

Launceston & Around

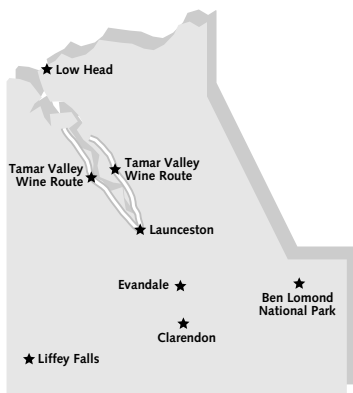


If you wanted to create the perfect pocket-sized city, you'd probably start by making it small enough to stroll around. You might add agreeable old architecture, interspersed with parks, and you'd probably place it somewhere near the water. Downtown you'd give it art galleries, a great museum, plenty of enticing places to shop and, of course, some excellent eateries. Finally you might arrange some gentle countryside around it. If you did all that, you might have just created Launceston. The city really is a bit of a gem; it has shed its former stolid, country-bumpkin air and is now surprisingly artsy and sophisticated. It's still got a relaxed, rural sort of feel – rush hour lasts barely 10 minutes – and it's only 10 minutes out into the country. And remarkable Cataract Gorge brings the wilds into the heart of town. Midweek you may find few signs of a rollicking nightlife, but you can hang out in the cool cafés and restaurants on Charles St, get your museum fix at the fabulous Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, or romantically wander the waterside boardwalks of the Seaport at dusk.

The vines of the Tamar Valley are a wine-bibber's Valhalla: the tastings and cellar doors will keep you merry. You'll want to take in the reed-fringed banks of the gorgeous Tamar River and the wide horizons bounded by craggy Ben Lomond National Park to the east. There's lots of the past to absorb too: historic towns like Evandale; Clarendon and Woolmers homesteads; and the lighthouses and maritime instalments of George Town and Low Head.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Finding the wild within the city at Launceston's magnificent **Cataract Gorge** (p202)
- Swooshing down the slopes at **Ben Lomond National Park** (p226)
- Strolling the 'Paris end' of **Launceston's Charles St** (p210) and settling in at one of its hip cafés for a latte
- Quaffing some fine wines and stocking up at the cellar doors in the **Tamar Valley Vineyards** (p213)
- Feeling like you've stepped onto the set of *Gone with the Wind* as you admire the neo-classical stately home at **Clarendon** (p225)
- Watching the world's tiniest penguins emerge from the sea at **Low Head** (p221)
- Walking through the myrtle and sassafras rainforest to exquisite, multi-tiered **Liffey Falls** (p223)
- Cheering on the riders as they career dangerously around town at Evandale's **National Penny Farthing Championships** (p225)



LAUNCESTON

☎ 03 / pop 71,000

When you visit Launceston, you'll want to do so with your walking shoes on. This is a city to stroll around – from the green spaces of the city's parks, to the wilds of Cataract Gorge, to the streets of the city centre lined with superb architecture. If you've got a few days, you'll want to sample some of its great restaurants and cafés, visit its museums, and perhaps take a cruise on the Tamar River to see the city and surrounds from the water. Be sure to take it slow here, though. When in Rome...

HISTORY

Bass and Flinders were the first Europeans to sight Launceston's Tamar River when they sailed in here on their 1798 voyage of discovery. The first settlement was established in 1804, when the British, intent on beating the French in claiming this island, built a military post at what's today George Town. Not long after, an expedition scouted south and found the present-day site of Launceston, naming it for the English seaside town in Cornwall – although this version came to be pronounced *Lon-ses-ton*. Early Launceston was both a port and a military headquarters. By 1827 it already had a population of 2000, and was shipping wool and wheat from the surrounding districts. By the 1850s the town was Tasmania's second major centre and was proclaimed a municipality. In 1871 tin was discovered at Mt Bischoff, which further cemented Launceston's fortunes as a trading hub and a decade later it opened its own stock exchange. In the 20th century it has been an important service town for the rich agricultural region that surrounds it.

ORIENTATION

The city grid forms around the Brisbane St Pedestrian Mall, which runs between Charles and St John Sts. Flanking the old seaport on the Tamar are a string of contemporary riverfront eateries and a resort hotel. West of the city is Cataract Gorge, a rugged ravine that's one of the city's major tourist drawcards. Charles St south of the CBD is emerging as a caffeinated, bohemian enclave.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Angus & Robertson (Map p204; ☎ 6334 0811; 80-82 St John St) A popular bookery.

Birchalls (Map p204; ☎ 6331 3011; 118-120 Brisbane St) Considered Australia's oldest bookshop (c 1844).

Internet Access

Cyber King Internet Lounge (Map p204; ☎ 6334 2802; 113 George St; per min 15c, per hr \$5; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun)

Medical Services

Launceston General Hospital (Map p203; ☎ 6348 7111; 287-289 Charles St)

St Vincent's Hospital (Map p204; ☎ 6332 4999; 5 Frederick St)

Money

ATMs are installed at most banks in the city centre, which are mainly on St John St or Brisbane St near the Mall.

Post

Main post office (Map p204; ☎ 13 13 18; 111 John St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Visitors centre (Map p204; ☎ 1800 651 827, 6336 3133; www.ltv Tasmania.com.au, cnr St John & Cimitiere Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun & public holidays) The centre houses racks of pamphlets and handles statewide accommodation, tour and transport bookings.

SIGHTS

Cataract Gorge

Ten minutes' wander west of the city centre, edging the residential suburb of Trevallyn, is the magnificent **Cataract Gorge** (Map p203; www.launcestoncataractgorge.com.au; ☎ 9am-dusk). It's amazing to have such a wild area cut right into the core of the city: the bushland, cliffs and tumbling waters of the South Esk River here really feel a million miles away from town.

Two walking tracks straddle the gorge, leading from Kings Bridge up to the Cliff Grounds Reserve and First Basin, where there's an outdoor **swimming pool** (admission free; ☎ Nov-Mar), picnic spots and fine dining at the **Gorge Restaurant** (☎ 6331 3330; meals \$18-32; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) with sociable peacocks loitering outside. There's also a **kiosk** serving snacks and afternoon teas. Trails lead from here up to the Cataract and Eagle Eyrie Lookouts. The gorge walk takes about 30 minutes; the northern trail is the easier, while the southern Zig Zag Track has some steep climbs as it passes along the cliff tops. The whole scene is impressively