



Free Spirit Pods at Bruny Island, main; dawn breaks, above; Cape Bruny Lighthouse, below; Lighthouse Bay, below left; island flavours, inset



ABOVE, LEFT AND BELOW: ADAM GIBSON

ISLE OF PLENTY

Feasting on Bruny's many delights

LINDY ALEXANDER

There's a tiny quoll peering at me. The little creature had gone quite unnoticed as I put my bags down, but now that I'm exploring my accommodation for the evening, the presence of the catlike marsupial gives me a start. Thankfully it's not a real carnivorous interloper, but a miniature figurine perched among the egg-cups, plates and bowls.

The quoll (and later I discover his mates, a possum and bilby on a windowsill) is one of many whimsical touches placed throughout my self-contained accommodation at Free Spirit Pods on Bruny Island. The pristine spot is home to all 12 of Tasmania's endemic bird species, quolls, wallabies and echidnas, and it's this connection with nature that inspired owner Garry Deutsher to up stumps from Melbourne.

"I was exploring Tasmania and Bruny Island and came across this waterfront block and could immediately see its potential," Garry says. "I wanted other people to have an opportunity to share this." The "this" he is referring to is 3ha of peaceful wilderness in the island's north on the edge of Quarantine Station State Reserve and overlooking the calm waters of Quarantine Bay.

I'm staying in Flying Duck, one of two open-plan studio pods on the property, which sits snugly among stringybark and black she-



oaks. Despite being new, there's a sense of history and character in the pods, as Garry and his partner Chris Varney Clark have decorated them with colourful, quirky items gathered during their extensive travels. The Tasmanian oak, blackwood and myrtle timbers used throughout imbue my digs with warmth, as does a roaring freestanding wood-fired pellet heater that has been thoughtfully turned on before I arrived. It's a cosy space that has everything you need: a compact but well-equipped kitchen (complete with small wine fridge), queen bed with plump cushions, plush rugs, a sparkling ensuite with heated floor, and bedside tables stocked with books about wildlife, science and green design.

Light streams through the bi-fold glass doors that open on to a large timber deck, where an outdoor lounge, barbecue and firepit invite guests to soak up the views and enjoy the remote location.

From the deck I can see Davis Beach, where soft swells of water lap at the narrow pebble shore. The pale sky is low with clouds but threads of sunlight break through, illuminating the small boats gently bobbing on the water. Later I crunch across the beach.

Oyster shells are scattered all around, the flaky, chipped outer layers contrasting with their smooth, shiny pearly-white depressions. Guests can borrow an oyster knife from Garry and Chris and head down to harvest the tasty

molluscs with shells that are as big as a fist. There's not a soul in sight as I walk along the beach to the state reserve. Bruny has only 600 or so permanent residents spread across the 50km-long island, and while those numbers increase fivefold in summer, the dirt roads, secluded coves and low-slung holiday shacks sitting eye-to-eye with the water hark back to simple, stripped-back holidays.

The island, particularly in the north, feels rural and undeveloped, but the food scene is thriving. The next morning, I join Bruny Island Safaris for a food and sightseeing tour. Guide

Phil Swift picks me up from a crossroads not far from Free Spirit Pods, having collected the other guests from Hobart. The curving roads take us past lambs tottering in rolling green fields, bush dotted with bracken, spear grass and eucalypts, and wild bays afloat with salmon and oysters farms.

Phil pulls over so we can walk up steep steps to a platform overlooking The Neck, an isthmus that connects north and south Bruny. On the way up we pass a small stone memorial to Truganini, a Bruny local and believed to be the last full blood Tasmanian Aborigine; she died in Hobart in 1876. From the top of the platform looking south, there's a wide arc of golden sand bracketing the Tasman Sea on the left and to my right is the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, the sheltered waters from where our morning tea has been plucked.



MORE TO THE STORY

Tasmanian whisky and gin is going gangbusters, and not far from the ferry terminal is the Bruny Island House of Whisky. The first thing that hits you as you walk into the small stone and timber building is the sweet scent of liquor. The second is the revelation of how many whiskies and gins Tassie produces. There are 110 local single malts and 78 gins to taste and buy. Houndstooth is the only distillery on the island and the first release, matured in a sherry cask, has the rich, fruity notes of a Christmas pudding. A flight of four whiskies starts from \$85; four gins from \$35.

tasmanianhouseofwhisky.com.au

IN THE KNOW

Access to Bruny Island is via the 20-minute vehicular ferry from Kettering, 40 minutes south of Hobart. Bruny Island Safaris runs daily food, sightseeing and lighthouse tours for \$155 a person, picking up from more than 40 locations in and around Hobart. Accommodation at Free Spirit Pods (two night minimum), including continental breakfast, starts from \$290 a night (low season).

sealinkbrunyisland.com.au
brunyislandsafaris.com
freespiritpods.com

Further down the road at Adventure Bay we tuck into plump, briny oysters with a squeeze of lemon while Phil cuts thin slices of sourdough topped with three offerings from the Bruny Island Cheese Company. There's an earthy hard cow's milk cheese, a one-day-old creation marinated in olive oil with fresh garlic, and my favourite, an oozy, pungent soft white mould variety.

After the morning feast we travel inland along narrow winding roads lined with blackwood, sassafras and myrtle. At Cape Bruny Lighthouse, guide Matt Spooner leads us up the slender, cast-iron spiral staircase. The wind is icy, and Matt has to shout over the roaring gale. He tells us the structure was built by 12 convicts, hand-picked from Port Arthur. They began the project in 1836 and were promised their freedom on the lighthouse's completion 18 months later. As the sky darkens over the dolerite cliffs, we make our way to Hotel Bruny for a hearty pub lunch with mugs of spicy mulled wine.

The afternoon is spent sampling more of the island's delicacies, from cider and chocolate to fudge, honey, beer and olives. At each stop I can't resist making a few purchases. At the bottom of my bag are a few sweets from the pantry at Free Spirit Pods. "Garry takes such pleasure in delighting people," Chris had said when I mentioned the jars brimming with marshmallows, licorice allsorts and jelly beans. It seems delighting people is what Bruny Island does best.

Lindy Alexander was a guest of Free Spirit Pods, Tourism Tasmania and Bruny Island Safaris.