



January 2016

OUTLINES TRAVEL NEWS THE WALKING EDITION

If you are receiving our e-newsletter for the first time, welcome. If you are interested in past copies they are stored on our website: <http://bit.ly/1NR5eqK> If you would like to change your address, wish to add the name of a friend or stop receiving this material please contact us immediately.

WALKING IN NEW ZEALAND

Hike the Milford Sound Track January to April 2016



Well-maintained walking trails, comfortable lodges and support from professional walking guides, New Zealand's Milford Sound Track is one of the world's most popular walks. Walkers can enjoy close encounters with the native wildlife, experience the spectacular Fiordland with its deep lakes, fiords, sheer canyons carved out of granite, majestic waterfalls and temperate rainforest.

We offer the Milford Sound Track, the Routeburn Walk, Grand Traverse or a Classic hike combination – all with the option of private or multi-share rooms - a few places are available for the 2016 season - for details call us or see: <http://bit.ly/1Cbx7Xm>

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



WALKING INFORMATION UPDATE

More accurate walking route information now available on group guided holidays in the UK & Europe

You may have noticed that the details of the ascents on our walks (both in our flyers and pre-departure information) have been changed in terms of the way the ascents have been measured. It might not be obvious at first but you may find yourself wondering why a walk that you did last year had only 300m of ascent, yet in 2016 it might have 390m of ascent! Don't worry, it's nothing to do with plate tectonics or any strange phenomenon of physical geography, what's changed is the way our operators measure the ascent on walks.

There's been plenty of debate over the years as to which way is best to measure ascent, and there will be variations in the results whichever method is used. In the past many calculated ascent values from a manual count of contour lines on, in the UK, an Ordnance Survey map. This gives an approximation of the ascent and for many years this was the traditional and only method available. However, with the advent of digital mapping, we now have the luxury of the computers doing the calculations, giving more accurate values for the ascent on all our walks.

As more and more of you have digital mapping on your smartphones and GPS devices, you should see a better correlation between the figures that we're now presenting for ascent, and those on your own devices. What you will also see, in coastal areas especially, are sometimes quite significantly higher measurements of ascent. There is no difference to the routes; they are the same well-loved walks. This new method of measuring ascent just helps explain why after walking some of the coastal routes, it seems like you have climbed a mountain!

The digital method of measuring ascent calculates every lump and bump on the route, whereas the traditional method only counts ascent only when you cross a contour line (contour lines are spaced at 5m or 10m intervals of ascent/descent). The new method means that all ascent is measured and we hope that by presenting these much more accurate ascent figures, this will better able you to choose the right walk.

It may take some time for you to get to grips with interpreting the new ascent measurements but if you have any questions at all about which walk is best for you, please ask our reservation staff and they will be happy to help. We hope that this more accurate method of measurement will ensure get the most out of your holiday.

SELF-GUIDED OR GUIDED SMALL GROUP WALKING HOLIDAYS

Easy to challenging guided walking holidays in Australia, New Zealand, Europe or North America

Outdoor Travel based in Bright, N.E. Victoria, offer many easy, moderate or challenging one-hotel or centre-based guided walks in numerous countries around the world.

In Australia our favourites are in Tasmania, the Great Ocean Walk in Victoria or walks in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Walks in Britain include the Cotswolds, Dartmoor or St Ives in Cornwall, Glencoe in Scotland, Snowdonia in Wales or in the beautiful English Lake District. The far west of Ireland offers classic Atlantic coastline views and in America the Grand Canyon or New England in autumn are always popular.

Our self-guided walking holidays are perfect for beginners and serious walkers alike, allowing you to discover these classic landscapes in rural parks or wilderness areas at your own pace. There are village-to-village walks as well as delightful paths through woodlands, beside farm pastures and grazing meadows and across the hills and dales. Walk through lush green fields, past rolling hills, along ancient trails, see stately homes, traditional and unique ancient villages and country market towns.

Tours usually include 7-nights in a comfortable hotel room with ensuite bathroom, breakfast and dinners where indicated, detailed walking route information and maps and inn-to-inn luggage transfers (where required).

WHAT'S **NEW** FROM OUTDOOR TRAVEL FOR 2016?

Here are a few of the **NEW** guided or Self-guided walks we are offering in 2016

Australia – Flinders Ranges & Wilpena wilderness guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1jsCcSQ>

The Flinders Ranges offer one of the most accessible outback destinations in Australia. On the southern edge of Wilpena Pound and the Flinders Ranges National Park, this guided walk redefines the classic Aussie 'bush walk', adding luxury touches to a four-day hike through private wildlife conservancy. A great way to experience the sights and sounds, the scale and the space of outback Australia

Austria – The Tyrolean Alps one-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1k1x3RS>

A walking holiday on the Seefeld plateau offers an easy and relaxing way to enjoy Alpine scenery. It offers majestic looming peaks, high meadows carpeted with colourful flowers, story-book cottages and picture-postcard valleys with far less effort than other Alpine centres.

France – the Loire Valley one-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1NoE7Tr>

Explore this beautiful area famed for hundreds of years for its spectacular châteaux and historic sites. We base ourselves at Chinon, a town with an enviable position on the banks of the Vienne River (a River Loire tributary). Visit the royal fortress of Chinon and surrounding towns to resound with the names of important figures in French history such as Joan of Arc and Richard the Lionheart.

Ireland – The Dingle Peninsula inn-to-inn self-guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1Zb8IZR>

A fantastic scenic walk along one of Ireland's rugged west coast passing spectacular mountain scenery, corrie lakes and pristine Atlantic Coast beaches – the setting of many films, including Ryan's Daughter and Far and Away. A highlight is the ferry crossing to Blanket Island where seals and seabirds abound.

Spain – Valencia one-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1m68Hrz>

Known for its beautiful beaches on the Costa Blanca, escape the tourist track into the mountains rising behind the coast at Biar, in the heart of the Valencian Sierras. An area of unspoilt nature parks and protected forests, tranquil mountain villages, and medieval hilltop castles and the mysterious 'Caves of the Moors'.

England – Northumberland one-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1QomKGa>

On the rugged North Sea coast with a sandy beach and tidal harbour, this walk is based at the coastal village of Alnmouth. The area offers a combination of historic castles, coastal walks, hills, valleys, country lanes, the remote wild beauty of the Cheviot Hills, dramatic Bamburgh Castle, nearby Alnwick Castle (Harry Potter's Hogwarts) and its famous gardens, Holy Island and the Farne Islands.



England – C2C Coast to Coast guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1ITxOZ8>

One of England's most popular but strenuous, challenging long distance walking trails made famous by author Alfred Wainwright, we offer a 16-day route that crosses the entire breadth of northern England from the North Sea at Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire to the Irish Sea at St Bees in Cumbria.

WALKING IN SCOTLAND

Exploring the Great Glen - by Sera Paterson

The Highlands in Scotland is an extraordinary place, especially after the summer months, one of those magical times that begin to come alive when autumn approaches. Although the Scottish weather is

unpredictable, and sometimes described to produce four seasons in one day, it's something that definitely shouldn't deter you from visiting. Even if the weather is not particularly good, you can guarantee an incredible and ever-changing landscape – dramatic, breathtaking and defiantly picturesque.

“Of course, the warmer months are still as fabulous, with more sun and higher temperatures, but in my opinion, it's after the busy season that the magic really happens, the leaves on the trees start to change and the midges start to disappear”.

Driving through the Scottish highlands and in particular, following the Great Glen, every road is scenic, and every corner brings a new and spectacular view. Driving is one thing, but walking, cycling or even cruising on a boat are some other things that make the journey even more special - slowing things down, allowing you to fully take in your surroundings. There are so many national parks and trails to see, that it's almost a surprise to see groups of others around, usually just a friendly passer-by or a local Scotsman, tending to his sheep.



The walking in Scotland has much to offer with a variety of terrain, every day feeling like a new adventure. There is the option of walking the entirety of the Great Glen, walking from coast to coast starts in Fort William and follows the Caledonian Canal, completing the journey on the opposite side of Scotland at Inverness.

From walking along the water's edge, through hilly mountainside and open plains, the scenery is spectacular! Into the forest and the mountains you are able to discover different waterfalls such as Ka-aig Fall (where the blockbuster Braveheart was filmed), then walking through the 'dark mile', a single road track where everything is cold and wet, lined with ferns and stone walls completely covered in moss, you feel as though you have just entered a fairy tale. With creeks running into the canals and lochs all the way along, the surroundings really do take you somewhere dreamy. The walking can be anywhere from flat along the towpath, to undulating or steep and into mountains for those rewarding views over the countryside, meaning it really is suited to most fitness levels.

A typical day consists of delights such as spotting red squirrel, chatting to some local men restoring an old railway line, crossing over the canal to see the boats going through locks, then finishing the day through farmland surrounded by Scotland's famous Highlands Cows.

Walking the length of majestic Loch Ness, it was one of the best days on my whole trip to Scotland, and probably the most picturesque.

“We started out with a morning walk from Fort Augustus along the right hand side of Loch Ness, the light was amazing as the sun rose, with incredible reflections and absolutely stunning views all the way down Loch Ness”.

We spotted a few cormorants along the edge and a lot of goats on the steepest of cliffs, how they get to those tricky places baffles me, but it's their best defence mechanism, with nothing else capable of reaching them. Such a stunning day to look forward to, as the sun is rising; the weather is crisp and fresh.

Leaving Fort Augustus where we spent the night and you would never guess, instantly the sky turned and the rain began. Just as we added a waterproof layer and pulled on our hoods, the sun was out again (this is what I mean by four seasons in one day). Not long into it, we hit the start of the uphill; we knew the day approaching was going to be the most challenging. The benefit of walking is that the pace is up to you and there is more opportunity to stop, look and to chat along the trail.

The views were getting more and more fabulous, especially when we reached Loch Tariff on a plateau - absolutely incredible! A photo says 1000 words! As we kept going up, the views continued to increase in beauty! We saw plenty of red stag, hard to miss from their rutting noises, comparable to that of grumpy teenagers. We eventually reached the summit of our day at 393m! The reward was incredible, never have I seen such magical 360 degree views.



We then made our long and steady decent, stopping at the pub for a hard earned lager and crisps.

The last mile or so took us through forestry, past Aldourie castle - now turned into a beautiful and very prestigious estate, before meeting back with the van at the end of Loch Ness at Lochend (what an appropriate name). Back through picturesque roads for a hot cup of tea and a much needed chocolate biscuit at the hotel.

Three Reasons to Visit Scotland in 2016

1. *Glasgow has been named among one of the top 20 destinations in the world for 2016 by National Geographic*
2. *The latest edition of the movie Star Wars was being shot in the Highlands and the Isle of Skye*
3. *Access to the highlands has just got even easier with two newly announced air links to Inverness with low-cost airlines*

MORE INFORMATION ON OUR NEW WALKING HOLIDAYS IN SCOTLAND – just click-on the links:

Scotland – Royal Deeside & Cairngorms two-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1NoHCct>

Immerse yourself in the majesty of high wild mountains, heather-covered moorlands, peat bogs, ancient forests, clear tumbling streams, glassy lochs, picturesque castles, tiny farms and crofts and small villages. Give reverence to her majesty in Royal Deeside, where Queen Elizabeth has her Scottish residence, Balmoral Castle, and Strathspey, where the high granite plateau rises above charming villages. Enjoy easy walks using mountain paths, old droving roads and thieves' trails once used for cattle rustling and smuggling illicit whisky.

Scotland – Isle of Skye two-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1TP3S0S>

Skye is a place of wonder, romance and legend. The history of this island encompasses dinosaur fossils, clan warfare, Highland clearances, Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobite rebellion. Its spectacular and varied landscapes also offer some of the best walking in Scotland and some heart-warming hospitality.

Scotland – Autumn in the Highlands one-hotel guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1Srhgb4>

Autumn is one of the best times of year to explore the glens and lochs of the central Scottish Highlands. Crisp, fresh autumn air, the roar of rutting stags, and vibrant shades of red, orange, amber and gold in the forests fringing the glens and the faded purple hews of the heather in the hillsides create an unforgettable highlands walking experience, based in the village of Fort Augustus beside Loch Ness.

Scotland – West Highland Way inn-to-inn guided walk: <http://bit.ly/1Yjmibh>

Established as one of Britain's most popular walking trail, wind your way from Milngavie to the foot of Ben Nevis, at Fort William. Surrounded by breathtaking mountain scenery, discover the Highlands and its history and culture from Loch Lomond to the wilderness of Rannoch Moor. Go scrambling beside fast flowing salmon streams, see herds of Red deer and perhaps the rare Golden eagle.



WALKING IN FRANCE - THE CEVENNES

By Caitlin O'Shea

Located in the picturesque inland south of France, Cevennes is a national park area which boasts many attractions. Often bypassed by Parisians rushing towards the Mediterranean beaches, Cevennes and its small, rustic villages and fantastic rock gorges offers visitors a more cultural and untouched view of the south.

To explore the natural beauty why not take a walk along the Stevenson Trail, following in the footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson and his donkey Modestine across wooded and open plains and the lush green valleys of the river Tarn.

On my recent visit, one particularly chilly morning we made our way up to the historic town of Le Pont-de-Montvert in the heart of the Cevennes National Park. The town is quite small but very scenic as the river Tarn flows through its centre. Stevenson ventured through the village on his walk from Le Monastier to Ales Gard. You can see on the town clock tower a little symbol of Stevenson's Way. This is an important part in the region's history as in 1702, during the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, the abbé de Chayla was assassinated by local rebels. From this town we ventured to the mountain tops, where on a clear day in mid-Autumn it began sleeting snow.

“It was very cold but our tour guides were well prepared with extra beanies, gloves and jackets for us ensuring we could all appreciate the magnificent scenery; deep valleys, mountainsides covered in yellows, reds and browns, and the river Tarn making its way down.”

One aspect of this region that rivals the dramatic scenery is the gastronomy. Using local produce many restaurants and bed & breakfasts create meals that are traditional in the region. Try the local goats cheese Pelardon with some locally grown and produced wine such as Domaine de Gabalie from Ispagac.

If you are looking for a getaway to the real heart of France, you should not miss seeing the preserved beauty of the Cevennes region. For details of our self-guided walking in Cevennes see: <http://bit.ly/1k1swPx>

NEW FOR 2016 CAMINO GUIDED PILGRIMAGE WALK IN FRANCE

France - Way of St James inn-to-inn guided walk – limited departures

Follow the *Way of St James*, also known as the *Camino de Santiago* or *Chemins St Jaques*, one of the most important Christian pilgrimage routes in existence today. In the company of a small group and expert guides explore the volcanic lands and rolling hills of the Velay in Auvergne, the Margeride Elysian landscape of dense oak forests and rugged pastures and the high plains of the Aubrac with its crystal streams and large rocks formation to reach the UNESCO listed village of Conques with its magnificent cathedral: <http://bit.ly/1mvBkyZ>

WALKING IN GREECE - SEEKING THE SUN GODS

By Sera Paterson on Santorini & Naxos

Naxos is the largest island in the Greek Cyclades and it has a diverse mix of town, countryside, sea and mountains. It offers a variety of scenery and the perfect opportunity to experience Greek culture and taste its unique and delicious cuisine. Naxos is easily accessible, by plane or one of the many ferries from Athens.

Walking is one of the main activities in Naxos, with the numerous tracks suiting most walking abilities. One of the more challenging walks is to the top of Mount Zeus, the highest point of not only Naxos, but of the Greek Cyclades Islands. The trail starts with a steady uphill slope, before it becomes steeper with each step. Wild goats, interesting flora and fresh air are abundant on the trail.

After about an hour and a half of climbing, the summit can be seen in the distance.

“When you reach the top, you are rewarded with the best view on the island, where on a clear day you are able to see many of the neighbouring islands in the Cyclades cluster”.

After spending a few moments taking in the crisp air from the top (or perhaps a picnic lunch), there is the option of an extreme descent via a cave (believed to be where Zeus was born) or to return by the same route.



Other walks around Naxos are clearly marked by coloured spots and signs. A few favourites are the walks between small towns and villages, where many local restaurants and shops are found along the walking trails, offering local produce and interesting hand painted souvenirs.

The city of Naxos itself has much to offer as well, with plenty of options for dinner, ice cream or coffee along the harbour as you take in one of the famous Greek sunsets. You can't miss a visit to the monument to the sun god Apollo or a trip to the old town to discover galleries, museums, and small boutiques, hidden among the narrow maze of cobblestone streets.

By contrast, nearby Santorini may have the most exquisite whitewashed houses and blue roofs, but it is a tourist honeypot, ideal if you are after a faster pace. Luckily the many walks on the island will take you away to calmer more tranquil places.

“Greek culture is inspiring: no one is ever late, the food is always plentiful and ouzo is served by the jug! The people have this relaxed and friendly attitude, seemingly unchanged for generations; they make you feel as if you have joined a new and massive family”.

The islands of Naxos and Santorini are an ideal destination for a relaxed holiday in Greece, full of walking adventure and other activities. It was definitely a trip to remember. See details here: <http://bit.ly/1RnDCN6>

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

AUSTRALIA'S FREYCINET EXPERIENCE – A WALK IN TASMANIA

A first-hand account by Outdoor Travel's Kristen Tufts

After an early morning flight to Hobart, we meet the Freycinet Experience team and the rest of our group at the Old Woolstore. Water bottles, day packs and jackets organized, we board the bus for the drive to Freycinet Peninsula. There are just six guests, a very small, sociable group. We have two guides, Jodie and Eric – a very favourable ratio!

Our driver, Gill, is what's known as a 'local character.' He has lots of stories to tell as we wind our way through Hobart and onwards to Coles Bay. What he doesn't know about the road between Hobart and Coles Bay isn't worth knowing. We stop for a gourmet morning tea (raspberry and almond friands) at Spiky Beach, near the convict-built Spiky Bridge. We have expansive views across to Maria Island and the Freycinet Peninsula as we sip our tea and munch our friands and fruit.



We're lucky, the weather is favourable today so on arrival into Coles Bay we head straight for the jetty to board the *Naturaliste* for our journey to Schouten Island, a large island off the southern tip of the Freycinet Peninsula. Shep, the captain of the *Naturaliste*, steers us through the water, down the length of the peninsula, then around towards Slaughterhouse Bay, so named because of the whaling station that once was there. We have amazing views of the Hazards, of Hazards Beach and Little Refuge Island, Mt Graham (which we'll hike up tomorrow), Mt Freycinet and Cooks Beach. During the ride we see a number of waterbirds, including albatross, pied oystercatchers, cormorants, white-bellied sea eagles, and pacific gulls; fish jumping from the ocean; and a seal frolicking in the waves.

Shep pulls up on the beach at Schouten Island and we disembark by the ladder on the bow.

“The beach is made up of tiny pebbles of white or clear quartz and pink feldspar, and the water is unbelievably clear. Jodie and Eric pull out lunch, and while we're eating, they both have a quick swim in the clear cold water”.

We sit in the sun eating gourmet baguettes from the café in Coles Bay, followed by the most delicious macadamia-chocolate chip cookies I've ever tasted. The guides set out the Trangia stove for a hot drink, and I decide after that decadent lunch that I should have a quick swim too. The water is positively invigorating – takes the breath clear out of my lungs when I dive in – so I don't stay in long, but every nerve ending feels fully alive so it's well worth it.

Jodie and Cap'n Shep head off to catch us some dinner, while the rest of us decide to hike up Bear Hill. We cross a stream then head through banksia and casuarina forest until we get to the exposed granite face of Bear Hill. After some scrambling we're rewarded with views back towards the Hazards and Mt Graham and Mt Freycinet and across to Maria Island and the mainland. We descend back to the beach where we meet two successful fishermen; we re-board the boat and take off back to Coles Bay.

Gill drives us back to Friendly Beaches and we walk along the beach to the unmarked access track to Friendly Beaches Lodge. Leaving the beach we walk through casuarina and gum tree forest to the lodge; it's a very quiet and peaceful approach, totally in tune with the low-impact, low-profile, sustainable intentions behind the lodge design.

We're met on the huge deck of the lodge by Hannah and Daniel, the lodge hosts and co-ordinators, who have water and ginger cordial for thirsty hikers. We sit in the lounge area of the lodge for afternoon tea (freshly baked banana bread with orange honey butter), and Daniel and Hannah tell us a bit more about Friendly

Beaches Lodge – its owner, its history, its eco-credentials. Composting toilets, rainwater, composted food scraps, limited solar power – we are without phone reception and without re-charging power, so our lodge stay is a refreshing time out from technology and devices. The main lodge is beautifully warm due to the log fires.

We're shown to our sleeping areas – there are two sleeping lodges branching out from the main lodge, each with four bedrooms, a sitting area with a wood-burning stove, two composting toilets, a clawfoot bath and a shower. The beds are enormous and furnished with high quality linen and cosy doonas. After unpacking and freshening up, we head back to the main lodge for canapés (Tasmanian cheeses, including a wonderful King Island triple cream Brie) and local Riesling and pinot noir. There's time before dinner to chat with our fellow guests or enjoy the huge library.

“Dinner tonight, served at the huge, candle-lit timber table, is the freshly caught crumbed flathead with garlic wedges, dill and caper mayo, and salad, followed by vanilla pannacotta with macerated berries. Delicious is an understatement”.

Most of us retire quite early tonight – it's been a long day, especially if you awoke at 3.30am to catch an early morning flight to Hobart. I would highly recommend coming in to Hobart the night before the trip – it's too exhausting otherwise.

Day 2 – Decision time today, over Mount Graham or along the coastal track?

After an early morning wake-up and a breakfast of warm croissants, local jam, a selection of cereals, and boiled eggs, now we need to decide if we're heading over Mount Graham (from sea level to 579m, 16km in total), or along the coastal track (no elevation gain/loss, 12km). Gill drives us back to Coles Bay where we re-join Shep on the Naturaliste.

Those of us who decide to go over the mountain are dropped off in choppy surf at one end of Cooks Beach (the coastal walkers normally disembark at Bryan's Beach, but today due to the chancy weather, they get off at the far end of Cooks Beach, near Cooks Hut).

We mountain walkers (four of us, ably led by Jodie), head up through varying casuarina, banksia, ti-tree and sclerophyll eucalypt forest, over granite flats, past impressive boulders towards Mt Graham. The track is easy at first, then soon starts to climb. We have morning tea, then hit the saddle, walk past the turn off to Mt Freycinet (the highest point on the peninsula) and onward to Mt Graham.

“Along the way we see trigger plants, beautiful pink epacris impressa, coral lichen looking (and feeling) exactly like its namesake, and sunshine wattle in flower. Through ti-tree scrub and buttongrass plains we approach the summit, then the route becomes scrambly over rough granite”.

The summit offers terrific views towards the Hazards, over Hazards Beach, out to the Tasman Sea and of course of the iconic Wineglass Bay. After photo ops we climb and scramble back down through ti-tree and over buttongrass on a fairly damp track (appreciating the water-resistant hiking boots right about now) into a little gully or saddle where we take lunch.

After lunch we descend through gum trees and past giant granite boulders to Quartzite Ridge – step carefully or risk sending a tumble of beautiful white and silver quartzite into your fellow walkers. We continue down through eucalypt forest to Wineglass Bay campground, then onto the beach. We stumble across a huge display of whalebones laid out carefully on the beach, and Eric, who has left the coastal walkers snoozing down the other end of Wineglass Bay. Those of us who are game for a swim change into our bathers and plunge into the invigorating waters of Wineglass Bay. Whalebones litter the sea floor here, and Jodie tells us that the wineglass shape of the bay is only one reason for its name; there was once a whaling station here at the southern end of the bay, and the waters of the bay would run red with the blood of slaughtered whales.



After taking a sombre moment to reflect on the gruesome history of such an idyllic spot, we start our walk to the northern end of the beach, where we re-join our coastal walkers. They were dropped off at the opposite end of Cooks Beach, where they explored the heritage hut. They then walked Cooks Beach and Hazard Beach, cut across the isthmus to Wineglass Bay and relaxed awaiting us there.

When we meet up we head up a well-maintained track to the Wineglass Bay lookout, where many of the photos of this iconic location are taken. By this time of day the crowds here have dispersed – we're almost the only people here. Despite a forecast of mid-afternoon rain, we've had great weather today, but now we see some dark clouds on the horizon, so we walk quickly down to the car park, racing the rain. We're met at the car park by a Bennetts Wallaby and by Gill, who drives us back to the lodge.

Back at the lodge a range of local Tasmanian beers and ciders are arrayed on the table for us, along with a selection of nuts, dips and biscuits, and some refreshing watermelon. This is when the rain starts to come down, rather heavily – very glad I'm not camping!

After freshening up with a well-earned hot shower or relaxing bath, we head back to the main lodge for dinner – lamb chops (or falafel) with raita, harissa, rice pilaf, cucumber salad and roasted vegetable salad, served with a local pinot noir or a cool-climate chardonnay, followed by rhubarb crumble with Tassie vanilla and wattleseed ice cream. Then, after our 'map chat' about tomorrow's plans, we exhaustedly trickle off to bed, despite the offers of wine, tea and coffee and an impromptu guitar concert from Jodie.

Day 3 – Wake-up to the sun's rays lightening the casuarina trees through the window above my bed.

A cooked breakfast – scrambled eggs with tomato, mushrooms, bacon and rye sourdough toast. Gill drives us toward Bluestone Bay, and we alight just before the bay. We walk down the 4WD track to Bluestone Bay and spot the tracks of wombat, wallaby and either devil or quoll. We take a quick detour to the sea cliffs – no rock climbers or abseilers today though – then head down the track to the bay. Rain threatens, and in fact a few drops fall, and some of us even get out the wet weather gear.

The bay beach is covered with lovely rounded granite stones, made smooth by the ocean. Here Jodie and Eric perform a 'soul cleansing' – or is that sole cleansing? – scrubbing our boots to make sure we don't carry phytophthora root rot into this low-traffic area of the national park. We head off on a secret track through the bush, stopping at the site of an Aboriginal midden where we learn more about the first inhabitants of the area. We continue up along the ridgeline above the ocean, with views out over the Tasman to the Nuggets, through varied bush including banksia, casuarina and tea tree.

Jodie leaves us to trek up ahead, and at about mid-day we see why – we come across a beautifully laid out picnic lunch in a clearing at the high point of the hike. Very civilized, tablecloth and all, and including delicious bread rolls, salads, smoked meats from the local butcher, Tasmanian cheeses and chili-chocolate cookies.

After lunch we descend through wet sclerophyll forest, seeing rare winged sporidium, several kinds of moss and lichen (including today a spongy coral lichen, after absorbing last night's rain), and many healthy grass trees (Xanthorrea). We see what we think (and hope!) is Tassie devil scat – it would be great if there were healthy Tassie devils in the area. We pass through areas looking like deliberately planted rock gardens and past a disused tin exploration mine, finally emerging from the bush near Freshwater Lagoon, thronged with black swans. We follow a 4WD track to the southern end of Friendly Beaches, where some of us have a very quick, very invigorating dip in the very cold Tasman Sea!

“Friendly Beaches is nearly deserted bar a handful of people playing beach cricket; these five people and two kayakers are the only other humans we've encountered today”.

We have a leisurely stroll up Friendly Beaches, past Saltwater Lagoon (pelicans, black swans and wood ducks today). It's a chilly walk up the beach, as the wind is fairly blustery and the sun is dipping below Mt Mary.

Warm scones with clotted cream and local jam for afternoon tea – we are definitely in danger of getting spoiled – and the lodge is cosy and warm thanks to the log fire. Canapes in the lounge tonight are pretty special – local oysters (we are near Great Oyster Bay, after all), baked Brie with maple syrup and pecans, and Spring Vale sparkling wine. Dinner is equally special – eye fillet on a bed of potato and celeriac mash, with oven roasted Dutch carrots and pan-fried asparagus, served with local cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir or pinot gris. Dessert is molten chocolate pudding with cream.

After our nightly 'map chat' and a slide show of Peter's photos from the day in the toasty lounge area, I head off to my king-sized bed with its comfy doona in our fire-warmed sleeping lodge.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Day 4 – Cruisy is the word of the day. No wake-up call so I stay in bed for ages under my cosy doona.

Its colder today so I head down to the beach for a hot drink (we have the option of a stretch class which I decide against, a hot cup of tea sounds much more appealing). We see a pod of dolphins some 200 metres off shore, probably following a school of fish as they are shadowed by an albatross). Eric and Jodie both have a swim but no one else is game.

Back to the lodge for a light breakfast of raisin toast with local jams, honey and even local peanut butter. Then there's an option for a short walk, about 3 km, mostly on the lodge property which is a leasehold within the national park. We've been promised a big brunch so a walk seems advisable. We walk past fossil sites – there are literally fossils littering the ground underfoot – and through casuarina, gum and banksia trees up the flank of Mt Mary, then along a ridge before dropping down to Saltwater Lagoon, populated by pelicans, black swans, ducks and lapwings. Then out and along the beach back to the turnoff to the lodge, where the bravehearts among us have a swim in the cold surf.

And now it's time to freshen up and pack, to meet for a gala gourmet brunch. For me the brunch highlights are the salads – spinach, haloumi and avocado with a lemon dressing, and rocket, apple, blue cheese and toasted Tasmanian walnuts with a balsamic honey dressing – and there are also pizzas, zucchini and sweetcorn fritters with smoked ocean trout, and spinach and ricotta phyllo parcels. Then after a quick digestive cup of tea or coffee it's time to bid farewell to Eric, Daniel and Hannah and head back down to the beach, to leave Friendly Beaches Lodge the same way we came to it. We walk the northern part of Friendly Beaches, passing many interesting rocky reefs, made of very different rock to the rest of the peninsula (chunky conglomerate, striated basalt), and heaps of animal tracks especially wallaby and wandering wombat. We meet Gill at Isaacs Point, and board the bus with some sadness and say farewell to the Freycinet peninsula.

“We get some beautiful views back across to the peninsula, Schouten Island and Maria Island, and drive past vineyards covered with autumn-leaved vines yellow and red, only a few still with black grapes hanging heavily, waiting to be picked”.

We stop briefly at a bush garden outside Orford – sculptures and a waterfall in an old quarry – then we are dropped at Hobart airport where we hug our new-found friends good-bye.

For details of the Freycinet Peninsula guided walk in Tasmania see: <http://bit.ly/1DdoueU>

OUTDOOR TRAVEL IS ON FACEBOOK:



If you enjoy our newsletters we also have a Facebook page where you can see our latest offers, photos, news stories more frequently and can make comments or ask questions about our many active holidays. Why not join today click and 'like' this link: <http://on.fb.me/1YzgDzX>

Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd has operated in Victoria as a travel agent for over 25 years. Our multi-talented team includes qualified and experienced travel industry professionals.

If we can help with flights, travel insurance, accommodation and any other travel arrangements please call Yvette or Kristen at our Fares Desk on (03) 57501 044 or email fares@outdoortravel.com.au

For our latest airfares to Europe see this link: <http://bit.ly/1NTMRhQ>

Call us directly on (03) 57501 441 if you want to discuss more detailed itinerary planning.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations

- Call Toll free: 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright VIC 3741, Australia.

To be removed from unsubscribe click here: <http://bit.ly/1FbRyyS> then look for the **UNSUBSCRIBE** button.