

W A L K

EXPERIENCE



WINEGLASS  
BAY

Tasmania



W A T E R

Wobbly-legged landlubber **Paul Connolly** discovers a different way to see the rocky peninsulas and crystal-clear coves of Tassie's east coast – and finds himself falling for a lady of the sea.



**P**recisely at the time I'm normally shooing kids out of the house for the trek to school, I reflect on my good fortune. It's enough simply to be aboard a handsome 75-foot (23-metre) sailboat, slicing north through the Tasman Sea towards the Freycinet Peninsula. But from my position on the bow pulpit – that outcrop at the front of a boat that can turn a man's thoughts to Kate Winslet in *Titanic* – I see four dolphins spearing through the water below me, weaving like braids through each other's paths.

I'm a long way from being an old sea-dog – though, with my beard and beanie, I'm a touch Ernest Hemingway (with a worrying hint of Papa Smurf) – but it seems to me that the dolphins are doing nothing more than entertaining themselves and the notion pleases me greatly.

I had the same feeling half an hour earlier when our boat, the *Lady Eugenie*, pulled up on the lee of an Uluru-shaped island of granite called Ile des Phoques. As we rocked on a gentle swell, with a pair of sea eagles hovering above, we saw a colony of 100 or so fur seals barking in the shadows. Abruptly, in a fleshy avalanche, dozens of them galumphed into the sea – at which point they transformed into sylphs, turning and arcing more elegantly and playfully than a calligrapher's pen.

So goes a memorable morning on day four of the Tasmanian Walking Company's Wineglass Bay Sail Walk ([taswalkingco.com.au](http://taswalkingco.com.au)). Over six days, we're transported from the vertiginous crag of Cape Hauy in Tasmania's south-east to Freycinet's iconic Wineglass Bay, about 130 kilometres north.

The Sail Walk is, in essence, a comfort-laden sea voyage peppered with optional day walks and activities. There's a moderately rigorous eight-kilometre bush-and-boulder ascent on Maria Island, rock-hopping around the turquoise shores of Schouten Island and a 10-kilometre bush-and-beach stroll on the Freycinet Peninsula.

At the heart of all that is the *Lady Eugenie*, a vessel that bears us, houses us and literally rocks us to sleep at night. It's halfway through day one

On board the *Lady Eugenie* (above); exploring the Painted Cliffs sandstone formation on Maria Island (right)



100-metre-high Candlestick and the relatively skinny 60-metre-high Totem Pole, which Di tells us is an iconic rock-climbing destination.

Later, having returned to Fortescue Bay, we're met by a dinghy operated by James McArthur, *Lady Eugenie's* sole crew member. "Home, James," quips Bert and the accommodating, bear-sized James smiles and guides us towards the *Lady's* sleek hull.

On board we meet our skipper, the laconic Colin Brookes, whose permanently windswept hair hints at his occupation. I'm instantly won over by the boat's teak decks, polished metal and varnished timber handrails. Her beauty comes with substance.

Adjacent to the cockpit, on the deck, there's a comfortable seating area that's sheltered from the elements. Given the views it affords it's here we'll spend most of our sailing time – reading books, napping and holding conversations that will spark up and drift away as we lose ourselves in our thoughts.

Below deck is a saloon with a dining table, a couch, an espresso machine called Dave and a small galley in which James cooks our hot breakfasts and dinners using recipes created by a chef back in Hobart.

when we get our first look at her. Earlier that day, I'd been driven the 100 kilometres from Hobart to serene Fortescue Bay in Tasman National Park with my six fellow guests – a couple in their seventies, one in their sixties and two female friends in their thirties. Leaving our luggage in the van so it could be transferred to the boat, we set off on foot carrying daypacks supplied by the company.

An hour or so into our four-kilometre hike towards Cape Hauy we stop for a tea break on a sloping slab of dolerite rock. As we discover, only one thing gets our loquacious and erudite guide Bert Spinks' juices flowing more than Tassie's native hens and Geelong Football Club: dolerite. "Tasmania is covered with this magnificent igneous rock," he says, the faraway look in his eyes broken only when he spots movement way below. Bert's co-guide, Di Ward, follows his gaze.

"Ah, there's the *Lady*," she announces, pointing to a streamlined ketch slipping into Fortescue Bay.

Excited by her appearance, the group pushes on towards Cape Hauy, rising and falling as we pass through she-oaks and blushes of wildflowers. We ascend, finally, to the cliff edges of the spectacular shark-fin-shaped summit. With the fresh wind in my face I peer over one of the stomach-flipping drops and marvel at two enormous freestanding columns of dolerite thrusting out of the ocean: the





At the stern – previously known to me as “the back” – are two cabins, each with glossy cabinetry, a double bed, shower and toilet. At the bow are two more guest cabins, similar to the others but with bunk beds. The cabins aren’t roomy – this is a yacht, not the Ritz – but they’re surprisingly comfortable.

Once we familiarise ourselves with the boat, we motor to nearby Canoe Bay to seek shelter from the prevailing current. Given the fickleness of the elements, the Sail Walk itinerary is subject to change but there are no dud anchor points around here. Canoe Bay is glassy and formed by a stunning amphitheatre of towering eucalypts that tinkle with life at sunrise. It can’t have changed much since 1642, when Dutch seafarer and merchant Abel Tasman mapped a coastline already familiar to the Aboriginal people of Oyster Bay.

Having settled in and taken a hot shower, I down a beer and nibbles before enjoying the company of my fellow guests over dinner. We’re served chicken thighs marinated in herbs and lemon, spiced rice with almonds and a pumpkin and fetta salad – accompanied, naturally, by a fine selection of Tasmanian wines, such as a Bangor pinot gris. The meal is very good. Is it as tasty as the coconut-braised beef cheek with rice and cucumber salad that James serves on day three? Or the pan-fried salmon with quinoa and cauliflower salad of day four? To ask such a question shows how small a problem this is.

That first night – as with all the others to come – I sleep soundly, a result, I expect, of exercise, sea air, sunshine and, quite possibly, motion sickness medication – a must for wobbly-legged landlubbers like myself.

Over the following days we immerse ourselves in the glorious sights from our aquatic vantage point: dolphins, seals, a humpback whale, pristine beaches and grand dolerite coastlines that fold in and out like a heavy theatre curtain at rest. When we make landfall there are treats to be had, such as the convict ruins on Maria Island and, at Bryans Beach on Freycinet’s south-western shore, a vast litter of bleached shells – remains of an Aboriginal midden showing how the First Australians enjoyed their time here.

Then there’s the jaunt on day two, when James drops us off at Lagoon Bay on the Forestier Peninsula so we can take a stroll over a knob of farmland. It’s the Bangor property, belonging to the Dunbabin family of farmers and winemakers.



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And so, in a well-kept surprise, we’re met by farm manager Matt Dunbabin, who treats us to fresh Pacific oysters – doused in sparkling wine – and a selection of Bangor’s finest drops.

But it’s on the water that the Sail Walk best captures my imagination. As we cross the Mercury Passage one afternoon, the wind rushes in behind us and Colin and James hoist the sails. Colin shuts off the motor and we revel in the relative silence as the boat rushes forward like it’s about to take off. He invites me to take the helm and, once in position, I aim for a distant peak on the Tasmanian mainland.

With the sails full above I feel the boat shift and surge beneath me, responding to my adjustments of the wheel. If only the kids could see me now. I’m sailing. Well, okay, *steering*. But don’t distract me with details; the *Lady* and I are busy.

The writer takes the wheel of the 75-foot luxury ketch



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### **3 stops to drop anchor for**

#### **MARIA ISLAND**

The traditional land of the Puthikwilayti people, Maria Island (named by Abel Tasman after the wife of Anthony van Diemen, governor-general of the Dutch East Indies) lies four kilometres off Tasmania's east coast. It's distinctive for its impressive spine, which includes the 620-metre-high twin peaks of Bishop and Clerk.

Maria Island became a convict settlement in 1825 and a number of buildings from that era remain today. From the 1800s it housed sealers and whalers, vineyards, cement works, a limestone quarry and farm stock. The island became a wildlife sanctuary in the 1970s.

During our visit we spotted wombats, wallabies, kangaroos, Cape Barren geese, wedge-tailed eagles, sea eagles and delightful swift parrots.

#### **SCHOUTEN ISLAND**

Sitting just 1.6 kilometres off the south coast of Freycinet Peninsula, Schouten is a small, rugged, heavily wooded island with the 400-metre Mount Storey at its heart.

*Lady Eugenie* pulls into Hen and Chicken Bay and, after a short dinghy ride, we're deposited onshore. We spend an hour picking through shells, appreciating the urchins and anemones holding tight to watery crevices, and scrambling over the chunks of lichen-covered granite that overhang the gorgeous bay.

#### **FREYCINET PENINSULA**

One of Tourism Tasmania's most striking pin-ups, Freycinet Peninsula is about a three-hour drive from Hobart. However, we sail to its southernmost point, where there's no road access. Over two days we walk through eucalypt forests and across the long stretch of Hazards Beach that runs down Freycinet's western flank.

On our final day we stroll to Wineglass Bay, named not only for its shape but also for the red bloodstains of its whaling days. From the lookout the scope of our Sail Walk journey is laid out before us in watery blue. ●



#### **GETTING THERE**

QantasLink flies to Hobart from Sydney and Melbourne, with additional connections. [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)

**HBA**