

Exploring Launceston

*A hometown
perspective on
Tassie's northern city*

Story and photography
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Launceston Tasmania

I love Launceston (or, as the locals call it, “Lonnie”). Launceston is my hometown - a city of 71,000 people located in the northeast of Tasmania. It is known for its rich history and heritage and proximity to the beautiful wine-growing region of the Tamar Valley and the stunning Launceston Cataract Gorge. When you arrive in Launceston, whether by air or road, you will be struck by the way it nestles into the Tamar Valley – houses cling to the hillside in the older area of Trevallyn and sprawl across the newer suburbs of Kings Meadows and Newstead. But, if there’s low-lying fog, you will see only those houses that peak from the tops of the hills. As those who have travelled the roads of Tasmania will know, a trip to Tasmania is not something to be rushed – I often tell visitors that sometimes they will need to make multiple trips to see the whole of the Apple Isle! So, if you have found yourself in Launceston, I am here to tell you there is so much to see and do. Let’s start with one of my favourites.

The Cataract Gorge

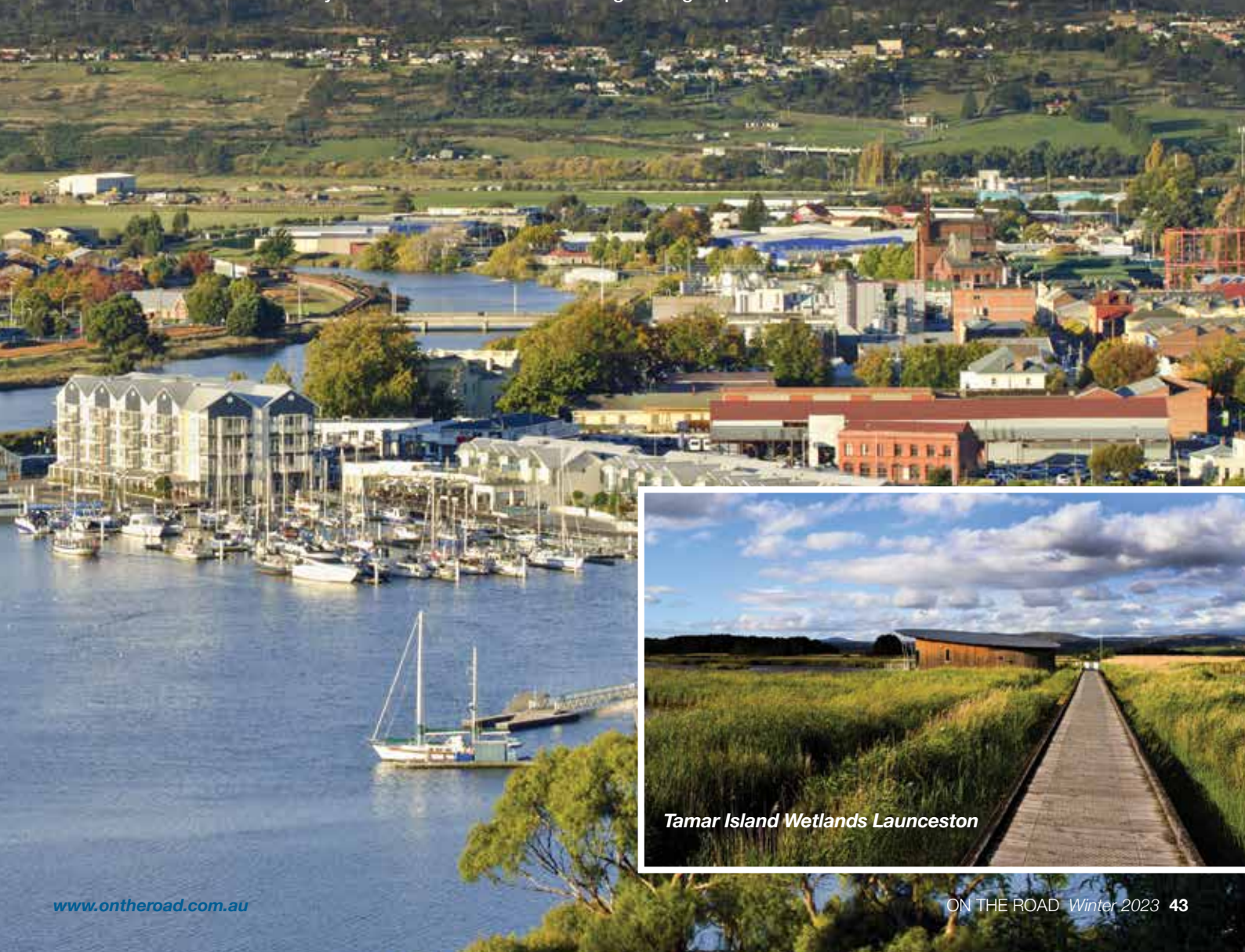
Within the city limits sits a truly magnificent natural gorge with a suspension bridge and large swimming (yes, swimming!) pools, both natural and constructed. The Cataract Gorge was initially used to generate hydroelectricity for the Launceston area until around 1934 when it could no longer supply the region. When you enter the Cliff Grounds, you would swear you have just stepped into a Victorian garden. Resident peacocks fan their magnificent tails, flowering hydrangeas, ferns, and exotic plants flourish, wallabies graze at dusk, and magnificent rotundas are restored from a long-gone era. A trip to the Cataract Gorge is only complete with a visit to the tea rooms for scones and tea or ice cream and a walk across the swaying suspension bridge built in 1904. If walking is unavailable to you or you prefer dizzying heights, you can jump on the chairlift and make your way across to the other side. The chairlift is the world’s longest single-span chair-

lift. A new pedestrian inclinator (or funicular) has been installed recently to cater to those who do not wish to ascend on foot. The inclinator is situated at the main entrance and will take you to the swimming pool and First Basin.

The First Basin is rumoured to be incredibly deep in the middle – as a child; I was told no one had ever touched the bottom! The cliffs of the Gorge can be traversed on foot – the paths are easy to access, and it is possible to walk from Launceston City centre to the top of the Gorge in around 15 minutes. The Cataract Gorge is where families go in Summer to cool off, the site of music festivals and concerts, and a quiet picnic spot for a romantic interlude. The Gorge is free to enter; however, there is a charge to use the chairlift.

Art Gallery and Museums

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery at Inveresk is a world-class museum set on the banks of the Tamar River.



Tamar Island Wetlands Launceston

DESTINATION Spotlight



Chairlift Cataract Gorge



Tasmanian Devil Tasmania Zoo



Wallaby at Cataract Gorge

The museum is the largest museum in Australia, not situated in a capital city. The modern museum is free to enter, and exhibitions change regularly. While there, you can enjoy a show and learn all about the planets at the Launceston Planetarium; you need to book and pay for sessions.

The Launceston Design Centre is well worth a visit. Situated right next to City Park, you can visit the monkeys and then go and browse some of Tasmania's finest arts. The Design Centre has been around since the mid-'70s. It is a not-for-profit centre that hosts the work of Tasmanian woodworkers, ceramicists, and jewellers. All work is available for purchase.

Markets

Just a short drive out of Launceston, and not far past the Launceston Airport, is the historic town of Evandale. The Evandale Market is held every Sunday from 8:00 am to 1:30 pm and has stalls full of bric-a-brac, fresh produce, and antiques. This lovely market is the perfect outing for those who enjoy a leisurely fossick. There are pony rides and fun activities for the kids. The Lilydale Village Market is held once a month on a Sunday from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm (you can find it on Facebook) and is a 25-minute drive out of Launceston. This market is set up in the town hall with stalls featuring local arts and crafts, fresh produce, and live music. Locals and visitors come to sit and listen to the local musicians while enjoying a sausage sizzle

from the Lions Club or venture further afield to experience the local cafes and eateries.

Well worth a visit

Launceston City Parks Launceston is not only a city of beautiful heritage buildings but also grand parks worth paying a visit to while you are there. Right in the city centre is the famous "Monkey Park" as I knew it when I was a child. Monkey Around The City Park in Launceston was established in the 1820s by the Launceston Horticultural Society and handed over to the Launceston City Council in 1863. The park has some beautiful established trees and an enclosure of around 20 Japanese Macaque monkeys. How did monkeys come to be in Launceston? Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, deer, brown bears, wallabies, and a thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) called City Park home. When I was growing up, the park housed Rhesus monkeys that were kept in tiny, cramped cages. The last Rhesus monkeys died in 1979, and Launceston's sister city, Ikeda, Japan, gifted the city with ten macaques. In turn, Launceston gave Ikeda ten wallabies. As a result, the enclosure is much more humane and spacious, and the monkey population has doubled. A square fit for a prince, Prince's Square is another lovely park in the city centre. The park is smaller than City Park and boasts some beautiful trees planted by royalty and established gardens. This park was formally the site of military drills, political meetings,

and even hangings! Modern play equipment Riverbend Park is an all-abilities park created in a former industrial precinct. This fun, modern park is a great place to visit with the kids, the grandkids, or the kids at heart. The park boasts two of Australia's largest pieces of play equipment – the Skywalk and confluence net.

Tasmanian Animals While in Tasmania

Seeing a Tasmanian Devil up close and personal is on most visitors' list of things to see. The Tasmanian Devil has been through a rough patch over the past few years with a terrible facial tumour disease striking down massive numbers Tasmania-wide. Luckily the current breeding program has seen a colony of healthy Devils released onto Maria Island on the East Coast and the Mt William National Park in the remote northeast of Tasmania. So, the likelihood of seeing one in the wild is slim as they are nocturnal and, despite their demeanour, somewhat shy. Fortunately, there are places you can view these growly creatures.

The Tasmania Zoo in Launceston is one. The Tasmania Zoo has become a tourist drawcard in the Launceston region, with a pride of lions being added to the already exotic selection of animals on display. The zoo is accredited by the Zoo and Aquarium Association of Australasia and plays a big part in animal conservation and welfare. Watch out for locals! If you are not planning a visit to the Zoo, keep your



First Basin Cataract Gorge



Tamar Valley Wine country



Suspension bridge Cataract Gorge

eyes peeled for locals, such as echidnas and wallabies, when out and about. The nocturnal animals start moving around at dusk, so it is vital to slow down when driving on our country roads to avoid adding to the road deaths. Always pack rubbish and scraps away when camping because possums will get into anything and make an awful mess, not to mention a dreadful noise!

The Tamar Valley

The Tamar Valley was a rich hunting ground for this region’s traditional Stoney Creek people. Artefacts, ochre sources, and middens have been discovered on the banks of the Tamar River as evidence of this fact. This region was home to the Therrernotepanner, Leterrermairrener, and Pannihier clans. The clans lived here for many thousand generations, above the floodplains where the three rivers – Kurnermurlukeker (Tamar River), Pleepertommel-er (South Esk River), and Lakekeller (North Esk River) meet.

Wine In recent times : Tasmania has become one of the world’s best cool-climate wine producers. As a result, a trip to the Tamar Valley wine region is a must for wine lovers and purveyors of fine foods alike. Tours of the region take in over 30 wineries, or you can meander through the area yourself, stopping where you please.

Bird Watching While in the Tamar Valley : You can stop for a spot of bird watching at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre

– a unique estuarine wetlands ecosystem on the outskirts of Launceston. Lengthy boardwalks and an interpretation centre make this place an exciting and picturesque interlude. There are over 60 species of bird identified in the area, with purpose-built hides available for the keen photographer or observer. I am very much a bird fancier and always visit this wetland when in Launceston.

Beer : Those familiar with Tasmania who know their beer will know that there is a friendly rivalry between the North and South. In the South is Cascade country, and in the North is Boags. The James Boag brewery is situated in Launceston. The smell of hops was familiar to me growing up in this city. So, if beer is your thing, a brewery tour may whet your appetite for a cold brew.

Camping around Launceston : Camping grounds are plentiful in Tasmania, with many towns providing free places for vans to stop overnight while driving around the island. There are a few delightful camping spots not far from Launceston: Beauty Point Tourist Park is close to the Tamar River in the lovely town of Beauty Point. The park has powered and unpowered caravans, camping sites, self-contained cottages, and glamping options. Motor homes are welcome with facilities for sewage (wastewater).

Myrtle Park Recreation Ground is on the Tasman Highway, about 30 kilometres from Launceston in the other direction. It is a campground of outstanding beauty with

excellent (unpowered) facilities for caravans and tents. Situated on St Patrick’s River banks, it is a pretty location with a peaceful outlook. Popular amongst travellers and locals, this park has been operating for many decades. My Dad is now 82 and used to camp there as a child. This park is one of my favourites.

Launceston Holiday Park is situated in Legana (not far from the city of Launceston) and has beautiful views of the Tamar River. The park has accommodation types to suit all budgets and camping needs. Powered and unpowered sites, cabins, and deluxe spa accommodations make this park a lovely place to rest while exploring the region.

Liffey Falls Campground is set in the beautiful dense forest of the Meander Valley at the base of the Great Western Tiers. The camping ground has facilities to suit caravans, tents, and motor homes with basic facilities. The campground is free to camp but has a strictly no-pets policy. A lovely place to stop if you plan hiking or to explore the area. If all these activities are not enough to fill in your time in this magic part of the world, you can spread your wings and head out further for day trips and tours of the surrounding countryside. Launceston may be small, but it has a big heart! From the wineries to the museums, the parks and reserves, and everything in between, Launceston delivers something for everyone. I’m sure you will love “Lonnie” as much as I do.

