

Golf widows rejoice — you're going to love this

Tasmania might be the best place on Earth for golfers and non-golfers to holiday happily together.

By CRAIG TANSLEY



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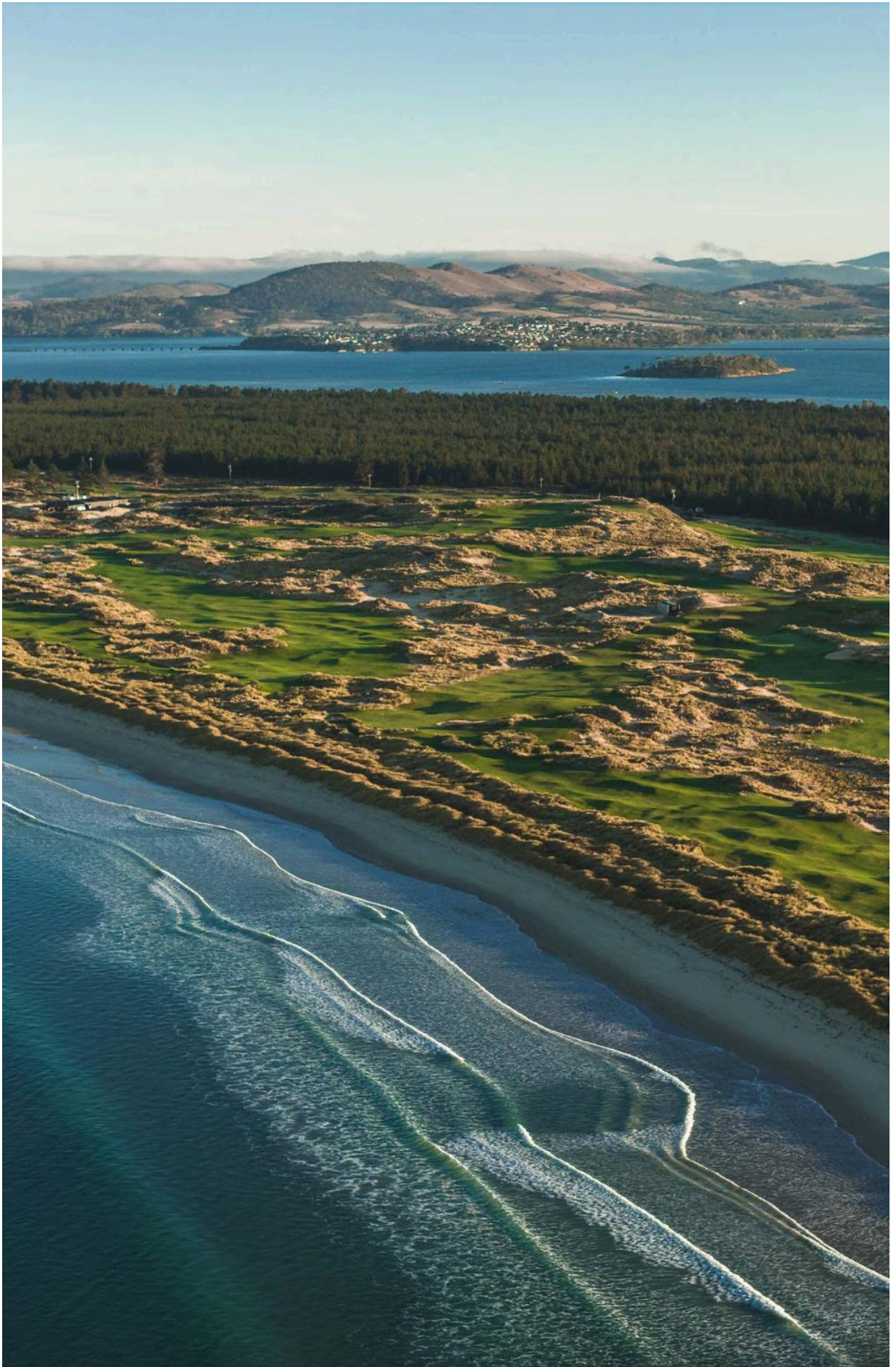
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It's over lunch on day four of our trip to Tasmania that my wife announces this is the best golf trip she's ever been on. She doesn't actually play – but that's the whole point.

Now that a course has opened just outside [Hobart](#) to add to the state's already illustrious stable of world's-best courses, it may be the best place on Earth to bring along non-golfing partners (or friends or family).

I love golf. I've played it since I was seven. But apart from a misguided attempt to include my wife on a tour of [New Zealand's best courses](#) (my persistent efforts to get her to keep her head down during her swing almost ended in the abandonment of our union), these holidays have been taken only with other devotees. Most destinations target groups of golfers focused on doing little else – mostly because they really don't offer much else.

But we've flown to Hobart intent on enjoying a genuine couples' vacation, golf clubs included. Until December, Hobart missed out on the international and mainland golf tourism market. Then 7 Mile Beach opened on the city's eastern coast, swiftly earning a reputation as one of Australia's finest courses.



7 Mile Beach golf course.

Hobart has always been a couples' kind of destination. It's cosy and cute, sheltered by a kilometre-high mountain and beautiful harbour. We have a penthouse apartment at The Finish Line on the water, a short stroll from dinner at Aloft, a restaurant in the city's historic waterfront precinct, Sullivans Cove, offering a chef's menu heavy on local seafood. A ferry goes directly from here to Mona (Museum of Old and New Art), Tasmania's premier attraction. It takes 25 minutes, the same amount of time it takes to drive to 7 Mile Beach.

The next day I'm heading there, riding shotgun with Alix Davis, co-owner of Hobart-based boutique travel operation Tasmanian Golf Experiences, handy for those looking to pair golf with the state's food and wine experiences. Davis says she's noticed an influx of golfers since the course opened.

After a slow drive down a deserted, corrugated, dirt road, the course appears out of nowhere, like golf's version of that famous, fantastical baseball diamond built among cornfields in Kevin Costner's Field of Dreams.

There's 300ha of classic links golf duneland here. Tasmanian PGA golf star Mathew Goggin has devoted the past 15 years to turning what was an old pine plantation into the world's best new links course. He grew up playing around the corner at Royal Hobart Golf Club. Construction has started on a second course on the site, to be ready by late 2028.

I tee off in the crisp, cloudless morning. Fairways are lined with calico-coloured grass and gaping bunkers, and greens teeter on the edge of wildly sloping earth. From them, I can see south across Frederick Henry Bay and north across Pitt Water lagoon. After hooking a tee shot into the dunes, I find a set of Tasmanian devil footprints in the sand.

When I'm done, I'm driven to a wine region 15 minutes away; everything in Tasmania feels close. This is Coal River Valley, one of the state's seven wine regions, home to the colonial-era town of Richmond, with its 200-year-old Georgian buildings and convict-built bridge. My wife arrived here while I was playing and now Davis is driving us to Sisu Wines to eat stone-baked pizza and drink pinot noir and chardonnay in a sleek tasting room built between two mountain ranges.

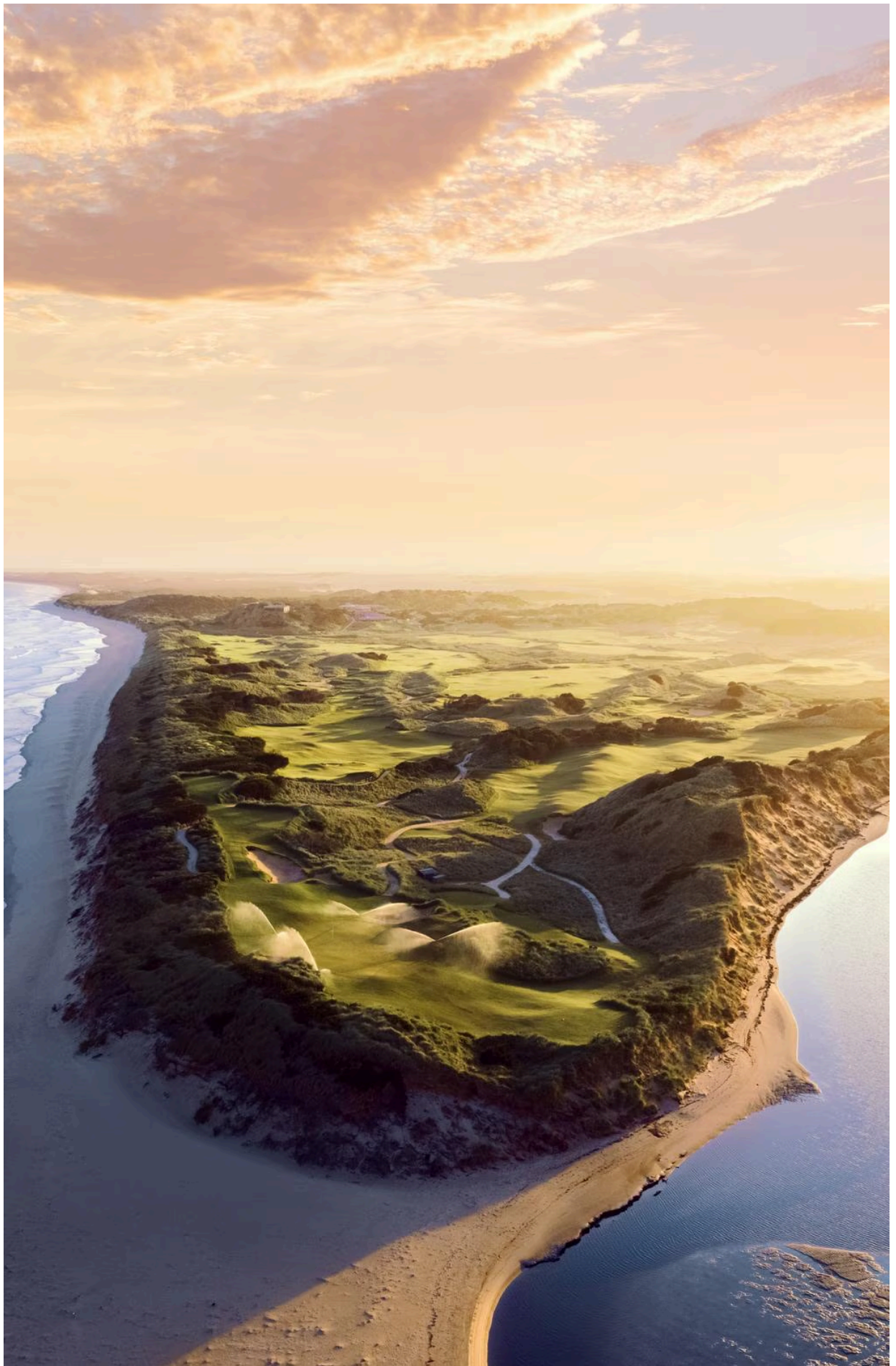


Aloft in Hobart is another fine reason why golfers are embracing this harbour city. Picture: Jon Gazzignato

There's more to do around Hobart, but I'm on limited time and no golf trip to Tasmania should be attempted without travelling further north – anyone who's come here to play golf for the past 20 years has come for one reason: Barnbougle. Then, in 2010, Lost Farm was built right next door to its original 18-hole course (The Dunes), giving golfers another reason. The courses are an hour's drive north of Launceston, beside sleepy farming town Bridport on Bass Strait. There's accommodation and a restaurant on site, though Barnbougle is generally the domain of groups of core golfers.

I'm doing things differently – staying in Launceston, now a Unesco City of Gastronomy. And to drive to Barnbougle from Launceston, I have to travel right through the Tamar Valley, from where most of the produce and wine which earned the city its title originates. Which gives us a lot of options beyond the golf course (there will also be a refurbished championship course 10 minutes' drive from Launceston by February, 2027, when Country Club Tasmania reopens).

Launceston is northern Tasmania's gourmet hub, the spiritual home of the state's paddock-to-plate movement. At Harvest Market on Saturday morning, locals lug shopping bags of oysters straight off the rocks and produce direct from the farm. "Hobart might have Mona, but Launceston has food," Harvest Market president, Andrew Pitt, tells me.



Barnbougle has been the reason golfers have come to Tasmania since 2005. Picture: Jacob Sjoman

At Peppers Silo Hotel, built from four old grain silos on the Tamar River, chef Thomas Pirker constructs our lunch based on what's just been picked and butchered locally. At dinner we take a seat at the bar of very chic inner-city wine bar Havilah.

Barnbougles is reached via a scenic drive through the Tamar Valley. Past the valley and along the north coast, 38 fairways (Lost Farm has 20 holes) browned by salted wind sit beside massive sand dunes as waves crash a few metres away. The courses here, The Dunes and Lost Farm, are consistently in the world's top 50, but there's a rawness about Barnbougles that reminds me this was the dream of a potato farmer (albeit one with an entrepreneurial bent). Each hole feels like it could come with instructions. It has a day spa on site, and a restaurant with a view over the courses and Bass Strait, so non-playing partners have options, and if you wish to stay overnight to play both courses back-to-back, Barnbougles has couples-friendly villas along the sand dunes.



The Finish Line allows you to stay right on Hobart's harbour. Picture: Adam Gibson

After my round, we tour the Pipers River wine region, just northeast of the Tamar, barely 15 minutes' drive away. It's second only to Champagne for the reputation of its sparkling wines. There are more than 30 wineries in the Tamar Valley region and over 60 food operators. It's at a pig farm called Fork it Farm, where we sit at a long table with a tray of local produce and a bottle of sparkling, overlooking a valley of vines, that my wife concludes this is the golfing holiday of her life. I've hacked, and shanked, and sliced, and hooked – humbled by some of the planet's most testing coastal golf layouts. But I've barely had a moment to mope – too busy by far eating

and drinking to replay a single bad shot in my head. Mark Twain called golf “a good walk spoiled”. But maybe he and I – and probably all of us – have just been doing it wrong. discovertasmania.com.au

The writer was a guest of Barnbougles, Sisu Winery, The Finish Line Hobart and Peppers Silo Launceston.

In the know

Play at one of Barnbougles’s two championship courses for \$174 (low season), \$199 (high season) or both for \$295, or all day for \$320; play 18 holes at 7 Mile Beach for \$290. Penthouses at The Finish Line Hobart from \$885 a night; rooms at Peppers Silo Launceston from \$274 a night. Book a golf transfer with Tasmanian Golf Experiences, or rent a car in Launceston.

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