

Tasmania

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rolling into **Coles Bay** (p171) in view of the musk-tinted Hazards
- Beach-hopping south from Hobart to **Cockle Creek** (p177)
- Burrowing through rainforest on a detour to **Liffey Falls** (p188)
- Rising out of Queenstown through an otherworldly landscape on the **99 Bend Road** (p202)
- Cruising through World Heritage wilderness amid the forest, waterfalls, peaks and rivers of Tasmania's **Southwest** (p193)

TERRAIN

Hilly throughout the island, switching from wild and mountainous in the west to hill-ribbed coast in the east.

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In so many ways Australia's island state is often an afterthought, but not among cyclists. The smallest of Australia's states, Tasmania is arguably the country's best region for cycle touring, offering achievable goals – east coast, west coast, the full circuit – in realistic time frames, cool summer cycling and some of Australia's most striking landscapes.

Tasmania is always beautiful and often demanding – flat, here, is a relative term – with most cyclists migrating to the east coast in search of the fewest bumps and the finest coastal scenery along stretches of beach that might embarrass the rest of the nation if they had the heat to match. Riders who prefer mountains will find one of the country's best highland routes along Tasmania's west coast, with views of shapely peaks such as Cradle Mountain and Frenchmans Cap and brief coastal respite in Strahan.

If you've arrived on the ferry in Devonport, you might prefer to ride straight on down through Tasmania's heart on the Across the Central Plateau ride. Less popular than the coasts, it is far from the second-cousin option. The climb up through the Great Western Tiers, past Liffey Falls, is one of the great sections of riding in the state, while the plateau is a multi-speckled land of lakes and isolation; bring a rod and reel if you're the least bit inclined to angling.

Heading to the last stop before Antarctica, the Cockle Creek ride hugs Tasmania's southern shores. Here, in an area often overlooked by cyclists, you'll find some of that elusive flat riding in combination with beaches, island views, caves and hot springs.





ENVIRONMENT

Tasmania separated from mainland Australia between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago when rising seas created stormy Bass Strait. Its highest mountain, Mt Ossa, reaches only 1617m but much of the interior is extremely rugged. The coasts' shallow bays and broad estuaries derive from postglacial flooding of river valleys. The Central Plateau, which was covered by a single ice sheet, is a sometimes bleak environment dotted with thousands of lakes. Most of the island's western half is a maze of mountainous ridges bearing signs of recent glaciation. The major environmental differences across the state are largely due to the interaction of prevailing moist westerly winds with these mountains; the rainforest

valleys and sometimes snow-capped western mountains contrasting with the mild climate of the eastern 'sun coast'.

The diverse flora ranges from the dry forests of the east, to the alpine moorlands of the centre and the rainforests of the west. Many of the state's plants are unlike those found in the rest of Australia and have ties with species that grew more than 50 million years ago, when the southern continents were joined as Gondwana. Tasmania's eucalyptus trees range from the swamp gum, which is the tallest flowering plant in the world (growing to 100m), to the small, shrubby alpine varnished gum. The famous Huon pine can live for thousands of years. Others, such as King Billy, pencil and