Current travel restrictions are in place and may affect your entry into Tassie. Check here, here and here for updates.

The timing for our road trip was lucky! It was between Victorian lockdowns, so we were able to take our own vehicle and camper on board the Spirit of Tasmania. The ferry was a great experience and it's well worth bookmarking Part 1 for when current restrictions ease.

In the meantime, if your circumstances permit, then fly/drive packages are a fabulous alternative. Or read on and add these spots to your post lockdown adventures.

Self-drive road trips around Tassie give you the flexibility to travel at your own pace and make decisions on the fly.

Fully stocked with supplies, we headed off from Ulverstone towards the east coast. We had 6 weeks before we needed to be in Hobart for our next planned commitment so embracing our preferred method, we took our time. Travelling slowly, stopping regularly, and keeping our plans flexible so we had the freedom to make decisions on the go.

We are experienced off-road campers who have dragged our little Tvan across Australia on and off for over 10 years. We're confident in our choices and they suit our style of travel, despite sometimes shocking other dedicated campers. We've endured some rough conditions in our time, so our next decision may come as a surprise.

Instead of camping in what was forecast to be bucketing rain, we opted to hide out for a few days in a Launceston hotel, and wait for the weather to clear. Sometimes a pub room costs less than a campsite and is much drier underfoot.

Cataract Gorge is only 1.5km from the city centre of Launceston.

Ulverstone to Launceston

We'd not spent much time in 'Lonny' during our previous trips. It's a pretty city with old buildings and lots of parks, gardens, and tempting restaurants. We played tourist with a visit to Cataract Gorge and the motor museum, found the cinemas, met some locals at the Saturday parkrun, and ate well.

The beauty of Tasmania is that nothing is far and after leaving Launceston, we decided we had better begin stopping early in the day or we might find ourselves in Hobart for dinner!

Free camps are an interesting and budget-friendly way to experience Tasmania.

Beechford to Waterhouse

From Launceston, we headed 40 minutes north to the coastal area of Beechford and found a free camp, tucked behind the dunes. There's a book exchange here and being avid readers, we always have books to swap. There's usually always a new title or author to try, so our love affair with book exchanges was bolstered by their fully stocked 'fridge'.

If you want to find interesting spots, don't dismiss a backpacker! They rarely stop in towns, free camp often and have a secret stash of shared locations. It's not unusual for these travellers to have seen much more of Australia than you have. Their tips are as valuable as grey nomads and others you meet in camp kitchens. Offering food or a drink is a great way to meet fellow travellers and can make a welcome trade for their best tip.

So it was that we stopped an hour east along the coast at the Waterhouse Conservation Area and enjoyed the large free camp which offers multiple sites to choose from.

Mount William National Park offers a choice of sheltered campsites all close to the beach.

Mount William National Park

Then it was time to head to the northeast tip of the island and home to Mt William National Park.

A valid Parks Pass is required for entry to all of Tasmania's national parks. Investing in a pass is not expensive and there are concession rates as well as short and long-term options. To stay in these parks, you not only need a Parks Pass, but some cash and a pen to fill the envelope on-site. Fees differ, but at the time of our travel, Mount William was $13p/n or $50 for the week.

There are six designated campgrounds at Mount William and we opted for one of the four at Stumpys Bay Campground. Each site is a stone's throw from the beach and sheltered behind a canopy of trees. Bennett's wallabies are all around the campground. They are precocious and will make their way into your tent looking for food. Don't feed or encourage them.

Many parks do not have fresh or drinking water available, so you need to carry your own supply. However, there are well-maintained pit toilets and numerous fireplaces by designated campsites. Do a bit of research to check the facilities in each area. It's also a good idea to check the fire restrictions before lighting a fire and take your rubbish with you.

Peron Dunes within the St Helens Conservation Area has been set aside for recreational 4WDing.

St Helens

After a week of beachcombing, driving to see the sites, spectacular sunrises, the Musselroe Wind Farm and paddling in the strong ocean current, we headed off to St Helens and the neighbouring Bay of Fires.

This area has been luring holidaymakers for decades and is a must on any Tasmanian itinerary. As the brochure says, '*the sight is simply jaw-dropping: the turquoise-coloured ocean breaks into a breathtaking white beach fringed with huge boulders draped in iconic orange lichen.*'

Minerals from the regenerated former mine site give Little Blue Lake its brilliant shade of aqua.

Although swimming is not recommended, a side trip to Little Blue Lake when visiting the St Helens area is well worth it. Some locals do swim or waterski during the summer months, but the high concentration of minerals leftover from when the site was a mine may irritate the skin.

Sunrise at Swimcart Beach, Bay of Fires.

Bay of Fires

Bay of Fires Conservation Area is home to the best free campsites in Australia. We were keen to get a good campsite at Binnalong Bay. We knew it would be busy and as we needed to catch up on laundry and were in need of a decent shower, we booked into a caravan park overnight.
We unhitched our van and drove to the many campsites we had read about, only to find they were all full. Having decided upon our personal favourites, we crossed our fingers for the next day.

The setting sun creates a dramatic effect from Swimcart Beach.

Swimcart Beach

One of our favourites was Swimcart Beach – a famed free camp. Given its reputation, we were expecting the worst. Sure enough, it was busier than Christmas! There wasn't even room for a swag on the road verge – every corner was taken.
However, our plan to familiarise ourselves first and arrive early the next day paid off. As we pulled in, there were campers packing up and we secured a perfect spot right next to the beach and close to the amenities. Grinning like Cheshire cats we settled in for a week of reading and resting by the famous bay.

Swimcart Beach is for experienced swimmers only as there is a very dangerous rip.
There is a dangerous rip here and unpredictable sand bars so we did not swim but happily roamed the beaches, rock hopped and birdwatched. I spent hours photographing the sunrise, sunset and rocks with their coverage of orange lichen.
My husband tried fishing, with no success. He's never sure if it's technique or timing, but there is very little need for his filleting knife when we travel. With the area being renown for oysters and seafood, there was no missing out on a fresh feed, despite our lack of a catch for ourselves.

Evercreech Reserve is a gem!

Evercreech Reserve

From St Helens, we made our way 40-minutes inland for lunch at the spectacular Evercreech Reserve. What a find! The home of the 90m White Knights, four gumtrees saved by an early conservationist, the reserve has a fabulous A-frame undercover picnic refuge complete with a fireplace.
There is a series of walks that cater for a variety of fitness levels, all alongside the headwaters of the South Esk River.
Sheeting rain shelved our plans for camping that night, so we drove back towards the coast, slipped into a room and enjoyed a pub feed in St Marys – about 40-minutes south of St Helens.
By calling the bar and booking direct, we saved money which we then put towards a nicer

bottle of red.

Zigzagging up the Ben Lomond Ranges, Jacobs Ladder is a spectacular sight.

Mathinna Falls to Ben Lomond Jacob's Ladder

As the rain eased, we meandered our way back inland to Mathinna Falls and then Ben Lomond to drive the famous Jacob's Ladder climb and set up camp. The mosquitoes were horrendous, so we hot-footed a little way south to a free overnight camp on the edge of Campbell Town. From there we headed back to the coast and Wineglass Bay.

Getting up close with the seals of Wineglass Bay.

Freycinet National Park

Sometimes you may read about a tour or hear about a place that is really popular. We find it is best to book into the tour and secure accommodation ahead of your arrival as you can't be sure that there'll be a free camp nearby. Nor can you be guaranteed a refund if you can't use your ticket due to a lack of accommodation.

A boat tour to see the spectacular coastline of the Freycinet National Park from Coles Bay was highly recommended, so we booked a site at the caravan park and jagged ourselves water views. Then we booked the tour and we were glad we had as it was a sell-out.

From here, a short drive north is worthwhile to experience the Bicheno Blowhole and some fabulous ocean lookouts.

Welcome to Country by the Palawa people of Lutruwita.

Burnie

Our east coast tour had an unexpected detour once we found out about Mapali – 10 Days on the Island Festival in the northwest coastal town of Burnie, about a 3-hour drive from Freycinet National Park.

We delighted in some local oddities and visited the Burnie Makers Gallery, Wynyard for a Lighthouse view, and a waterfall fix at Guide Falls picnic ground but the main event was the Dawn Gathering of Mapali where the Palawa people perform the opening *Welcome to Country*.

The Dawn Gathering of Mapali was spectacular.

I had read it was a pretty spectacular first nations storytelling smoking ceremony, and we were not disappointed. Hundreds of spectators of all ages and from all around the island joined the Palawa people for the contemporary celebration.

From here we zigzagged over to visit the Beaconsfield Mine and Heritage Centre before continuing on to Mole Creek. The Centre celebrates the rescuers in the 2006 gold mine collapse that captivated the nation, and it too is captivating. I highly recommend it! Beaconsfield is under an hour's drive from Launceston or going off our itinerary, it's approximately 1.5-hours from Burnie and around 1-hour from Mole Creek.

A Day at the Creek Festival.

Mole Creek

The Mole Creek Hotel annual A Day at the Creek Festival is a well-run toe-tapping two-day event with a professional lineup of revival bands. It was a delight to the Wolfe Brothers, James Blundell and local artists. The beer garden regulars welcome a range of music fans to their local, and the event is a tribute to the publican and his staff. Don't miss it if you are in Tas during autumn!
After another free camp under the famous Callington Mill in Oatlands, we arrived in Hobart – 38 days since disembarkation in Devonport and just shy of our 6-week deadline.
To be continued…

The coast or the mountains, which is your Tasmanian favourite?