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The Tahune Adventures site includes walking trails and suspension bridges that overlook the Huon and Picton rivers. PHOTO: TOURISM AUSTRALIA



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Summarise

HOBART, Tasmania – It is a brisk and overcast morning at North West Bay off the coast of Tasmania and I wonder idly how cold the water is.

I will soon find out.

Aboard a pontoon vessel, a wood-fired sauna gathers heat. This is Kuuma Nature Sauna, built on a boat and custom-made for relaxation. The dawn sky lightens into a powder blue as skipper and co-founder Nathan Gore steers us out of the marina.



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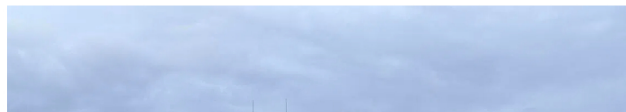
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There are innumerable ways to be immersed in Tasmania's rugged landscapes, including caving, multi-day hikes and sea kayaking. The hardy outdoorsman (or woman) might take on the six-day trek from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair or ascend the iconic mountain on a full-day trek.

But there are just as many options for "soft adventure" – a gentler and no less beautiful way to experience the land. Here are a few worth checking out.

Kuuma Nature Sauna





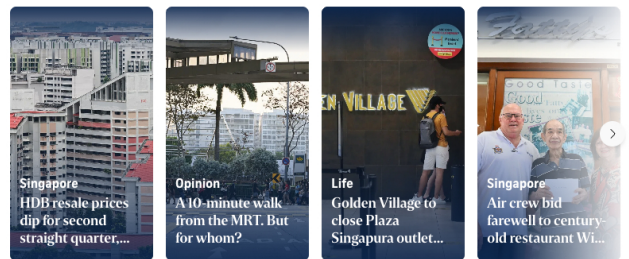
Kuuma Nature Sauna is a pontoon with a sauna on board. ST PHOTO: CLARA LOCK

Enveloped by 75 deg C to 90 deg C warmth and cloaked by a gentle aroma and humidity, I can see why Gore, who was introduced to the Finnish tradition during a ski trip in his teens, decided to introduce it here.

Australia's southernmost state, with its cool climate, seemed the ideal place for Kuuma Nature Sauna, whose name means "hot" in Finnish. Gore and his wife built the boat from scratch at a cost of "between A\$500,000 (S\$446,000) and A\$1 million", engaging a naval architect and tapping contacts from his former career in commercial construction.

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Why a combination of the two? "I like boats and I like saunas," he says.

A boat also facilitates the second part of the sauna ritual, a plunge into chilly water. The combination of heat and cold exposure is said to have a host of health benefits, including reducing stress and inflammation and enhancing sleep.



Guests can relax in a sauna aboard the Kuuma Nature Sauna pontoon. ST PHOTO: CLARA LOCK

The turquoise water is clear enough for me to see the seabed and is an agreeable 16 deg C in autumn – nippy, but not numbingly cold. (Gore says it drops to around 8 deg C in winter.) If you do not want to take the plunge, there is a shower bucket on the boat instead, its water equally bracing. The 90-minute sauna cruises start from A\$90 a person.

Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary



Eastern quolls at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary are part of a nationwide breeding programme. ST PHOTO: CLARA LOCK

Tasmanian devils are the island's most well-known endemic animals, but there are more native species at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary, which focuses on conservation and rehabilitation.

Its Eastern quolls, for instance, are part of a nationwide breeding programme aimed at beefing up their population, which was wiped out on mainland Australia in 1963 by disease, and predators such as the red fox. Wild quolls now remain only in Tasmania, although the marsupial is being reintroduced in protected mainland sites.

The sanctuary's Tasmanian devils are also part of ongoing research for a vaccine to the Devil Facial Tumour Disease – a rare, aggressive and contagious cancer that decimated the wild population to about 15,000 today.

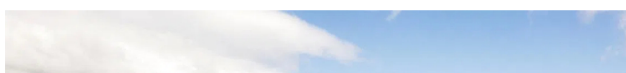
Other animals, rescued from unfortunate fates, have a second chance at a good life. There are seniors like an 11-year-old masked owl which arrived with an injury, an albino common ringtail possum that was found at the base of a tree with an eye injury, and a pair of orphaned tawny frogmouths huddled together.



An albino common ringtail possum at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary. ST PHOTO: CLARA LOCK

Habitats here may appear tired compared with some of Australia's other parks, or the gloss of Singapore's Mandai Wildlife Reserve, but the sanctuary's impact is undeniable. Tickets cost A\$20.50 for children aged three to 15 and A\$35.50 for adults.

Tahune Airwalk





The Tahune Airwalk is a steel canopy walkway that offers a different perspective from the island's more famous mountain peaks and coastal lookouts. PHOTO: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

While Tasmania is no stranger to dramatic scenery, the Tahune Airwalk is a steel canopy walkway that offers a different perspective from the island's more famous mountain peaks and coastal lookouts. Instead of regarding nature from afar, I gaze at eye level at trees such as myrtle beech, celery-top pine and leatherwood, the last one a source of the island's prized leatherwood honey.

From the Eagle Hang Glider, I take in yet another view of the forest. It resembles a gentler zipline – riders are secured in a seat and whisked from ground level into the trees, about 50m above the Huon River, before gliding smoothly back down. The speed is controlled and there are no sudden drops, making it suitable for both children and seniors. Weight restrictions apply. (Safety requirements mean passengers must weigh between 25kg and 120kg. Weight restrictions may vary depending on weather conditions.)



The Eagle Hang Glider resembles a gentler zipline, where riders are secured in a seat and whisked from ground level into the trees. PHOTO: TOURISM AUSTRALIA

The Tahune Adventures site includes both activities as well as walking trails and suspension bridges. Entry costs A\$17.50 for children aged five to 16, and A\$35 for adults. The Eagle Hang Glider costs A\$22 for children and A\$25 for adults.

It is located 90 minutes by road from Hobart, within the Huon Valley – a former hub of Tasmania's apple export industry and part of why the island used to be known as the apple isle.

Declining exports in the 1970s led to limited employment and an exodus of residents, until tourism helped rejuvenate the Huon Valley – including attractions such as Tahune Adventures when it opened in 2001.

Today, the valley warrants at least a day trip from Hobart, with lots to keep visitors occupied. The Hastings Caves and Thermal Springs is another popular attraction and groups can stop for lunch at the family-friendly Willie Smith's Apple Shed, where the cider is crisp and the portions are generous.

The Ploughman's Board (A\$45), for instance, which includes double smoked ham, a British-style pork pie and accompaniments such as apple and date chutney, house pickled onions, Ashgrove Vintage Cheddar, Scotch egg and sourdough bread, can easily feed two to three.



Within the restaurant, visit the small exhibition depicting the story of four Smith generations, which started in 1888 when William Smith planted the first tree in the family orchard.

His son, Ron Smith, worked in the orchard before signing up for active service in World War II, where he fought in South-east Asia against the Japanese army and was captured when Singapore fell. In Changi prison, he won a coin toss with a prison mate to see which of them would volunteer to work on the infamous Thai-Burma “death railway” and survived four years of forced labour before returning home.

Ron Smith’s grandson, current owner Andrew Smith, carries on the fourth-generation family business, which has diversified into cider-making and distilling while continuing to grow apples, and has won multiple cider awards in the last decade. More than a century after the first tree took root, the family business is still evolving, with one eye on the future.

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Travel tips

Airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Scoot and Qantas fly non-stop from Singapore to Melbourne in about 7½ hours, with round-trip flights from about \$500. From there, Jetstar, Virgin Australia and Qantas operate flights to Hobart, which take around 90 minutes and start from \$150 for a round trip. Prices are for flights in August, based on checks by The Straits Times.

Hobart’s luxury properties include Macq01, which bills itself as a storytelling hotel. Each of its 114 rooms and suites tells the story of a notable Tasmanian – my suite, for instance, features a display on Henry Jones, a pioneer of Australia’s jam industry. The hotel also runs storytelling tours, which are free for guests and cost A\$20 for members of the public. Rooms start from about A\$250 a night.



Macq01 Hotel, with 114 rooms and suites, which each tell the story of a notable Tasmanian, also runs storytelling tours. PHOTO: MACQ01 HOTEL

A mid-priced option is the clean and no-frills Best Western Hobart, a five- to 10-minute walk from the main shopping strip. Rooms start from about A\$120 a night. ♦

- The writer was hosted by Tourism Australia.

[Clara Lock](#) is assistant Life editor at The Straits Times and helms the travel section.

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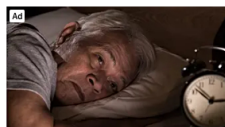
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