



# Take a walk back in time

Launceston is a treasure trove of beautiful buildings, best discovered on a walking tour, writes **SUSAN BUGG**

**L**AUNCESTON'S streetscape shows that lean times can have a silver lining, though it might not be fully appreciated until years down the track.

Settled in 1805, the city — Tasmania's second largest and Australia's third oldest — is said to have the largest intact collection of 19th-century architecture in the country, well-preserved buildings that range from warehouses and elegant civic buildings to churches, banks, merchants' dwellings and hotels. Some, like the Italianate town hall, are still used for their original purpose, while others have been converted to law offices, shops and restaurants.

And yes, there's *that* brewery. The city is also home to a famous beer, and though the James Boag and Son brewery is now a sprawling complex that spans generations of building styles, its original red-brick facade, date-stamped 1881, still stands, as does its conical oast house where hops were dried.

The oast house is among sites marked on a Launceston City Council map outlining three self-guided heritage walks of different themes and lengths that give perspective on the city's past and people.

Of course, you can pick up a brochure and go for a ramble yourself, but for the small price of \$15, you can join local history enthusiast Robyn Jones on a 90-minute guided walk around various city landmarks.

We meet Jones at 1842, a furniture and art gallery she runs with husband Trevor in a historic building

that housed a wholesale grocer and counting house in the 1800s.

The walk she has chosen today focuses on the northern blocks of the city where the Tamar River joins its tributary the North Esk.

It was once a hub of commercial activity; flour mills, grain and wool stores lined the waterside and tin from the mines of Tasmania's northwest was shipped to the world from long-gone wharves. Replicas of ships' masts sit on the river's edge as a reminder of the fleet that once moored there.

Jones says that it was the riches of the late 19th-century mineral boom that gave the city grand buildings such as the nearby Customs House, with its Corinthian columns, and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

"But it was poverty that preserved the buildings," she says. Ensuing decades weren't quite as bountiful as the 1880s and without the funds for the cycle of redevelopment, the city stuck with much of what it had, though what was a village green is now Harvey Norman's car park.

But in one case a building has returned to its original function. Twenty years ago Australia Post abandoned the 1880s red-brick post office, but after a community campaign, services returned to the building, notable for its clock tower, in 2012.

Jones is also happy to point out a couple of early colonial buildings instrumental to the history of



Melbourne. One, a Georgian-style warehouse, provided the supplies for John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner's separate expeditions to establish settlements on Port Phillip Bay. The other, now the Batman Fawkner Inn, but built by Pascoe Fawkner in 1824 as the Cornwall Hotel, was where the rival explorers made their plans to cross Bass Strait. Though remodelled in later years, Jones says it's most likely Launceston's oldest building.

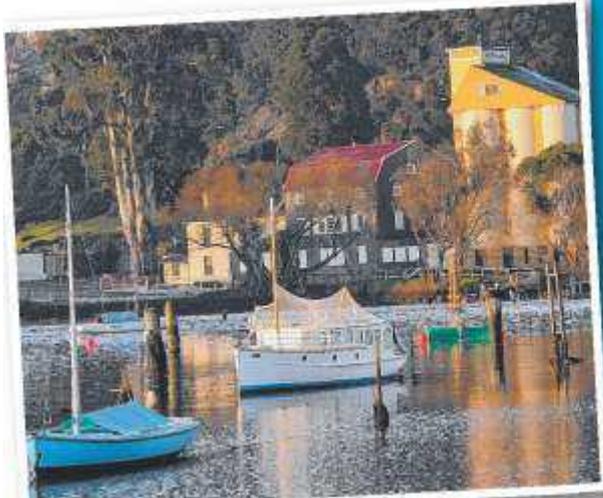
Jones is an eloquent and passionate advocate for preserving the "beautiful gems" she lives among and wants visitors to appreciate Launceston's heritage as much as they enjoy the surrounding Tamar Valley's food and cool-climate wines. "I hope they get a love and appreciation of the heritage that is Launceston," she said. "I don't think people are aware of the extent of what we have."

But she says the city is becoming prouder of its historic buildings, many of which are being re-purposed.

Ritchie's Mill, which sits on the Tamar at the base of Cataract Gorge — Launceston's premier visitor attraction — is just one example and an apt place to get a taste for the region's history and its food and wine. The former flour mill dates back to the 1830s and now houses Stillwater, which has numbered among Tasmania's most lauded restaurants for more than a decade. It's loyal to local, its menu drawing on organically grown vegetables from the Tamar Valley, grass-fed beef from Cape Grim, seafood from the state's East Coast, lamb from Flinders Island.

Another walk, this time along the trails and gardens of the Gorge — the rhododendrons and azaleas are stunning in spring — is the perfect way to build up an appetite. And a seat at Stillwater at dusk, overlooking the glassy Tamar and glass of Janz sparkling in hand, seems the perfect place to end a Launceston day.

**The writer was a guest of Launceston City Council**



**THE DEAL**

**GETTING THERE**  
Virgin Australia, Qantas and Jetstar fly from Melbourne to Launceston. The airport is about a \$35 taxi ride from the city centre.

**STAYING THERE**  
The Auldington, 110 Frederick St, Launceston, is a private hotel that started life as a convent. It's an easy 10-minute walk to the city centre or Cataract Gorge. Overnight rates start at \$149 a room. Ph: (03) 6331 2050. [auldington.com.au](http://auldington.com.au)  
Launceston Historic Walks runs tours from Monday to Saturday, with tailored tours by negotiation. Cost: \$15. Ph: (03) 6331 2213.

**SHOPPING**  
For souvenirs and presents, the National Trust runs The Old Umbrella Shop gift shop at 60 George St.

**ONLINE**  
[visitlauncestontamar.com.au](http://visitlauncestontamar.com.au)





**Launceston's gems: the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (above) and a view of the Tamar River from Stillwater Restaurant (below).**