



# Top of the island

Tasmania's second largest settlement is not quite the town time forgot, more like the town that time has given a second chance to. **Bev Malzard** reports.

**L**aunceston is the gateway town to the north west of Tasmania and has seen traffic for more than two centuries carry the result of a thriving logging industry and tonnes of silver from local mines shipped to the mainland and all parts of the world.

Those cash cows were behind the spurt of magnificent and elegant Georgian buildings lining the streets of Launceston and beyond. And grand manors were the stronghold and centrepiece of rural holdings.

When the fortunes of silver waned there was little to sustain Launceston except for subsistence farming and the logging trade.

From the 1950s through to the beginning of the new millennium

Launceston mooched along to the beat of a slow and forgettable drum – and unlike the cities on the mainland, it kept its head down when the developers and the flash young architects were making their mark on other parts of Australia as the second half of the 20th century hastened change.

While heritage buildings were being ripped from their sandstone bases and demolished in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne (less so) to make way for modern, high rise and in particular rather bad architecture, Launceston quite frankly couldn't afford to set a demolish plan in motion, so the elegant Georgian institutions and homes either shut up shop or continued on their dogged way to stay standing.

Now these beautiful buildings are the pride of Tassie, and Launceston is welcoming visitors to view the grand buildings and learn the history behind them and enjoy the elegance.

The pride in the city is evident as parks and gardens are spruce and abundant; food and wine are proudly displayed – and imbibed; and the Tamar River is at the heart of things as it stretches 58km. It is from the river that the most breathtaking beauty of the valley is on show.

## Walk the walk

Get the best of what architecture is on show in Launceston by walking the streets – look up, down and sideways. Collect a heritage walks map from the Visitor Centre and follow one of the various (or all of them) trails.

Begin with a stroll through City Park to get a taste of the green city. There's a rather lovely greenhouse in the middle



The old buildings are Launceston's star attraction.



Basin Pool at the Cataract Gorge.



PHOTO: BEV MALZARD

The Umbrella Shop.



Town Clock.

of the park and surprisingly a group of Japanese Macaque monkeys in an enclosure in the park.

Walk through Princes Square, where in the 19th century there was a hot air balloon attempt and two bushranger villains were hung here, and the pretty fountain was purchased from the Paris Exhibition of 1858.

Along George Street there is a fine terrace of Victorian shops; the huge Johnstone and Wilmots store (1842) and the solid complex of Public Building fronting Cameron, St John and Paterson Streets.

A cutie in George Street is The Umbrella Shop. The shop is full of umbrellas of all sorts and displays vintage brollies that are a delight. The cosy little shop is run by volunteers and the women here are great to have a natter to.

Next stop is QVMAG Museum at Inveresk. I could have stayed there

all day – it's free entry and features hands-on education for kids (yeah, sure) and us grown-ups. You pull, crank, touch and switch your way around the factory for fun.

Another area here is quite melancholy – it's the preserved railway workshops, where the men who worked there just downed tools and walked out – it is in a state of stasis and a little ghostlike.

And there's the splendid QVMAG Art Gallery Royal Park, home to changing art and photography exhibitions. Vast gallery rooms present local works and imported exhibitions.

You can take an escorted Heritage Walk too, wherein a local will give you the low down on scandals, gossip, and tales of rogues and rascals who left their mark on historic Launceston.

### Vino veritas

Well, the truth is that there are some

of the country's most elegant wineries in this part of the island. We head for Joseph Chromy Winery for lunch.

Josef Chromy OAM has been instrumental to the Tasmanian food and wine industry having owned and developed some of Tasmania's leading wineries including Rochecombe (now Bay of Fires), Jansz, Heemskerck and Tamar Ridge. Joe fled his war-torn Czech village in 1950 as a penniless 19-year-old after 11 years of Nazi and Soviet occupation. He escaped across borders guarded by minefields, dogs and soldiers, suffering five months of privation before immigrating to Australia. Over the next 40 years he used his skills as a Master Butcher and Smallgoods Maker to build his business, Blue Ribbon Meat Products. In 1993 Blue Ribbon was floated on the Australian Stock Exchange, and Josef used the money to invest in Tasmania's fledgling wine industry.



The pretty back garden of Franklin House.

PHOTO: BEV MALZARD

At 76 he is still active in the industry. We had a splendid lunch here with a beautiful view over the vineyards and lake. A hard place to tear yourself away from...

Next we walked around the beginning of Australia's pastoral and agricultural history at Brickendon World Heritage site. The farm has operated continuously (since 1824) under the auspices of the original family's descendants, the Archer family – now in their seventh generation...

The stunning rural landscape, magnificent heritage gardens, amazing collection of convict constructed buildings, family history and memorabilia are special squares of Australia's patchwork of history.

### Gorgeous gorge

One of Launceston's most popular tourist attractions and a favourite chill place for locals, Cataract Gorge is beautiful and ideal for a walk or a picnic. Walk across the suspension bridge and try and name some of the wide range of flora that grows here.

There's a cafe, the world's longest single-span chairlift, a free outdoor pool and it's only 15 minutes from bustling downtown. The rugged, natural beauty here is the local spot to be immersed in.

After all that nature we go see the past in bricks and mortar – the elegant Franklin House.

This is a grand Georgian manor house built by convicts for a Launceston brewer in 1838. From 1842 it became a boys' school for 40 years, fell into disrepair, and was taken up by the National Trust which opened the house to the public in 1961.

The house has notable pieces such as an 18th-century mahogany clock, an organ, a Tasmanian cedar piano, a range of interesting portraits and the lovely architraves, windows and skirting boards made from everlasting cedar.

Just when you think you've been everywhere in Australia, take a little trip to Launceston, be surprised, be delighted and see just what all the fuss is about. •

## TRAVEL FACTS

### Getting there

### Stay at

The very splendid Charles Hotel, once a hospital. Lovely room, great service and an excellent restaurant – and free Wi-Fi!

[@] [www.hotelcharles.com.au](http://www.hotelcharles.com.au)

### Eat at

Still Water Restaurant, one of the state's most lauded eating places. [@] [www.stillwater.com.au](http://www.stillwater.com.au)

### Don't miss

a visit to pretty Evandale Village for the famous Penny Farthing race and Village Fair, held next 21 February.

[@] [www.evandalefair.com.au](http://www.evandalefair.com.au)

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