



retreat



**Clockwise from left:** Views of the Tasman Sea from the deck of Bay of Fires Lodge; The Bay of Fires coastline is peppered with sandy beaches and rocky points and runs for 30 kilometres along the north east corner of Tasmania; a morning yoga class at the lodge with teacher Murial Corcoran; the view from the library.

# a slice of wilderness

A yoga retreat in remote Tasmania makes the most of its beautifully wild landscape.  
**By Sue White**

**Unravelling myself** from the 4WD that has just spent the last 20 minutes skilfully maneuvering its way along a potholed track, I attempt to stretch while simultaneously hugging my body for warmth. The night is pitch black, but within seconds a cheery announcement cuts through the crisp Tasmanian air: "We're here." ➤



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The effect is like being hugged to the sides and back by bush, and poised high above the Tasman Sea.

➤ Momentarily distracted by the impossibly dense blanket of stars above, I try to bring my attention back to earth, where I have just one question: “Where exactly *is* here?”

Here, it turns out, is the end of the line for vehicles, and the second last leg in the sequence of steps required to immerse myself in nature (and yoga). We’re en route to Tasmania’s Bay of Fires, a spectacular pocket of coastline in the north east of the state. With five yoga classes and plenty of free time for exploring over the next three days ahead, I remind myself that the effort in getting here will soon pay off.

Actually, it already has; the nearly three-hour journey from Launceston quickly shifts me out of solo-traveller mode. Instead of simply staring out the window, I meet everyone in our minibus-sized group before passing the trip nattering easily about hobbies, careers and preferred yoga practices. The setting sun entices wallabies, pademelons, spotted quolls and possums to leap perilously close to the vehicle’s tyres but each animal

escapes safely, thanks to the skill of our calm driver.

Back in the dark, pulling on my beanie, I hover by our weekend host, lodge co-manager Rob Gluckmann. Handing out a few solar-powered (read, wind-up) torches, Rob encourages us to follow him along a thin, sandy track towards our final destination, the spectacularly isolated Bay of Fires Lodge. Having refused his kind offer to bundle my wheelie bag into a trolley, I hear its wheels bash behind me as I tow it along the 200m track. We’re deep in Mount William National Park and there’s not another house along this strip of magnificent coast for 20km. The perfect place for a spot of yoga.

**DEEPLY NATURAL**

It’s a fact reconfirmed upon waking the next morning in my simple but comfortable bedroom. Lazily rolling over, I discover I am perched high on a cliff above the sea and I spend a good five minutes in a bed-bound cobra pose, resting on my elbows



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOP LEFT COURTESY OF ANTHOLOGY, THE TRAVELLERS COLLECTION, ALL OTHER IMAGES SUE WHITE

gazing at the water below. Piling on layers (two pairs of pants, three tops of varying weights and my favourite multi-coloured beanie), I wrap myself in the thoughtfully provided blanket and head to my morning meditation and yoga class. Although all yoga classes are optional here, the light flowing through the glass wall behind my bedhead has ensured I am up with time to spare for a 7am start.

Having spent a great deal of time in resorts, which claim to be environmentally compatible yet are clearly victims of greenwash, the authenticity of this eco-lodge is readily apparent. Power is solar with occasional use of gas; water is courtesy of a rainwater tank and toilets are composting. In practical terms this means only two adaptations for guests: a cupful of rice husks in lieu of water thrown down the toilet after each visit; and a commitment to “pumping” water for the shower. The required 35 pumps provide a four-and-a-half minute toasty shower, which seems a suitable reward for effort invested.

**Clockwise from opposite page:** The lodge has serious eco credentials, with solar power, rainwater tank and composting toilets; accomodation is modest but makes the most of the views. Meals are a buffet affair and use organic and locally sourced produce as much as possible; retreat guests enjoying the communal dining table; the lodge’s deck at sunset.



retreat

**Above:** Teacher Muriel Corcoran addressing her class. Two yoga classes are offered each day of the retreat, the morning classes including a meditation.

Bay of Fires Lodge is two separate but complementary structures, both made of Tasmanian oak and using plenty of glass to maximise light and views. There are bedrooms and bathrooms tucked on the southern side, with living and eating spaces to the north. The two buildings are linked by a wooden, covered walkway offering vistas at each end. The architect has clearly strived to achieve genuine synergy between the construction and its surroundings, and the effect is like being hugged to the sides and back by bush, poised high above the Tasman Sea. I feel like I'm not only surrounded by nature, but deep in the middle of it.

Arriving for class, I see that Gluckmann and his partner Aimee Woods have managed to turn our main meeting area into an inviting yoga space. While last night this same long, glass-lined room ending in million-dollar views was the site for an impressive welcome dinner (Atlantic salmon on a bed of spicy Asian noodles, followed by a summer berry pudding topped with Chantilly cream), today it's clear of tables, chairs and couches, playing the part of a stunning yoga studio to perfection.

**While morning classes work my muscles, the afternoon yin targets the connective tissue holding the muscle groups together.**

Our yoga teacher, Muriel Corcoran, who has flown in from NSW for the weekend, begins to lead us in a short meditation that precedes each morning's yoga class. I soon discover that while Bay of Fires may be spectacular, it's not silent, neither in my mind nor outside of it. Wind whips around the building creating a whirl of prana; waves crash against the beach below and the fire crackles to my right, bringing my wandering mind continually back into the room. With my mind's eye, I drink in the vision of my position, and every morning's practice becomes a profoundly memorable experience.

#### A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

In these surrounds, it's hard to conjure up the slightest smidgen of resentment against the elements, which are certainly capricious. Tasmania puts Melbourne to shame in terms of its capacity to display four seasons in one day. Impressive sunrises give way to morning rain, casting doubt over our midday explorations and picnics. But by lunchtime the sky is blue, showing off waters that now lap, rather than crash, against the pristine beaches running along the shoreline.

I join the active half of our group and we potter our way through the low green scrub towards the sea, 40m below. Bay of Fires Lodge is accessed mostly by a four-day walk, and I quickly realise that although we merely choose to stroll an hour

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUE WHITE



**Above:** Forester Beach is 14km north of the Bay of Fires Lodge and is on the coastal trail that makes up the four-day walking tour offered by the lodge. **Below:** A group of keen yogis from the retreat and teacher Muriel Corcoran (bottom left) strike a pose on the beach.

or two in either direction along the myriad small beaches, I could, should I choose to, keep going seemingly ad infinitum. I immerse myself in the patchwork of colours and textures found through the entire region. The turquoise waters and white sand are suitably impressive on their own, but in combination with red lichen-covered rocks and a low green scrub that manages to hide our lodge within minutes, the effect is hypnotic.

Even the Tasman Sea is enticing. Despite the fact that it's off-season, two keensters strip off on our first afternoon and take an impressively long swim. The rest of us busy ourselves admiring starfish, watching dolphins and pelicans, or simply flopping on the sand.

Given that we're here for yoga, daily explorations eventually require returning up the hill for an afternoon class. Corcoran has more than 20 years of teaching experience and it soon becomes obvious she has a plan for our bodies and minds. Morning practices are dynamic hatha and get stronger by the day, but the afternoons are reserved for a two-hour Yin practice. Involving very few poses,

each held for a number of minutes per side, yin is a challenge not just for the body but the mind. While morning classes work my muscles, the afternoon yin targets the connective tissue holding the muscle groups together. My body quickly notices the impact on both—by day two I'm contentedly achy from head to toe.

Of course, that's just the physical. Lying happily on my mat



PHOTOGRAPHY: MAIN IMAGE COURTESY OF ANTHOLOGY, THE TRAVELLERS COLLECTION; BELOW SUE WHITE



## Fact File

**GETTING THERE** Most major airlines fly direct to Launceston from either Melbourne (many flights), Sydney (twice daily), or Brisbane (once daily). Flights can cost as little as \$100 each way, slightly more from Brisbane.

**PACKAGES** Anthology runs occasional yoga retreats and other yoga-inspired weekends at Bay of Fires Lodge throughout the year. Packages (\$1380 in 2010) include all yoga and meditation classes, meals, wine, three-nights accommodation and transfers to/from Launceston. [www.bayoffireslodge.com.au](http://www.bayoffireslodge.com.au).

**ACCOMMODATION** Rooms are twins or doubles, and all visitors should be ready to accept that the building's eco-credentials require some active participation, such as pumping water for hot showers. The views, staff and design make the experience so rejuvenating that a few small inconveniences are well worth the (nominal) effort.

**Above** The pristine Abbotsbury Beach and surrounding Mt William National Park, directly to the south of Bay of Fires Lodge.

during one Yin session, it doesn't take long with my right leg held in the air in a Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining-Big-Toe Pose) for my mind to begin its merry wander. Over three minutes, that feel more like 10, my mind canters rather than strolls from distraction to distraction in order not to focus on the slow opening in my hamstrings. I observe fellow yogis finding their own techniques, including contemplating the wallabies feeding outside the glass window. Eventually, just as it seems three minutes will never end, I hear a human-like "gong" sound. The group falls into peels of laughter as we realise it's the yogi beside me mimicking Corcoran's timer in an effort to make it stop. "Yoga is fun," agrees Corcoran, laughing with us. "But that doesn't mean you can bring your leg down."

In terms of both a holiday and a yoga retreat, the weekend hovers on idyllic. While the location, the yoga and the company all play their part in the experience, it's hard to not give some credit to the relentless onslaught of beautifully presented fresh food. Locally sourced and organic where possible, Gluckmann and Woods spend the three days of retreat cooking up a virtual storm. Bread is baked by hand and cakes

appear without fail every day, fresh from the oven. We're not even spared the organic excess over breakfast. Cereal is topped with fresh yoghurt and fruit is simply an entrée preceding freshly barbequed toast, poached eggs or pancakes, cream and maple syrup.

Without phone coverage or a TV, relaxation comes easily as the three-day weekend continues in its steady pattern of yoga, food, walking, food, reading, food, yoga, food, sleep. Even pumping my evening shower fails to cause me any grief. In fact, I ponder one night as I pump, if I had to do this at home, I'd probably halve the time spent in my shower, saving time, water and energy.

The only thing that does manage to rile me up at the Bay of Fires Lodge is that on Sunday we actually have to leave. Taking up the offer of the trolley this time round, I wander reluctantly behind my bag along the path to our transport. My body is relaxed and my mind is clear. While I'm unlikely to miss having to toss rice husks down the loo, the weekend's been a clear reminder that some things in life—not least having yoga with a view and the joy of being immersed in one of Australia's most impressive landscapes—are well worth the effort. ❖

*Sue White is a Sydney-based freelance writer and long-time practitioner of hatha yoga.*

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I could, should I choose to, keep going seemingly ad infinitum.

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