



The view to The Hazards; a guest room; the reception area.



A FINE BLEND

On the pristine east coast, a luxury lodge is at one with its surrounds, writes **Jim Darby**.

THE PLACE

Entrances matter. Arrive at Saffire (more accurately be guided – you will be welcomed before you can wander far from the car) and there, beyond a wall of glass, are the Hazards, the dinosaur's tail of a mountain range in the distance across the water. It's a view that rarely leaves you during your stay and it's never the same; the sea might be moving this way or that and the pink-hued granite rock of the mountains is a subtle light show depending on the angle of the sun or moon and the cloud cover. The granite has feldspar in it and it's the oxidation of the iron in this that gives the colour. Who said travel was not an education?

THE LOCATION

The Freycinet Peninsula on Tasmania's east coast has the state's most-visited national park, with good reason. There's a sublime mix of beaches and bush; of rough seas and sheltered bays; of mountain peaks and trails to climb them. Saffire blends into this, with buildings that look as though they've grown from the low coastal bush. Access is easy from Hobart or Launceston (about two hours' drive from either airport). There's also a helicopter shuttle and Saffire has a dedicated lounge at Hobart Airport.

THE SPACE

Back to the entrance, for it really is

something, taking you through the lounge and as though on a jetty, to a viewing point up close to the windows and that landscape. Here you're under the highest part of the roof of the main building, shaped from the outside like a stingray. Below is the restaurant and another lounge. Before you know it you'll find yourself with a glass of Tasmanian sparkling wine in your hand.

THE ROOM

We're in a Signature Suite, with a private courtyard at the entrance and a split-level inside to capture that Hazards-and-water view. The bathroom is vast, with a shower for two and a separate bath area with that view. A deck runs off the main room and there's a lounge area below the king bed. There are tea and coffee-making facilities, but use the phone and coffee will arrive. The mini-bar is stocked with wine and spirits of your choice and it's effectively bottomless as these are included. There are two other grades of accommodation, the slightly smaller Luxury Suites and much larger Private Pavilions with plunge pools.

THE FOOD

The food is exceptional – fine dining without the fuss. Tasmanian-born executive chef Paddy Prenter leads a team of 12 chefs. The menu changes daily, accounting for the seasons and the available produce. For the

kitchen, there's a big difference between high-end dining at a restaurant and at a luxury lodge, with more emphasis at the latter on catering to individual preferences. "We don't say 'no' here and that's a challenge and it keeps the chefs on their toes, but that's why it's such a great place for chefs to work. It forces you to be creative," he says.

He buys local wherever possible. There's pork from Long Name Farm, oysters and mussels from Freycinet Marine Farm and mushrooms from the Good Four Miles up the coast at Four Mile Creek. He'll go beyond to satisfy demand though: spanner crab from Fraser Island and prawns from Mooloolaba for example. Dinner is a la carte, a degustation menu or a combination if you wish. Lunch can be lighter. Burrata with onion and tomato jam, a seafood mezza and John Dory for main. Breakfast is as you like it, but eggs, smoked ocean trout and crispy capers is hard to beat. The wine list shines with Tassie drops and there's an extensive list of "off-package" wines available to buy.

STEPPING OUT

The rooms and shared areas are so good, motivation isn't high to step out at all; hence the only slight sigh of disappointment when the weather caused the cancellation of our Wineglass Bay cruise. Resort activities (most included) range from the cruises to an outing with the beekeeper; donning waders

and hitting the shallows for oysters; kayaking and bird watching; guided walks to see Wineglass and other bays; and Connection to Country which reveals the local Indigenous past. There's also a spa for beauty and health treatments. Guests can visit Tasmanian devils at an enclosure on the grounds where some are kept as part of a research program into their wellbeing.

THE VERDICT

Is casual luxury a thing? The staff, the service, the rooms, food and wine are all delivered with such understated quality and in such a sophisticated yet relaxed way, you can't help but feel rejuvenated. And did I mention the landscape and view?

ESSENTIALS

Suites from \$2500 a night, all inclusive (meals, drinks, most activities). Saffire Freycinet, 2352 Coles Bay Road, Coles Bay, Tasmania. (03) 6256 7888. See saffire-freycinet.com.au

HIGHLIGHT

There are so many, but the food, wine and service are extraordinary.

LOWLIGHT

Leaving.

Jim Darby was a guest of Saffire.