

Must like long walks on the beach

Before experiencing the Bay of Fires walk through north-eastern Tasmania, **Nigel Bowen** had always considered himself at two with nature. ►



The Gardens, Bay of Fires Conservation Area

PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & SCOTT SPORLEDER, MATADOR



Bay of Fires Lodge



Bay of Fires Lodge

PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & SIMON KENNY

It was dinnertime on the first night of the Bay of Fires walk when my distaste for The Great Outdoors began to dissipate. The first five hours of this four-day adventure – spent tramping along a pristine section of the Tasmanian coastline had stirred traumatic childhood memories of camping expeditions involving insect bites, sunburn and answering the call of nature behind a bush.

But after a seemingly interminable trek we had arrived at base camp, a collection of well-appointed ‘tents’ made of canvas and sliding glass doors affixed to a solid steel frame. While the three couples also doing the walk and I freshened up (there was an al fresco bush shower and, thank God, an amenities block with drop toilets) our two young guides went snorkelling and harvested a collection of squirming

abalone any restaurateur would have paid top dollar for. It was cleaned, wrapped in foil along with lemon, ginger and chilli, barbecued then served, followed by melt in your mouth salmon on a bed of soba noodles and bok choy, with meringue and chocolate mousse for dessert, all washed down with quality Tassie wine and beer.

After dinner I repaired to my bed and drifted into a full-bellied deep sleep gazing at a thousand incandescent stars. I began to think there might be something to this glamping business after all.

Making it to the lodge

Day Two – a 14km walk along the coast with occasional detours inland – could have sorely tested my newfound affection for Mother Nature but the meditative state of doing nothing

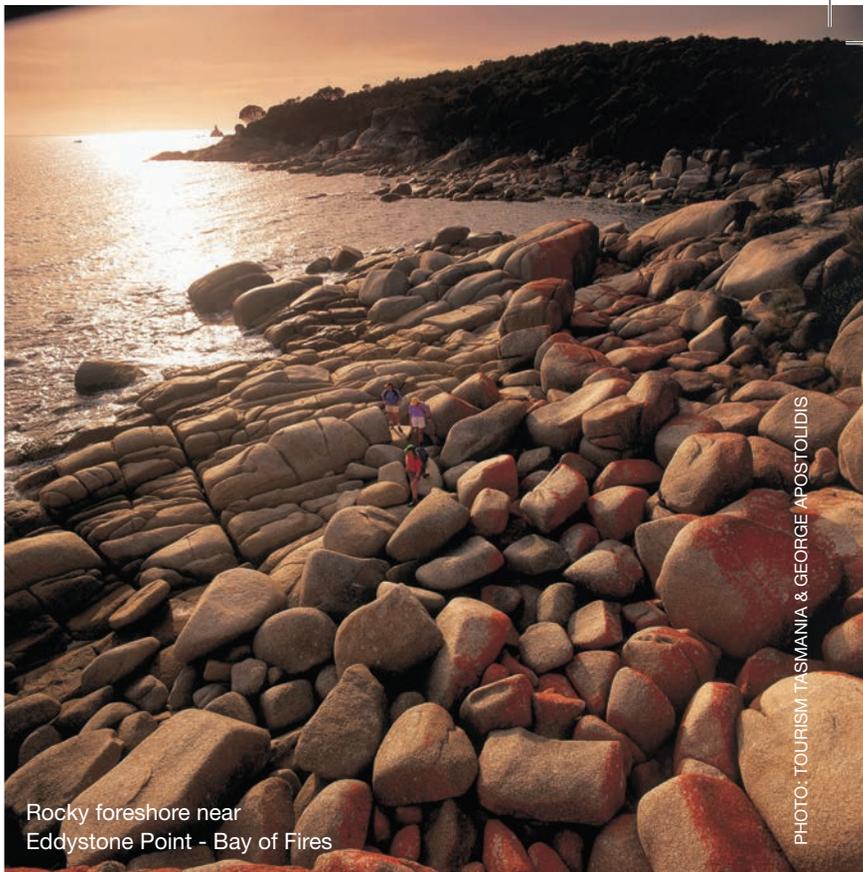
more than place one foot in front of the other while inhaling fresh sea air and luxuriating in a deep silence compensated for my sore feet.

Our guides had implored us to leave our mobile phones behind and everyone was glad they did. On a planet groaning under the weight of seven billion people there are a few places you can truly ‘get away from it all’ anymore but wandering incommunicado through Mount William National Park in the largely uninhabited north-eastern corner of Tasmania comes pretty close.

Thankfully, our guides don’t ruin the Zen ambience by prattling unnecessarily, though they are always available to identify exactly what species of wallaby is hopping past, or recount how the original inhabitants of the region used to keep warm

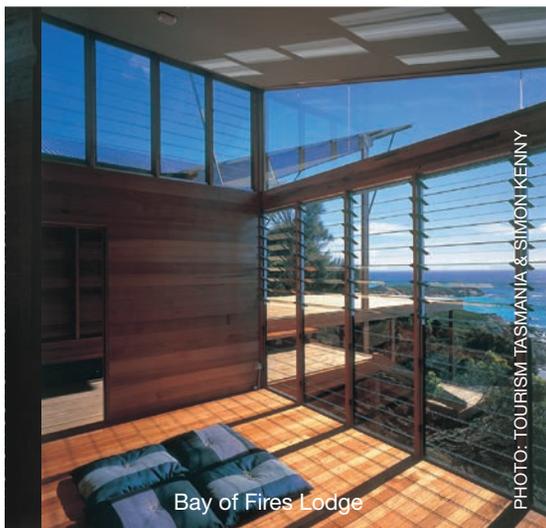


PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & TASMANIAN WALKING COMPANY



Rocky foreshore near Eddystone Point - Bay of Fires

PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & GEORGE APOSTOLIDIS



Bay of Fires Lodge

PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & SIMON KENNY



Ansons Bay River, Bay of Fires Walk
Bay of Fires Lodge

PHOTO: TOURISM TASMANIA & TASMANIAN WALKING COMPANY

in the winter. The original locals maintained a series of campfires along the coastline (hence Bay of Fires) and smearing themselves in seal fat before diving for crayfish.

After an eternity of determined trudging we reach the home stretch of 'barefoot beach'. Everyone pulls off their hiking boots and floats the final few kilometres, treating their tired feet to icy seawater and icing-sugar sand. By four o'clock we've reached the Bay of Fires Lodge, a giant, timber and glass eco-palace with sweeping views, hot showers and a roaring fireplace.

Primal rhythms

By the third day of living in a world with no outside connection, we all seem to have happily regressed to a prehistoric timetable. We wake early, spend the day hunting and gathering

(or hiking and gawking in our case) then return to camp to feast and swap stories of the day's exploits. Today we head inland to the Ansons River to kayak through an aquatic wonderland full of bream, salmon, trevally and flounder all trying to escape the attention of black swans, herons, cormorants and wedge-tailed eagles.

Come mid-afternoon we reach the coast and leave our kayaks for a long walk back to the lodge along the beach.

It's our last night together and the vino flows freely, complementing a lavish pre-dinner cheese platter and three-course meal that wouldn't be out of place at one of Sydney or Melbourne's finest eateries. While we're all middle-aged Australians, we move in very different circles and wouldn't otherwise have much in common. But we've bonded over a wilderness

experience few people will ever share.

The next morning there's the choice of rock fishing, going for a final stroll along the beach or simply lounging around the lodge. I do a bit of all three before we hike for a couple of hours through the eucalypts, tree ferns and spheres of button grass to our waiting minibus. From here it's on to Pipers Brook wine region to enjoy a glass of Apogee's sparkling wine before re-entering the real world.

Switching on my mobile, I see I have 80 plus emails. I switch it off and don't look at it again until I get to Launceston airport the next day. After a reinvigorating spell in the wild, I'm surprised to find I've now developed a distaste for the 24/7 distractions of the modern world. •

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