room categories – premium, deluxe and luxury – all feature a king-sized bed, a double shower and, perhaps best of all, a complimentary minibar stocked with top-notch Tasmanian wines and nibblies. The villas echo the design philosophy of the main building and all have magnificent views of The Hazards, the perfect backdrop for enjoying a glass of Springvale chardonnay (thank you, free minibar!) on the deck.

While it's tempting to stay in my villa and marvel at the view, the list of 11 complimentary activities on offer is good enough to entice me out.

I've signed up to explore Freycinet Marine Farm so I can see how they cultivate the Pacific oysters featured on the menu at Saffire Freycinet. The farm is a 15-minute drive from the resort and is one of the only commercial operations allowed within the Ramsar-listed – and perfectly picturesque – Moulting Lagoon.



As we wade into the water, resembling neoprene-covered Teletubbies with our waders on, the guides take us through the life cycle of the oysters. We marvel at the giant 10-year-old specimens, choose our own fresh oysters to sample once we're back on dry land, and try desperately not to fall over after being warned how quickly our waders can fill up with water.

We are quite keen to get back to the sorting shed to see what a very fresh oyster tastes like. I'm not usually into oysters, so it's with some trepidation that I accept the still-moving creature. A debate ensues about whether to chew or just swallow, but I figure the very least I can offer this oyster in return for its life is a full appreciation of its flavour. So I chew. I'm surprised by how briny it is. ▷

All villas have magnificent views of The Hazards, the perfect backdrop for enjoying a glass of chardonnay on the deck.

Right: Try the Pacific oysters at Freycinet Marine Farm, straight from ocean to plate. Far right: Take a hike for views of Wineglass Bay. Below: Palate has a delectable degustation menu.



Guests are encouraged to mingle over canapés and drinks in the lounge, another glorious space filled with design classics.


As I swallow it with a gulp of champagne I finally understand why so many people are fanatical about these slimy creatures.

While the oyster is delicious, it has done little to fill my stomach, so I'm keen to get back to the resort to dine at its much-lauded restaurant, Palate.

Every evening, guests are encouraged to mingle over canapés and drinks in the lounge, another glorious space filled with design classics and bespoke pieces, but it's the bar that grabs our attention. A solid plank of macrocarpa pine props up a large selection of Tasmanian wines, beers and soft drinks, and guests are invited to help themselves. With a glass of the local Stefano Lubiana pinot noir in my hand, I test my wine knowledge with a Le Nez du Vin kit, but when the hunger pains

grow audible I realise it's time for dinner. Located in the main building's right wing, Palate is headed by executive chef Hugh Whitehouse. Most recently from Darley's at Lilianfels in the Blue Mountains, where he gained two chef's hats, Whitehouse's talent for creating degustation menus is put to good use here.

Dishes such as spanner crab, prawn and shaved southern calamari congee; slow-cooked rare breed Wessex saddleback pork with gnocchi, raisins and apple; and braised Clover Hill lamb are served with wines to deliver a delectable gourmet experience. However, it isn't just dinner that impresses. Breakfast features fresh fruit and mini pastries that wouldn't be out of place in a French patisserie. There's also a menu of hot dishes, including French toast with caramelised bananas and walnuts, and smoked salmon eggs Benedict.

With all this divine food, it's lucky that nearby Wineglass Bay provides the perfect motivation to burn off some of the calories. The steep one-hour climb to the viewpoint is hard on the thighs but proves to be worth it when the dramatic bright white sand and deep turquoise water is unveiled. This suitably impressive view reminds me that, regardless of the human melodramas played out in the world, it is the stunning theatre of nature that always steals the show. 

Getting there • Virgin Blue flies to Hobart from Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. To book your flight, visit www.virginblue.com.au or call 13 67 89 (in Aus).