

The West



There are no two ways about it: Tasmania's west truly is its wilder side. We're talking endless ocean beaches where the surf pounds in from the Southern Ocean, ancient mossy rainforests dripping emerald green, whisky-tinted rivers, glacier-sculpted mountain peaks and boundless untamed horizons that make you feel you're the only soul in the world.

There's a rugged human side to this part of Tasmania too. The first inhabitants braved the west's ferocious weather indomitably; but convicts transported into aching isolation on Sarah Island suffered extreme privations, leaving behind desperate legends of mutiny and cannibalism. Later piners and miners ventured into rivers and forests here. Outdoor adventurers were the next to feel the lure of the wild west. Their depictions of this region's beauty helped win Australia's most intense environmental protest, the battle to save the Gordon and Franklin Rivers from a hydroelectric dam. Even today, west-coasters are different: they have a certain rough-at-the-edges, no-nonsense charm. The visitor will find a vast outdoor playground: multiday hikes, such as the Overland Track, to tackle and river rafting on the incredible Franklin River. There's sailing, jet-boating, sandboarding and helicopter flights, or more gentle outdoor pleasures like chasing the reflections on a mirror-calm Gordon River cruise, riding through the rainforests on a restored heritage railway or being driven to the heart of it all in a comfortable 4WD.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sand-boarding on the towering sand dunes at **Henty Dunes** (p278)
- Waking up on a sailboat on the **Gordon River** (p279) to reflections so perfect, they'll have you puzzling which way is up
- Shouldering a backpack and striding out through Tasmania's breathtaking alpine heart on the **Overland Track** (p290)
- Getting some full wilderness immersion on a 10-day rafting journey down the wild **Franklin River** (p288)
- Watching the sun sink towards South America and feeling the awesome power of the waves on 33km-long **Ocean Beach** (p278)
- Riding the rails through the rainforest between Strahan and Queenstown on the **West Coast Wilderness Railway** (p286)
- Swooping low over the King River and landing on the forested Teepookana Plateau on a **scenic helicopter flight** (p281)
- Climbing from the mud to the quartzite peak of remote **Frenchmans Cap** (p288), one of Tasmania's more off-the-beaten-track bushwalks



Getting There & Around

Tassielink (☎ 6230 8900, 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) operates two/five times a week in winter/summer from Hobart to Bronte Junction (\$33.40 one way, 2¼ to 2¾ hours), Derwent Bridge (\$39.90 one way), Lake St Clair (\$46.40 one way, three to 3½ hours), the start of the Frenchmans Cap walk (\$48.20 one way, four hours), Queenstown (\$58.50 one way, 5½ to six hours) and Strahan (\$67.70 one way, 6½ to 8½ hours, times varying due to Queenstown stopover); and return. From Launceston, Tassielink offers a return service to Deloraine (\$10.60, 40 minutes), Sheffield (\$27, two hours 10 minutes), Gowrie Park (\$35.60, 2½ hours), Cradle Mountain (\$53.30, 3¼ hours), Tullah (\$46.10, five hours), Rosebery (\$48.10, 5¼ hours), Zeehan (\$55.80, six hours), Queenstown (\$64.70, 6½ hours) and Strahan (\$73.90, eight hours). This route is covered three to seven days a week, depending on the season, and includes a connection service from the ferry dock in Devonport to the bus station and vice versa.

For information about additional services for those walking the Overland Track, see p297.

Drivers heading north up the Western Explorer Rd should fill up at Zeehan, Tullah or Waratah, as there's no fuel at either Savage River or Corinna.

TULLAH

☎ 03 / pop 270

Long isolated in the dreaming rainforests of the West Coast Range, and wrapped around by deep, tannin-brown rivers, the little town of Tullah was established when mineral riches were discovered here in 1887. The lead-zinc-copper-silver-ore bearing body in nearby Mt Farrell sustained the town until the mine closed in the 1970s.

The name Tullah comes from an Aboriginal word meaning 'meeting of two rivers', and indeed, Tullah is almost an island: there are bridge crossings to enter and leave town, and seven dams in the vicinity. The town shelters in the nape of majestic Mts Farrell and Murchison, and the waters of Lake Rosebery lap close.

For most of its history, Tullah was only accessible to the outside world by horse or on foot. Later came a narrow gauge train and only in 1962, a road. In the 1970s and 1980s, Tullah was a 'hydro-town' accommodating workers building hydroelectric dams. It was a rollicking time: with 800 hardworking men

in town the pub regularly served 38 18-gallon beer kegs in one week.

Though posthydro Tullah has been a somnolent backwater, like much of the west coast it's currently experiencing a mining boom again, driven by the rise in metal prices. Old mines are reopening and there's an air of optimism about. It's still a quiet place though, offering visitors accommodation as well as trout fishing, boating and horseback riding.

Information

The friendly folks at the **Tullah Tavern Museum and Café** (☎ 6473 4141; Farrell St; ☎ 9am-5pm; ☑) dole out information on the area, as well as running an informative display on mining and hydro times. Pick up some of the mineral-bearing rocks to find out for yourself what a weighty issue mining is here.

Sights & Activities

At **Radford Woodcrafts** (☎ 6473 4344; ☎ 9am-4pm most days) gallery and workshop you can breathe the woody aromas of Tassie timbers, stroke some smooth grains, and buy quality lamps, clocks and other woodware, including a wide range of colourful wooden genie's bottles!

There are several scenic drives alongside major hydroelectric dams and lakes. Three kilometres north of town you can follow a road west for 55km to **Reece Dam** and then a further 29km to Zeehan. Another scenic road, the **Anthony Rd**, starts 5km south of town and heads over the flanks of Mt Murchison towards Queenstown – providing good views as it crosses the West Coast Range. From town, a scenic minor road also leads to **Murchison Dam**.

The area's best **walks** include **Mt Farrell** (three hours return) and **Mt Murchison** (1275m; six hours return).

To commemorate the days of steam when Tullah's only link to the outside world was by train, local residents have restored **Wee Georgie Wood** (☎ 0417-142 724; Murchison Hwy; adult/child/pensioner/family \$6/2/3/12), one of the narrow-gauge steam locomotives that operated on the town's original railway. From late September to early April, on Saturdays or Sundays, usually between 10am and 4pm, passengers can take 20-minute rides through the hills and rainforest, on part of the original track.

Tullah Horse-Back & Boat Tours (☎ 6473 4289, 0409-809 441; www.tullahhorseback.com.au; Mackintosh Track) provides a perfect way to discover the back