

STEP BACK IN TIME

A treasure trove for history-loving visitors, Hobart punches well above its weight when it comes to showcasing its colourful colonial past.

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With his dashing good looks and bad-boy image, bushranger Matthew Brady was infamous in 1820s Hobart, known to set many a female heart fluttering. So when he was eventually apprehended by bushranger hunter John Batman and sentenced to death by hanging, the women of the colony were not well pleased. On 4 May, 1826, the date of his execution at Hobart Town's gaol, crowds of angry women thronged the streets to mourn his passing.

"It's said the crying and wailing went on for a fortnight," Lucy Palmer, official Storyteller with Hobart's MACq 01 Hotel tells me. As a Storyteller, her role is to take people on journeys into the past, bringing Old Hobart to life, with its

Clockwise from this page, top left: Take a horse-drawn carriage tour around town, including picturesque Battery Point, birthplace of Errol Flynn; Jackman & McRoss sells some of the most divine baked good in town; Port Arthur is a moving but worthwhile day trip from Hobart. Established in 1837, the Theatre Royal is the oldest continuously operating theatre in Australia.

rich array of colourful characters, heroes and villains. For those interested in history, it seems like a pretty cool job.

LIVING HISTORY

As the second Australian convict settlement to be established, Hobart Town saw around 70,000 convicts transported from England to its shores from 1803 over the next 50 years. I was keen to visit historic Battery Point, a short walk south and up the hill from the city centre, where streets of heritage-listed workers' cottages, stately homes and colonial stone churches were built. It is still a charming community, in particular, Arthur Circus, a circular avenue of pretty cottages that originally housed working-class families whose livelihood depended on the docks. Today these sought-after homes encircling the park are worth well in excess of \$1 million.

My wanderings brought me to Jackman & McRoss bakery, popular with the good folk of Hobart since 1998 for their tantalising baked goods. The place was packed with people nursing mugs of hot chocolate and plates of cake, taking refuge from the chilly afternoon. I couldn't resist a stick of sourdough and a fat cookie bursting with chunks of chocolate,

regretfully passing on sugar-dusted shortbread, chocolate & hazelnut slab and the intriguing duck, cranberry and walnut sausage rolls.

Back down in the city centre, I strolled through picturesque St David Park, winter-pretty with its bare trees and leaves strewn across the ground. Today, the park is a popular spot for picnics, poetry readings and musical performances but it boasts a darker past. "Many Hobartians don't know it but underneath the park are buried around 800 of their ancestors," Lucy tells me. She explained that from 1804 to 1872, the public garden was the site of Tasmania's first cemetery and many of the graves still lie under the landscaped grounds. On one side of the park is a memorial wall displaying a number of headstones that were saved when the park was built. It's moving to note the very short lives of many of those early settlers and their children, cut short due to unsanitary living conditions and illness.

Take a short walk downhill from the park to Salamanca Place, a beautiful cobblestone square with rows of sandstone buildings. Former warehouses are now restaurants, galleries, shops and cafés. It's a lovely place to shop and wander, and every Saturday, an artisans' and producers' market is held. Another 10 minutes'

walking will bring you to the Georgian Theatre Royal – the oldest continually operating theatre in the country. It opened in 1837, amid the brothels, public houses and humble workers' cottages of Old Hobart Town, to provide entertainment for the burgeoning colony. Back then, it hosted cockfights and boxing ... religious meetings. Today, you can take in a show or join a guided tour to learn more about the theatre's history and those who've trodden its boards, including luminaries like Laurence Olivier, Noel Coward and Vivien Leigh.

If you're ready for a break, put your feet up at the Hope & Anchor Tavern, which declares itself Australia's oldest pub. Dating from 1807, the tavern boasts freshly sourced Tasmanian produce and local beer, plus an impressive collection of antiques, weaponry and stuffed animal heads. A hot buttered rum contemplating the open fire was just the thing after a long day traversing the city.

CULINARY INSTITUTION

That night, Battery Point beckoned again for dinner at Da Angelo, the Italian restaurant that's become a Hobart institution. Housed in an 1860 sandstone building, it was formerly a private home, then a butcher, before

Angelo founded his eponymous restaurant featuring food from Italy's southern regions in 1994. I savoured every mouthful of my spinach gnocchi basilicata (basil, garlic, pine nuts, cream and parmesan) and was regretful I had no room for dessert after I saw my friend's tempting tiramisu – voted by tourists as the best in Hobart.

A SOBERING PAST

Ninety minutes south of Hobart lies Port Arthur. After a penal settlement was established there in 1832, many of Britain's worst criminals were sent to this remote and lonely spot on the Tasman Peninsula. It's all too easy to imagine how weary new arrivals from England might have felt arriving at this unwelcoming land, with its craggy coastline and strange flora and fauna.

Port Arthur's surrounding seas and inhospitable conditions meant escape was virtually impossible. It did not stop desperate prisoners trying, however – with one enterprising convict making his escape wearing a kangaroo skin on his back. When the hungry guards fired on him, thinking they'd cook up some nice 'roo for dinner, his plan backfired and he was returned to his gaol cell.

Nine-year-old James Lynch was amongst the youngest sent to the colonies as punishment for his 'crime'. Convicted of stealing three boxes of toys in 1843, he told the court he was sent thieving by a man who'd give him a few pence for his thieving, but an unsympathetic judge sentenced him to seven years in the colonies nonetheless.

It's sobering to wander this vast heritage-listed site and explore buildings including the penitentiary, prison cells, convict church, hospital and officers' quarters.

More than 1,000 people died at Port Arthur during its 47-year history as a penal settlement, and some believe that the souls of the departed have never left. The after-dark Port Arthur Ghost Tours escort you through the atmospheric buildings and ruins as you listen to tales of unexplained events and 'appearances' of those deceased said to still haunt this eerie site. discovertasmania.com.au

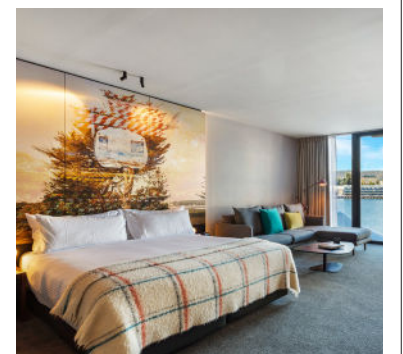
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The historic Don River Railway, gold panning at Penny Royal and the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) are three more reasons to put Tasmania on your bucket list. mindfood.com/family-friendly-australia

WHERE TO STAY



Steeped in Hobart's history, the Henry Jones Art Hotel is housed within the original IXL Jam Factory and a row of renovated 1820s waterfront warehouses. The hotel's Acting Art Curator, Greg Ball says the creation of the hotel within the 200-year-old buildings was so meticulously carried out that only four of the original wooden beams had to be replaced. "When it's very hot, guests often report a 'sweet' scent in their rooms. It's jam that became soaked into the original walls during the days of the factory," says Ball. This luxury hotel also functions as a de facto 'art gallery' displaying works for sale by local artists. Ideal for lovers of both history and art. thehenryjones.com



The 5-star MACq 01 Hotel also boasts some serious history credentials. It's gone from a wharf market, to a shipping shed, to being Australia's first 'storytelling hotel'. Each of the 114 guest rooms is named after an illustrious or infamous figure from Tasmania's past including convicts, crooks and captains of industry. They're grouped into five different categories, also determining each room's décor: Colourful & Quirky; Grounded Yet Exceptional; Fighting Believers; Curious & Creative; and Hearty & Resilient. For those keen to learn more about Hobart's past, the Storytellers offer fascinating tours. macq01.com.au