

Tasmanian Trek

Walking in Maria Island National Park and more.

MELBOURNE-BASED VIRTUOSO AGENCY owner Melanie Ford recently spent five days exploring Tasmania, mostly on foot. Here, a few of her highlights.

GO NOW While the international borders are shut, it's a perfect time for Australians to learn more about our fabulous country, which is full of magnificent places to visit. And our Aboriginal culture is something we all should learn more about.

RETURN TO TASSIE My first visit to Tasmania was more than 20 years ago – it was one of my first travel work trips. I had forgotten how beautiful Hobart is, especially when you drive over the Tasman Bridge with the harbour below and Mount Wellington in the distance.

HOBART STAY I was looking forward to staying at the Hotel Islington, a beautifully restored mansion overlooking Hobart. I had been told that their service and beds are amazing. That wasn't a lie!

MARKET TIME At Hobart's Salamanca Market, open on Saturdays, everything sold is locally grown or made. I enjoyed tasting all the gins, vodkas, and whiskies. The local apples looked unappetising but tasted delicious – and the fudge was addictive.

ART IMMERSION Even getting to MONA (Museum of Old and New Art) was fabulous – we arrived on their high-speed catamaran, seated in the Posh Pit private lounge, sipping bubbles and eating canapés. The museum itself is eclectic – I'm dying to go back. I loved the cabernet sauvignon at their on-site Moorilla Estate Winery, and dinner at their Faro Bar & Restaurant, with the totally bizarre band and the light exhibitions that felt like a scene from Willy Wonka.

WILD ISLAND All I knew about Maria Island was what I had seen in pictures: wombats and white beaches. I am not known as an avid walker but was keen to find out why people "walk" on their holidays. Maria



Clockwise from top: Maria Island, en route to MONA, and Melanie Ford (second from right) and friends.



Island National Park is approximately 90 minutes from Hobart. After a transfer to Triabunna, a private boat takes you to the starting point of the four-day trek.

EASY ADVENTURE Our trip was portered, so we just carried our day packs; our duffle bags were transferred to each overnight stop, of which two were glamping camps (with hot showers). We spent the final night in a renovated original house. Walking was at your own pace, on paths or beaches, with a few uphill.

ANIMAL KINGDOM The wildlife-spotting was magnificent: plenty of kangaroos, wombats, birds, and a friendly snake. The resident huntsman spider that lived in a tent had to be escorted out at bedtime.

BLUE HEAVEN The ocean looked like the Maldives. The greens and blues stood out

against the white sand. (The temperature, however, was definitely different.)

BRISK SWIMS The brave ones among us swam while the rest of us drank wine and listened to the swimmers scream as they entered the water.

PACKING LIST Take excellent walking boots that have been worn before and are worn in; your feet will thank you for it. Bring layers: Our days started with thermals and finished with T-shirts and shorts. You'll also need proper walking socks, a moderate level of fitness (think walking your neighbourhood with your boots on), and a sense of adventure.

THE VERDICT Even though I'm not a walker, I loved this trip and would do another walk (with better boots). You get a sense of winning when you finish – or of relief. **VI**