



Rob Barker, of Wild Hives Honey, gives tips on the art of apiarist, main; Saffire Freycinet, left and right; Indigenous guide Mick Quilliam, below

CHRIS KIDD, GEORGE APOSTOLIS



THE SWEET LIFE

Look and learn at a top Tasmanian lodge

CHRISTINE McCABE

I just can't get the hang of my apiarist's kit, which is a complicated onesie with NASA-like headgear and various zippers going in all directions. Saffire Freycinet's resident beekeeper, Rob Barker, comes to my rescue as I attempt to shove my legs into the sleeves and struggle to secure the all-important protective face mesh. Everyone in our little honey-loving group of guests is waiting for me to get my sartorial self together so we can set off to view the luxury lodge's beehives, tucked into bushland on the Freycinet Peninsula on Tasmania's east coast.

Rob has whetted our appetites with a fascinating insight into the incredible life of honey bees. The doe-eyed and doomed drones, the guards, the undertaker bees, epic Queen wars. Game of Thrones has nothing on the life of a hive. After cranking up a smoker to subdue the industrious insects, although these are Ligurian bees from SA's Kangaroo Island and naturally docile, Rob lifts a couple of lids to reveal the inner workings of miraculous honey-producing machines. Like Winnie-the-Pooh, I'm tempted to stick my paw straight in and extract a mess of "hunny", but Rob has a much better idea. Beneath a picnic shelter a short stroll away, Saffire crew members have laid out a posh honey tasting.

Tassie bubbles are popped and, with Pfund Scale in hand (used by beekeepers to describe the colour and various flavours of honey), we compare sticky treasures.

There's leatherwood honey from the West Coast, dark Freycinet honey redolent with rare nectars, and honeycomb straight from the hive served with island cheese. All the while, mysterious guttural sounds boom up from the bush. Pooh Bear or something more devilish? The latter, as it turns out. We are seated next to Saffire's free-range Tasmanian devil enclosure and meeting these creatures is another of the lodge's complimentary "Signature Experiences", along with kayaking, walks, and visits to a nearby oyster farm.

My first port of call after check-in is the Saffire Lounge, with panoramic views through a soaring curved wall of glass across Great Oyster Bay to the jagged Hazard mountains. The resort's new head chef, Paddy Prenter, has set up a little kitchen at the bar and is giving a masterclass in prawn toast; the secret is a brioche base and freshly grated Tasmanian wasabi. His upscale take on a dim sum classic sets the mood for two solid days of eating. In Silca, one of 20 guest suites fanning out below the main lodge, I'm greeted with macarons, cookies and a gratis minibar stocked with Tasmanian wine and bubbles and lots of snacks. Each suite is very private,



MORE TO THE STORY

The drive from Hobart airport takes less than three hours and is a delightful element of the lodge experience as the road snakes through farmland and forest, dipping down to the sea. On the return journey, allow a couple of extra hours for sightseeing. There are several popular cellar doors along the way, and the historic town of Richmond is just 10 minutes off the main road (then another 20 minutes to the airport). In Richmond, Pooley Wines makes excellent pinot noir; the cellar door is located in the coach-house of a convict-estate abode. And if you're a collector, don't miss Warwick Oakman Antiques.

pooleywines.com.au
warwickoakman.com



entered via a courtyard garden, Japanese in style with raked gravel. There are gorgeous views to the Hazards from the bed, the comfy sofa in the living room, the bathtub and the terrace.

Dinner is a six-course degustation. Chef Paddy keeps it local with a vegetable garden just outside the lounge (popular with wallabies, wombats and possums as well as the kitchen team). Sourced directly from the Bay are sea urchin, abalone and southern rock lobster. And there are wild beach and heath herbs to be foraged, including sea parsley, samphire, white tea-tree or Kunzea. And did I mention fat Tasmanian oysters? A platter or two seems to be in constant circulation.

Next morning, I wake to cloud-shrouded Hazards. Shroud is a rather sombre word, perhaps cosseted is better, as though a soft duvet had been thrown over the rugged pink granite peaks. The misty bay is gun-metal grey and I'm imagining all those delicious sea urchins

and squid waiting to leap on to the head chef's skillet.

Walking to breakfast through whispering grasses, I'm greeted by a little wallaby and later, seated at the great curved window in the dining room, tucking into Tasmanian field mushrooms, watch a kookaburra attempting to pierce something from a small tree hollow, while rain clouds dance about the Hazards like Macbeth's witches. (Rain is not as common as you might think; this is generally one of the sunniest spots in Tasmania.)

The friendly Saffire team is faultless at every turn, rustling up the perfect coffee, seeking out the best wine, helping guests to explore on land and sea. And not to be missed is the Connection with Country walk led by Indigenous guide and artist Mick Quilliam. He arrives for our outing with a backpack stuffed full of intriguing treasures, such as shells, stone tools and string fashioned from kangaroo tendons. He's lived in the region for

decades and holidayed here as a child when a caravan park stood on the Saffire site. He knows every little cove and bay, every secretive quoll's lair.

On our gentle stroll through coastal bush and heath, we stop often to examine food and medicinal plants. There's fragrant, slow-growing river mint; lomandra, the seeds pouched into flour; and honey myrtle, aka the Vicks tree. We find edible bracken shoots and delicious coastal celery growing in the dunes. On the beach, Mick demonstrates how to mix ochre and points out detritus on the shoreline. "My grandmother taught me that the high tide mark was like a menu, showing what lay just offshore," Mick says. We spy winkles, abalone and black lip mussel shells and even an angasi oyster. Mick says the women were expert divers.

On the beach sand, he sketches the outline of stone, timber and clay houses built by his ancestors until they were razed by settlers. Back at base there's a chance to learn more by perusing the contents of the upstairs library from a comfy leather chair. And to reflect that nothing has been overlooked in this superlative lodge, from Magic Pudding-like oyster platters to a raft of immersive experiences that serve to illuminate that bewitching view.

Christine McCabe was a guest of Saffire Freycinet.

IN THE KNOW

From \$2300 a suite a night, including meals, wine and extras. Saffire Freycinet was awarded gold in the five-star accommodation category of the recent Qantas Australian Tourism Awards and is a member of Luxury Lodges of Australia.

saffire-freycinet.com.au
luxurylodgesofaustralia.com.au