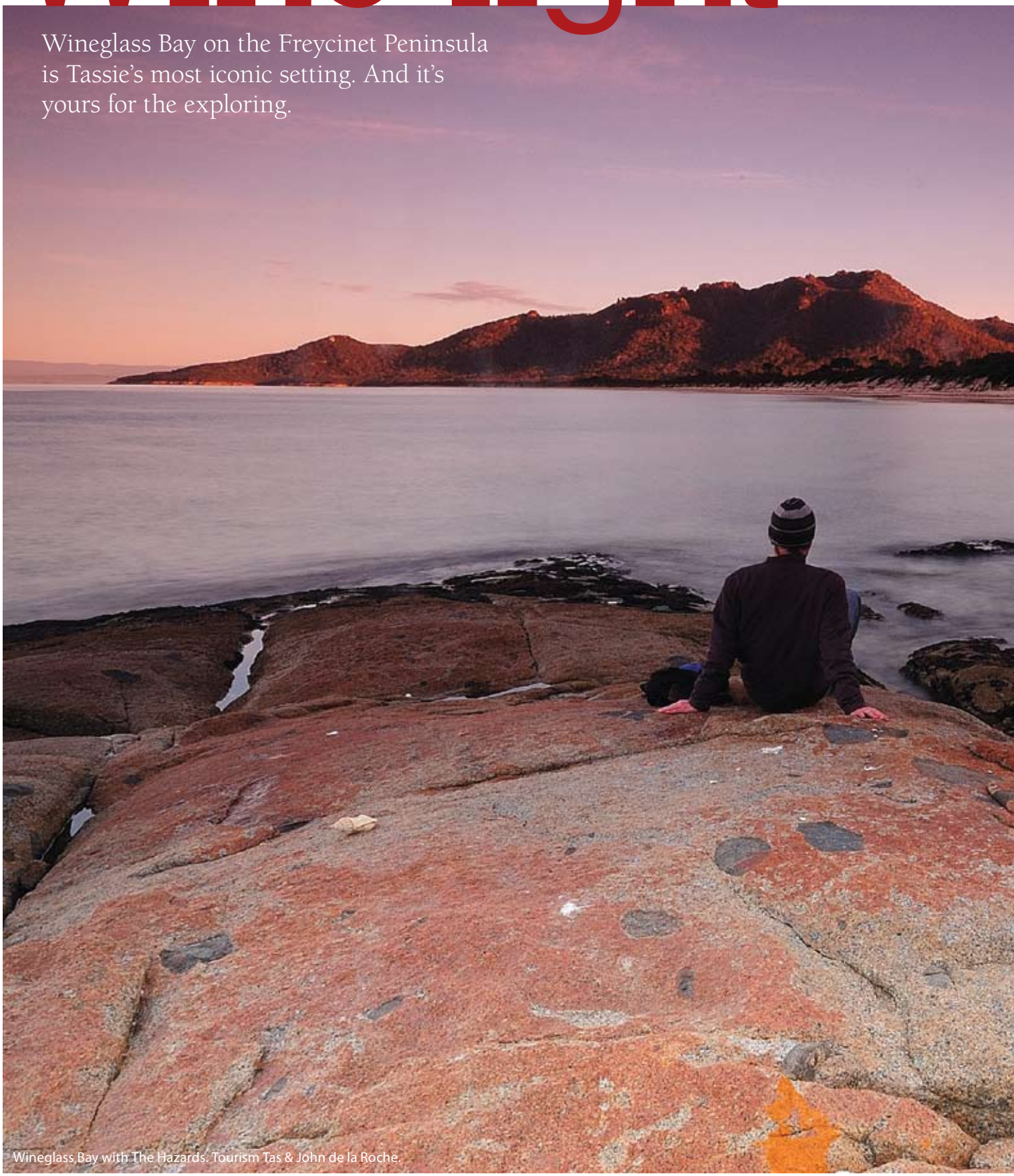
Wine light

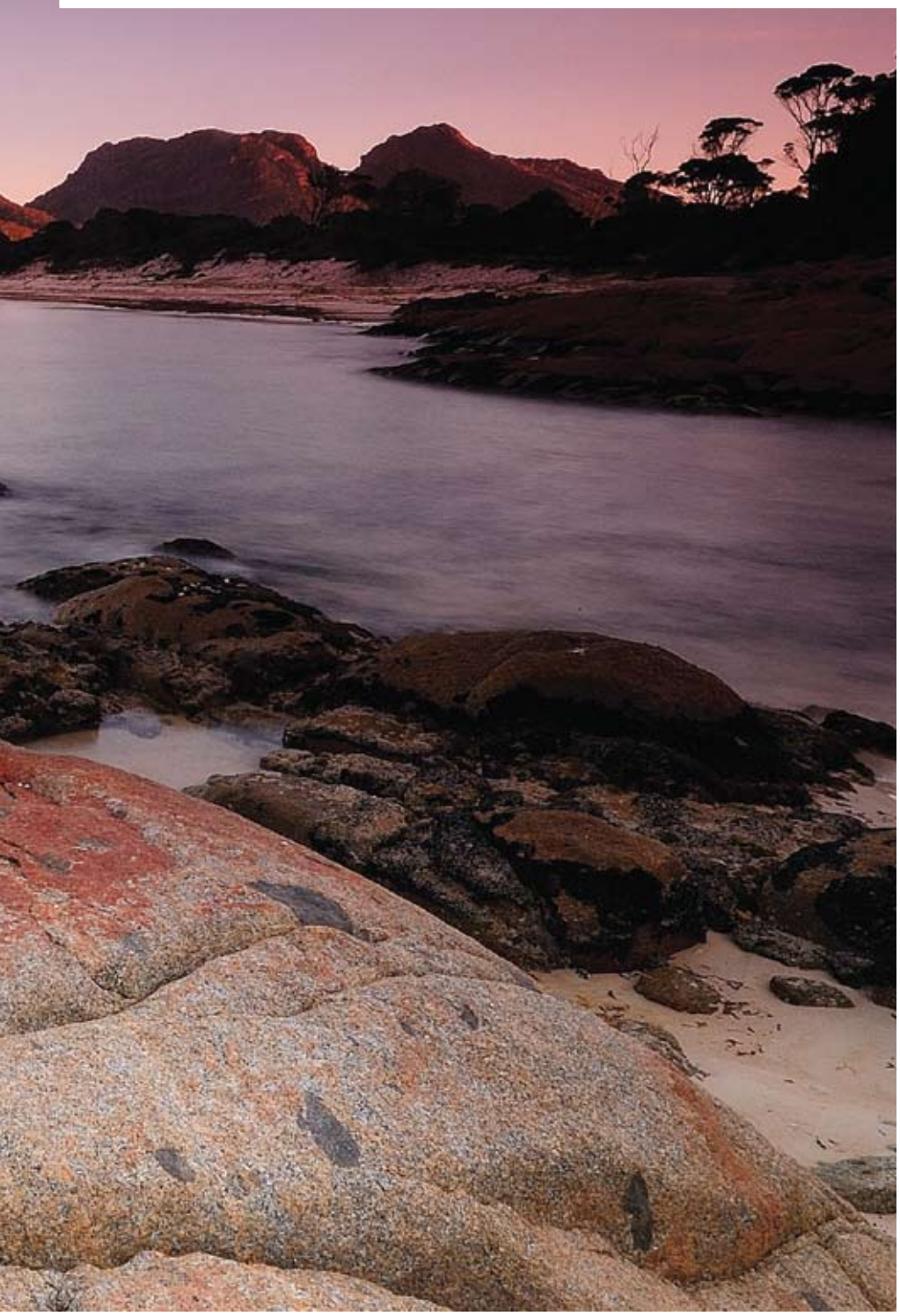
Wineglass Bay on the Freycinet Peninsula is Tassie's most iconic setting. And it's yours for the exploring.



Wineglass Bay with The Hazards. Tourism Tas & John de la Roche.

Walking the isthmus track.
Photo: Matt Newton.

Freycinet in macro: shells from Friendly Beaches.



WORDS AND PHOTOS_GABI MOCATTA.

How often, in the humdrum of ordinary life, does one find a place so evocative it sends a shiver of goosebumps down the spine? On Tasmania's east coast, on the gorgeous Freycinet Peninsula, there's just such a place. This was the territory of Tasmania's Oyster Bay tribe, the area's original inhabitants, and the path we are following was once trodden by their feet. There's no one else around and the bush is whisper-quiet. Flitting wrens and our breathing are the only movement and sound. To be here in this quiet feels like it must have to its first inhabitants: just a breath away from Garden of Eden perfection.

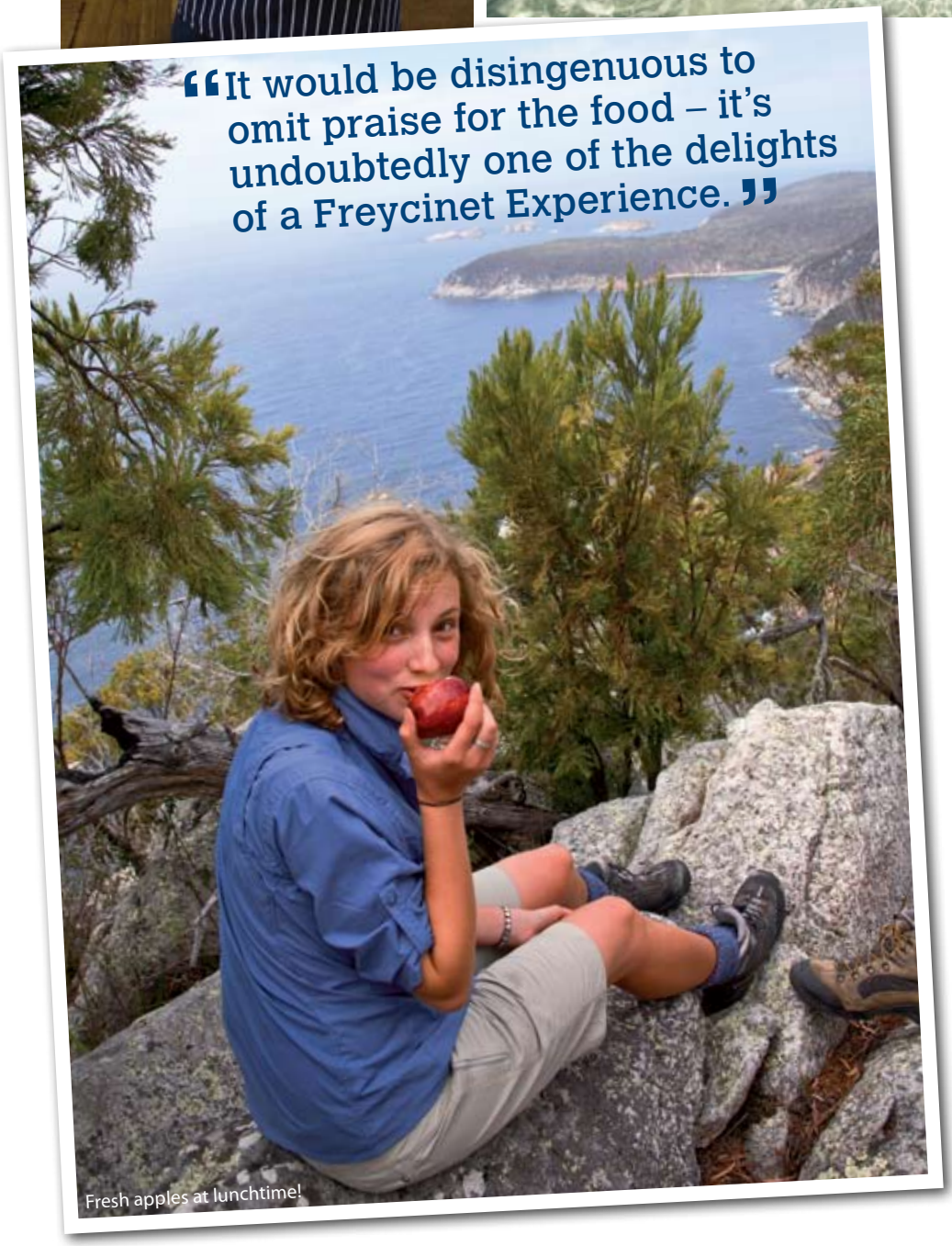
To experience this kind of revelation on day three of the four-day Freycinet Experience Walk is not to say that the rest of the walk is any less spectacular. This guided, lodge-based walk is the most comprehensive, as well as the most comfortable, way to take in the peninsula. Based at the environmentally aware Friendly Beaches Lodge, this boat-and-walking journey covers the most beautiful – and remote – corners of the peninsula. Starting at Schouten Island off the peninsula's southern tip, the walk meanders north, climbing ancient granite mountains, traversing white-blonde beaches, passing through fragrant coastal forests, and ending up alongside the Southern Ocean surf of expansive Friendly Beaches.

Minimal footprint

Perhaps the best thing about taking a guided walk at Freycinet is that the guides are so eminently knowledgeable. The peninsula, we learn, was the territory of the Oyster Bay tribe of Tasmanian Aborigines for at least 20,000 years. The French were the first outsiders to make contact with them: there were friendly encounters in

Refreshing watermelon on offer at Friendly Beaches Lodge.

Wading in the beach with the Hazards in background.



Fresh apples at lunchtime!

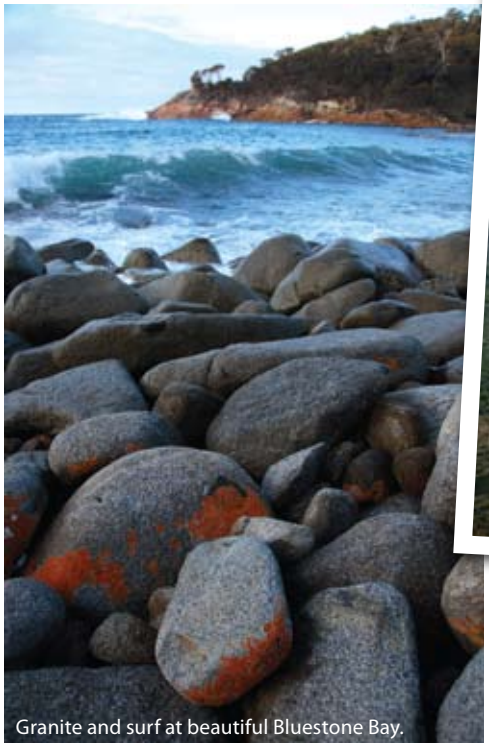
1802 with the voyage of explorer Nicholas Baudin (he gets a big mention in a story about WA’s Cape to Cape Walk, *Cape Crusaders*, *GW* Apr-May ‘10), and the peninsula was named after the expedition’s navigator – Louis de Freycinet.

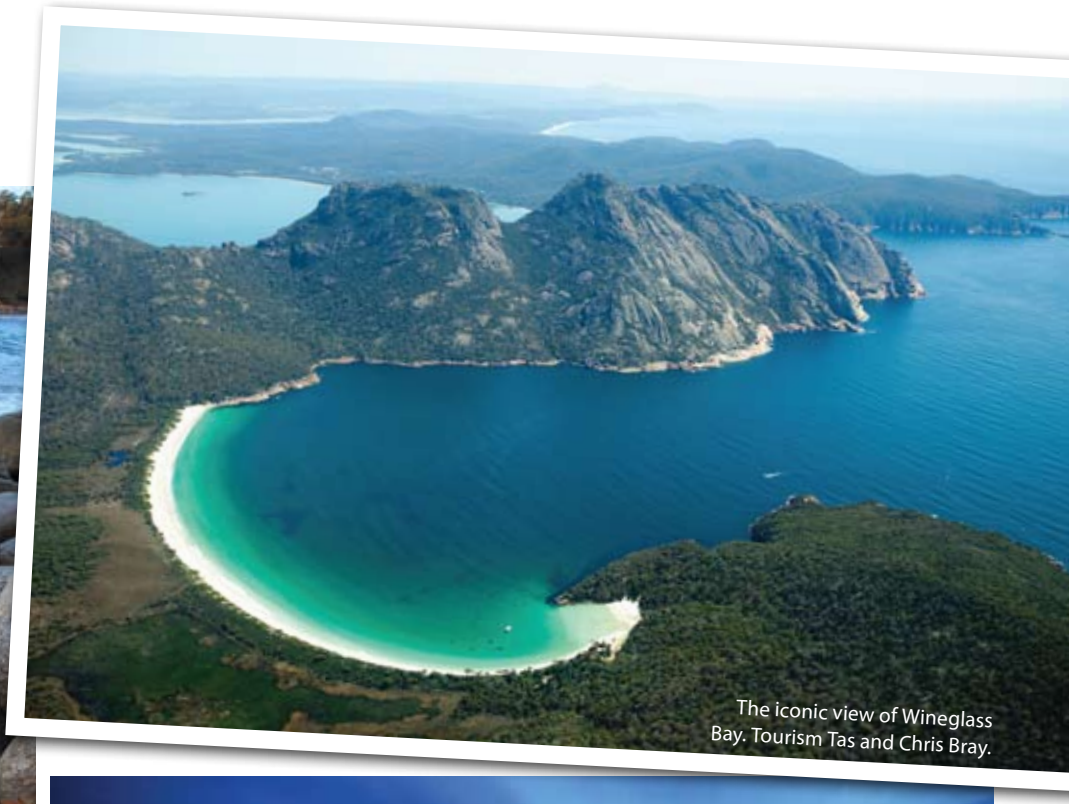
Now encompassed in Freycinet National Park, this 38km-long peninsula of sugar-white beaches, soaring cliffs, lichen-splashed boulders and ice-blue seas is a haven for endangered wildlife and rare flora. Guides point out bush orchids and grass trees; we spot a trundling echidna and a pod of dolphins. Birdlife we encounter varies from elegant black swans to a white-bellied sea eagle and an amazing peregrine falcon, diving like a kamikaze.

An equally wonderful aspect of this walk is being based at Friendly Beaches Lodge. Hidden in the whispering casuarinas, this is a true eco-lodge. Off-grid, rainwater harvesting and designed for minimal ecological footprint, the lodge has won awards for environmental design, and a concern for the environment underpins everything that is done here. The lodge feels simple, peaceful and contemporary: the timber architecture is gracefully minimalistic, there’s a diverse collection of art, an eclectic book collection in the library and many quiet spaces, indoors and out, to soak up the tranquillity.

Food for thought

It would be disingenuous to omit praise for the food – it’s undoubtedly one of the delights of a Freycinet Experience. Forget ordinary walking-trip stodge. A lodge evening might start with pre-dinner oysters or abalone from the waters around Freycinet, then continue at the


Granite and surf at beautiful Bluestone Bay.


The iconic view of Wineglass Bay. Tourism Tas and Chris Bray.

candle-lit communal table with food that's sophisticated and delicious. There's freshly caught flathead done Thai-style with fennel and chilli relish and coconut lemongrass rice, local lamb cutlets Moroccan-marinated, eye fillet with baby spinach and goats' cheese – followed by delectable deserts of summer berries, poached pears and real ice cream – all at a walking lodge! In between, the guides serve up freshly baked muffins, local cheeses, home-made bread and classy Tasmanian wines.

Staying at the lodge together and walking together each day, walkers come to know each other quite well – and an easy-going friendliness develops amongst groups. Walkers here are a diverse, interesting bunch: our group included a law academic, a wine maker, a filmmaker and a brilliant computer whiz. Freycinet Experience also seems to have a knack for picking charming, entertaining and altogether delightful guides. Ours were fascinatingly well travelled and highly experienced in the outdoors – as well as clearly infused with a love of Freycinet.

It's from our guides, on the second day of the walk, that we learn something few people know about the peninsula. Freycinet is probably best known for the picture-postcard perfect curve of Wineglass Bay, and we've eagerly awaited seeing it. Wineglass Bay, we now learn, was not named for its curvaceous shape, but for the fact that it was once the centre of the whaling industry on this coast.

Freycinet NP during the Lumina winter festival. Tourism Tas and Stuart Crossett.

It was the blood of slaughtered whales that once stained these waters the colour of wine: difficult to imagine as we near the bay's sapphire-clear expanse on the descent from Mt Graham.

Gorgeous it may be, but strolling Wineglass Bay is an entirely different experience from our Freycinet Experience Walk. On the routes the guided walk takes there's barely a soul – here, there are hordes admiring the beauty. In contrast to where we've been, it feels, frankly, overrun. What a privilege, then, to have been shown the quieter corners and heard the true stories of this Eden-like domain – to have really experienced its spirit – and to have retreated at night to a hidden lodge to sleep close to nature.

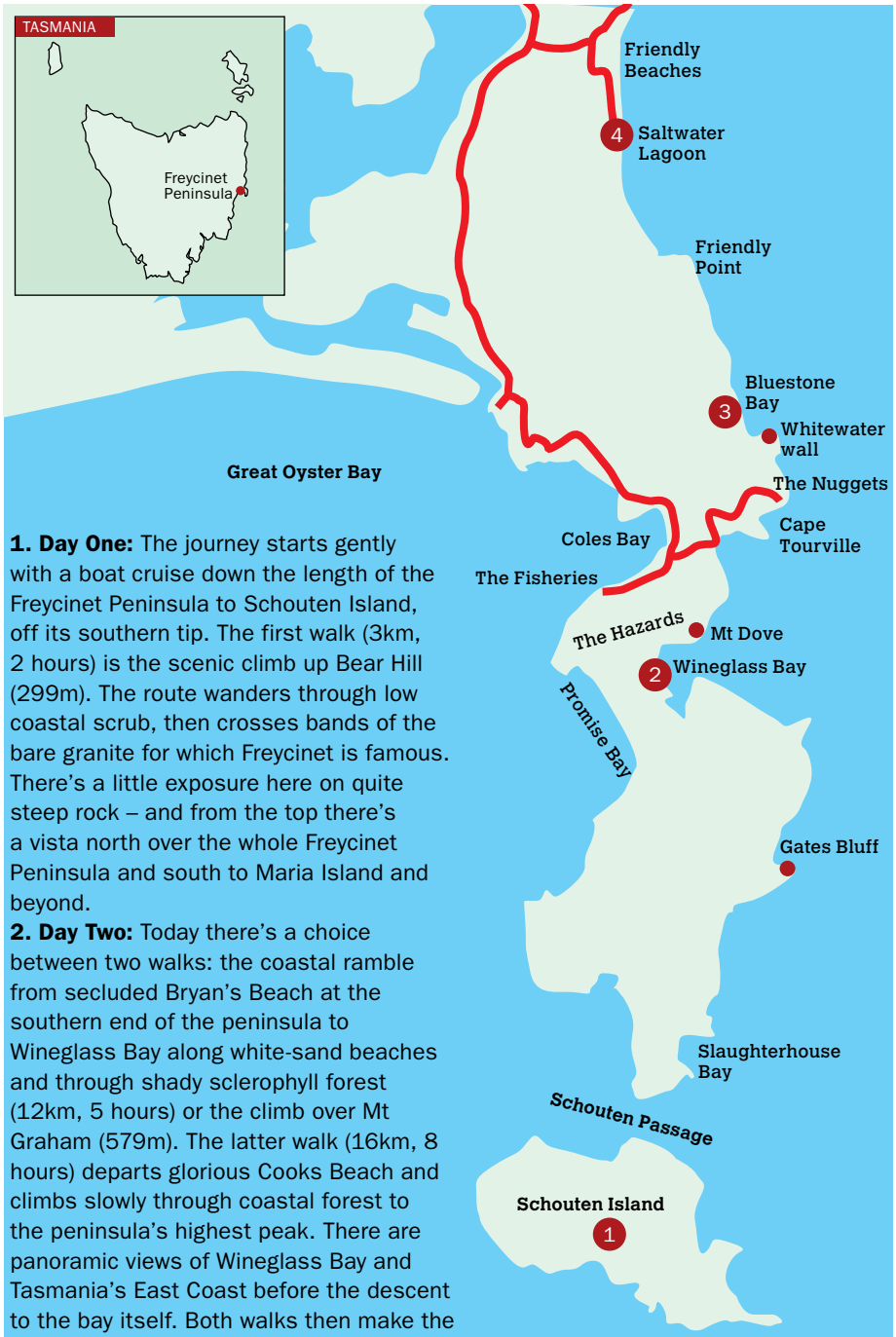
INDEPENDENT WALKERS

If you prefer to explore Freycinet NP on your own, one great walk is the Freycinet Peninsula Circuit. This 31km overnight walk is graded easy-moderate. The trail travels around the Hazard Mountains to Hazards Beach. The track continues south to Cooks and Bryans Beaches. Walkers then cross the peninsula over a heathland plateau next to Mount Freycinet to take in the spectacular views before descending to the white quartz sands of Wineglass Bay. The best map to use is Tasmap's 1:50 000 *Freycinet National Park Map & Notes*. Due to the high demand for campsites, a ballot system operates from December 18 until February 10 and during Easter each year. For more info visit **www.parks.tas.gov.au** or phone the Freycinet Visitor Centre on 03 6256 7000.

Walk notes

FREYCINET EXPERIENCE

Time/Distance: 40km/4 days | Degree: Easy



1. Day One: The journey starts gently with a boat cruise down the length of the Freycinet Peninsula to Schouten Island, off its southern tip. The first walk (3km, 2 hours) is the scenic climb up Bear Hill (299m). The route wanders through low coastal scrub, then crosses bands of the bare granite for which Freycinet is famous. There's a little exposure here on quite steep rock – and from the top there's a vista north over the whole Freycinet Peninsula and south to Maria Island and beyond.

2. Day Two: Today there's a choice between two walks: the coastal ramble from secluded Bryan's Beach at the southern end of the peninsula to Wineglass Bay along white-sand beaches and through shady sclerophyll forest (12km, 5 hours) or the climb over Mt Graham (579m). The latter walk (16km, 8 hours) departs glorious Cooks Beach and climbs slowly through coastal forest to the peninsula's highest peak. There are panoramic views of Wineglass Bay and Tasmania's East Coast before the descent to the bay itself. Both walks then make the tough climb up steep stone steps to the Wineglass Bay Lookout before descent on the new and immaculately groomed path to the carpark.

3. Day 3: The walk begins by exploring the climbers' nirvana of Whitewater Wall, and then beautiful Bluestone Bay. It then follows a rarely accessed route along the Bluestone Bay cliff tops through pristine bushland back to Friendly Beaches headland. The remainder of the walk is along the white sands of Friendly Beaches – either crashing with surf or calm and azure – back to the lodge (12km, 6 hours).

4. Day 4: A leisurely morning's walk leads up to the fossil-rich ridge line of Mt Mary behind the lodge, and down to Saltwater Lagoon, set in the bush and sand dunes behind Friendly Beaches, nesting ground of black swans and pelicans (6km, 3 hours). After lunch at the lodge the last part of the walk is a stroll down Friendly Beaches to Isaac's Point – journey's end.

NEED TO KNOW

Getting there
Freycinet National Park is 2.5 to 3 hours drive from either Hobart (194km) or Launceston (173km).

Planning your Freycinet Experience
Embarking on this walk is simple: all arrangements are taken care of by your guides. Pick up and drop off are from Hobart. The walk includes transport from Hobart, boat and vehicle transfer each day of the trip to a different part of the peninsula, national park entry, comprehensive guiding, three nights' accommodation, all food and fine wines. Walkers are provided with a rain jacket and a daypack for the day's walking necessities.

When to walk
The walking season is November to April, when days can be pleasantly warm (17-23˚C) to occasionally hot (30˚C+). Nights are usually cool (10-15˚C). Although this is the drier time of year, rain can come at any time: be prepared.

Who will love this walk?
This walk is for anyone who feels at home in the bush, but appreciates comfortable accommodation, great food, the camaraderie of being in a group, and the ease of having everything organised. Don't expect luxurious resort-type accommodation, but do expect to be delighted by the simple stylishness and environmental awareness of Friendly Beaches Lodge.

Accommodation
Accommodation is in two understated wooden pavilions at secluded Friendly Beaches Lodge. Each has a communal sitting area warmed by a wood-burning stove, a claw-footed bath and steaming gas-heated hot water shower in a shared bathroom. Toilets are of the environmentally friendly composting type. Singles may need to share twin rooms.

Fitness
Walkers cover 36-40km over four days on terrain that varies from beach sand to rocky tracks and smooth, exposed granite, with some steep climbs and descents. The group's pace is always mindful of its slowest members – and groups travel at a pace that everyone can enjoy. Guests from age eight to 78 have completed the walk.

How many walkers in each group?
There is a maximum of 10 walkers per group, led by two experienced guides. The lodge is run by two live-in lodge coordinators who organise catering and accommodation.

Cost/further info
$2075, with special rates for children and groups. For further details visit **www.freycinet.com.au** or phone 1800 560 003.