

TASMANIA'S WARM WINTER WELCOME

MasterChef winner, Good Food columnist and cookbook author Adam Liaw invites us to rug up and head to Tasmania to explore the top of the island, where we discover clean, crisp air, lush landscapes and incredible seasonal flavours.



DIGGING LIFE ON THE TRUFFLE ISLE

The French said it couldn't be done. But just a 45-minute drive from Launceston, at the historic riverside town of Deloraine, brother and sister Henry and Anna Terry run Tasmanian Truffles, the island's first truffle farm, and the home of Australia's first black truffle.

Their parents planted hazelnut and oak trees in 1994 in the hope of producing the mysterious and valuable black truffles, and five years later that first black-gold nugget was dug up, smelling like sweet success. Today, with the help of Douglas the truffle dog, the family runs a thriving business that not only produces fresh truffles, but truffle products such as oils, honey and mustard.



Soon after we arrive, Henry invites Adam Liaw to hunt for truffles with Doug, who quickly settles on a section of soil. Adam gets down to smell the soil himself, then gently sweeps away the earth to pull out an impressively round, dense truffle that's worth a cool \$300.

"It's a truly unique experience, arriving here on a cold Tasmanian winter morning, walking through the orchard and digging up truffles with man's best friend," Adam says. "It's exhilarating."

Henry agrees. "It's always exciting to unearth a nice piece of truffle," he says. This is peak season for the farm, with black truffles farmed during the colder months fetching up to \$3000 a kilo.

Tasmanian Truffles offers guided tours (book, tastruffles.com.au). Guests can experience a truffle hunt and dine on a catered spread by Deloraine Deli, including local salmon, cheese and smoked wallaby.

Henry says his home at the foot of the Great Western Tiers is a different world to the rest of Australia, especially in winter.

"I just love going for a hike in the snow, experiencing the silence of no one around you for 30 kilometres, or getting up to Cradle Mountain with a beautiful bottle of red, some lovely food and snuggling up by a fire. It doesn't get better than that."



WINTER TRUFFLE DISHERS TO DIE FOR

With truffles, keep it simple. Dishes with three to four ingredients are best.

- 1 **Homemade pasta** with butter, salt and heaps of truffle shaved on top. You can't beat it if you're using fresh truffle.
- 2 **Scrambled eggs.** Don't be precious about the truffle; be generous.
- 3 **Ice-cream.** Shave the truffle on top. You'll be amazed how good this is.



A GLASS OF TASSIE GOOD CHEER

Fittingly named after the gorge just 400 metres from the property, that was itself named by Launceston's first settlers after a location in Scotland, Corra Linn Distillery is a relative newcomer to Tasmania's whisky distilling boom.

"If you had to look for the picture-perfect vista for a small batch, single malt whisky distillery, this would be it," Adam says. "You've got the rolling hills behind you, John rolling the barrels up the hill by hand. It's exactly what you'd want it to be."

While Corra Linn owes a lot to the pristine water that flows from the region's mountain reserves, it's the carefully selected ingredients and time-honoured process put into place by passionate owner and master distiller John Wielstra that makes this whisky sing.

He is a master at selecting the finest of ingredients, including barley, malt, molasses and yeasts, to create precision, small batch whisky with flavours as diverse as banana, raisin and stone fruit, and John's Corra Linn drop is attracting interest from far beyond this island.

"If you've got even a passing interest in whisky, you would've heard of the amazing things that are happening in Tasmania over the past five to 10 years," says Adam, who on this crisp, clear winter day has warmed his soul with a drop from the premier barrel of Corral Linn whisky. "To come here and see it happening on the ground is what I'd hoped it would be."

The distillery is boutique in size (snug and comfortable like Tassie itself), but the machinery that shines from within John's distilling shed is serious business.

In contrast to a traditional Scottish still, which requires two or three runs to produce the desired alcohol level, his system can do it in one. "It's more efficient, plus it's got a bit of theatre to it," John says. "With the glass pieces you can see what's going on as it's bubbling away."

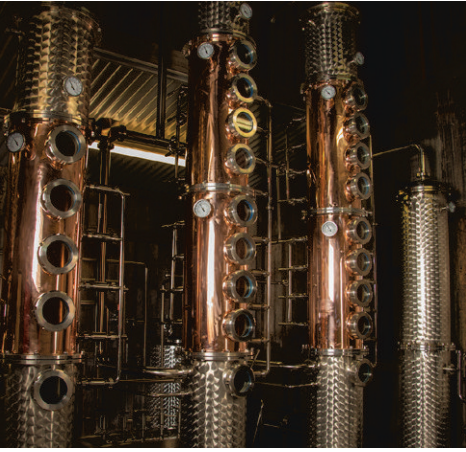
Adam has been to quite a few distilleries around the world. He says what's lovely about Corra Linn is how personal it is to John. "It's a fantastic whisky, but you can see that every step of the process is something that John gets pleasure from," Adam says.

There's an intimacy to visiting Corra Linn that evokes a certain closeness you feel to Tasmania's soul during the winter months. Perhaps this is because it's in John's rather large backyard, but more likely it's due to the connection and relationships on which the local community thrives. As a visitor you get a sense of that.

"If you were sitting at home tasting the whisky, you'd taste a great whisky," Adam says. "But if you come here and taste it with John, you see the glint in his eye. That's the experience. It's not just having a drink, it's being a part of the story."

Tassie whiskies are selling at a premium. Lark Distillery on the Hobart waterfront has bottles starting at \$185, while Sullivans Cove in Cambridge charges up to \$1500 a bottle. "They'll release 200 bottles and sell them in three days," says John, who's currently selling his exclusive amber drop, described by Adam as "smooth as anything, with a lovely vanilla from the oak and not too smoky" for \$239 a bottle.

Corra Linn is participating in Tasmanian Whisky Week 12-18 August, 2019. Just another excuse to visit.



WINTER SPIRIT

Tassie's top drops can whisk you back anytime.

- 1 **Corra Linn*** has prided itself on its precision, small batch production since 2016.
- 2 **Lark Distillery** on Hobart's waterfront was set up in 1992 by local legend Bill Lark. It's since been inducted into the Whisky Hall of Fame.
- 3 **Three Cuts Gin** from Turner Stillhouse is distilled from a premium grape base, pure Tasmanian water and botanicals including Tamar Valley roses.
- 4 **McHenry Distillery** makes an award-winning sloe gin distilled with sloe berries foraged from Tasmanian hedgerows.
- 5 **Hellyers Road Distillery** gives visitors the opportunity to pour and wax seal their very own bottle.

**open by appointment only*



Paddock to Plated Up

The hour-long drive north-west from Launceston to Devonport is all rolling hills, farms, and roaming cows, sheep and horses emerging through the dawn mist.

Adam is here, where the Mersey River joins Bass Strait, to meet another former MasterChef contestant turned TV host, Ben Milbourne, who opened his Devonport restaurant, CharlotteJack, in 2018.

"Tasmanian produce is the key to what we do," says Ben, adding that the restaurant is also a social enterprise committed to reducing food scraps with a nose-to-tail/root-to-tip menu.

All produce is sourced from within 50 kilometres, making the menu a tribute to the farmers, fishers, growers and winemakers of this fertile region.

CharlotteJack is housed in Providore Place Food Pavilion, just moments from the port where the Spirit of Tasmania docks daily, and home to a twice-weekly farmers market. The restaurant dedicates its menu to the fresh fruit and vegetables that stallholders drop off at the front door.

One of the ingredients dialling up Ben's minimalist dishes is wasabi, grown here in Tasmania at the Shima Wasabi farm.

"The environment is perfect for it," says Ben, who uses the entire plant on his dishes: stem, leaf, flower and root. "It's quite versatile. Freshly grated wasabi is totally different to what you'd expect."

Ben's support of local growers extends to his patronage of Produce to the People, a not-for-profit hothouse that grows micro herbs and feeds people down on their luck.

That sense of community that's thriving all over Tasmania is inescapable. Everyone knows each other by name and is happy to talk to you about 'their' Tassie.

"Ask five people what they like to do, and you'll get five different answers," says Ben, who recommends arriving in Tasmania without a plan, but with an open mind for new experiences. "Within an hour you'll have 10 unique places to visit that you've never heard of before."

WINTER IS THE TIME FOR WASABI

Shima Wasabi is turning up the heat in the culinary world, as one of the few wasabi farms to successfully cultivate this sensitive plant outside Japan. Founded 20 years ago, Shima (Japanese for island) Wasabi is grown hydroponically in the region. "I'm amazed," Adam says. "It's as good as you get in Japan and a local product."

