

# Destination Tasmania

A short distance to fly, absolutely worth the trip!

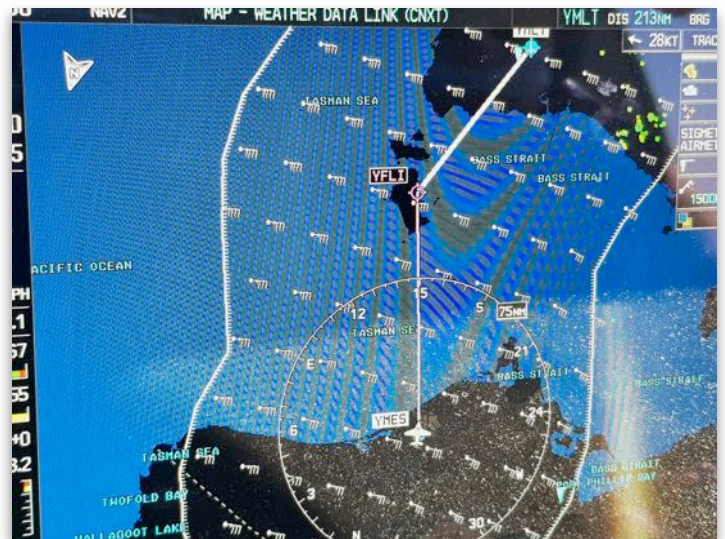


Tasmania – that island that everyone says is “little NZ” has always been on our bucket list. Having flown around Australia umpteen times and around the world you would think that we had flown to Tasmania...right? Well, ashamedly no – until now. In October a clear crossing opened our window of opportunity to cross the volatile Bass Strait so we pulled out our double floored Winslow life raft pack (made for protection from extreme cold water and on board for our North Atlantic crossing), the immersion cold water survival suits and our Switlik X-Back life vests (with pockets full of EPIRB and flare guns) and jumped in the Cirrus, our beautiful bird.

Bankstown tells us that Sydney Departures is very busy, so we elect a visual departure that leads us towards the Blue Mountains. From there we receive our IFR clearance directly to Cooma and East Sale at FL170 (17,000 feet). The wind as reported to us via the Garmin Data Link (at all levels) is against us at 40 kt, so we TAS at 200 kt with a ground speed of only 160 kt.

We start to fly closer to the Snowy Mountains. The snow season this year has been one of the best on record; its late October and normally the snow would not be very visible from FL170, but

as the mountains draw nearer the entire tops of the mountains are covered in thick snow. It's like floating past a magical winter snow land.



The track from East Sale, VIC to Launceston TAS

Soon the line of entry from overhead East Sale to the sea crossing is coming into sight. There is always a little bit of contemplation when you're about to fly over water. Especially freezing water that you know has a reputation for being one of the most dangerous in the world. It is a pause out of respect and to humble yourself – no-one is infallible. With this in mind we get ready – Amir first, always my pilot first. On go the Switlik life jackets; secure the straps; fill the pockets with



EPIRB, flares, flare gun and dry food; pocket knife in the hand ready; make sure the window hammer is handy. Too many things you may think, but you never know what is going to happen. I'm absolutely sure that no matter what happens you're never quite prepared. My turn to put on the vest. Although it is a light vest I still feel bulked up with the planes airbag safety belts adding to the bulk. I'm not complaining though, as we could have put on the heavy immersion cold water survival suits. In Bass Strait the water temperature this time of the year is below 8 degrees Celsius, low enough for you to drown instantly from neurological shock brought on by sudden immersion in cold water, shivering and reflex gasping for air and instead taking water, or hyper ventilating from the cold water, both which can trigger cardiac arrest. Consequently, you will have very short Time Useful Consciousness (TUC), not always enough to even get into a life raft. Bass Strait has had very few people surviving ditching as the mobility and dexterity time is under 5 minutes!!!

So we should have donned the immersion suits, should have, but I'm confident we will be fine in particular because from FL170 we have huge gliding distance. However, seeing the huge 30 feet swell in the water makes you have some second thoughts.

A very wise friend and seasoned pilot of both plane and yacht once told us, if you are worried about your aircraft flying over water then you shouldn't be flying the aircraft over anything.

**“... if you are worried about your aircraft flying over water then you shouldn't be flying the aircraft over anything.”**

Midway to King Island there is some cloud cover which always alleviates the feeling of being over water. Then it clears off, which allows us to take in all the surrounding islands with their pristine beaches and green rugged pastures. We are island hopping all the way to the main island.

Tasmania is made up of 334 islands and as the main island approaches we strip off the lifesaving equipment whilst on descent and preparing for the approach. We remove the oxygen cannula and are happy to be once again over land and free to move about and enjoy the scenery spreading out below us. The crossing was such a blink it feels silly to have prepared so much, but we will always take the side of safety. We have utmost respect for the two W words Weather and Water, we don't mess with either of them.



ILS into Launceston

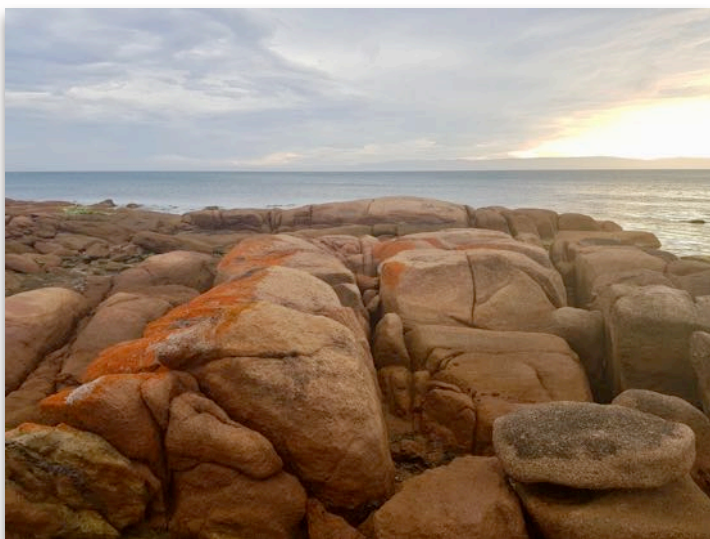
We are handed over by Melbourne Centre to Launy Tower and are given a clearance for the only ILS approach into Launceston for runway 32L. The downwind leg to join the ILS provides wonderful sightseeing in the valley next to Tom Gibson Nature Reserve and between Ben Lomond National Park and Central Plateau/ Great Lake Conservation areas. There are some clouds and with a LSA of 6300 feet, precision flight is a must. We land in Launceston and taxi to GA parking. There is no toilet and the flying club is closed. To make things worse, the terminal is a kilometre away, so we call security to pick us up which they promptly do and escort us to the airport authority to pay landing fees and the \$6 per day parking. We hire a car and are on our way thanks to the helpful very friendly airport facility staff.

We are driving the mainland from here on. We spend a night in the Casino/golf course and meet a local who drives for a living so knows all the best routes, short cuts and scenic drives that are

"worth it". Our new friend tells us of the hardship of finding good jobs on the island, how badly the "Greens" have hurt the economy and tells us of his good friend Roger Corbin who has helicopters (Roger's company RotorLift acts as Rescue Tasmania and has saved over 700 lives in the last few years). Roger also has a King Air B200 and our local has flown with him to Queensland – a trip of a life time for him and his boys. A good-hearted bloke, a single share parent, just trying to make ends meet in a job that is far below his capabilities. Unfortunately Tasmania is the state of the Commonwealth of Australia that has been a politically motivated train wreck for years.



Tamra at Wine Glass Bay lookout



Coles Bay

With our route now set from the local's tips we head to the east coast to Wineglass Bay and Coles Bay. We stay just one night because that is how long it takes to see the place. We try to get

into the best accommodation in the area, Saffire Freycinet Lodge, but at \$2000 a night we think that is chutzpah and find a lovely house just back from the bay. We have dinner at Fraser Lodge, then are in bed by 9 pm – there is no other option. The town is dead by 8:30.

What the place lacks in night life it makes up for in the day - WOW views and hard healthy walks to be wowed again by the views from the top of the mountains.

We proceed on to Hobart for a few days in a city spreading up to very steep mountains that surround the vast river giving most houses a water view that is breathtaking. We visit the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) and are amazed by the phenomena of people coming to see a machine that makes artificial "poop" – all in the name of art.



Museum of Old and New Art (MONA)



Street market, Hobart





Cradle Mountain

We drive up to the top of Mt Wellington, the skies are clear and blue. Then, the temperature drops in a few minutes to 2°C. We are standing out on the lookout as cloud rolls over and drops a fine snow/hale – the alpine nature garden is covered in minutes with a fine white. The native flowers with a dust of snow was one of the most amazing experiences of nature at its purest.

Driving North West to Cradle Mountain we drive the Great Lake and Central Plateau Conservation Areas route. The wilderness is beautiful – huge granite mountains and massive lakes. It doesn't matter how long you drive every bit is captivating. We arrive at Cradle Mountain and look for accommodation – there is plenty to choose from. The Peppers is getting a bit tired, but has the most atmosphere so we have dinner there. We stay at new modern cottages called Wilderness Village.

We think we are mountaineers and take off two hours before sunset to do a 6 km walk around Dove Lake. We do it in lightning speed making it back before night fall. The next day we take another breathtaking 12 km grade four rough and very steep track to the top of one of the mountains. Snow still covers the peaks and there

are outstanding views over several lakes of pristine freezing waters. The flora in Tasmania is beautiful alpine and sub alpine nature garden with vast meadows of button grass that the local wombat eat and live on.



Wombat country

We wake early and hit the road back to Launceston, stay overnight and head to the airport for departure. At 10 am the airport is still closed due to fog, but as we arrive the fog is lifting. We think we'll give a miss to flying back over Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park as fog is reported throughout the entire





We can see the walks we did

north of the island. However, once in the air we break out of the thick cloud and can see that the mountain area looks clear. We ask to deviate and do some aerial work. With permission granted we head straight to the Cradle Mountain area. We magically float and circle above the Tasmanian western mountains and lakes still covered with a frosting of snow. We can see the walks we did and how little we actually saw from our walks. Cradle Mountain is one of the most spectacularly beautiful landscapes from the air.

Reluctantly after 30 minutes of air work at 7000 ft we turn north, climb to FL140 and fly over Bruny Island on our way to Melbourne (YMMB) over the water again wearing the safety equipment. With minimal wind, we cross Bass Strait – it is so fast we hardly feel the water flight this time as it is entirely in cloud and our over water speed (ground speed) is over 200 kts.

Some people may say that Tasmania is like a little NZ but we disagree. Tasmania is unique. It is nature, it is a culinary experience with the finest ingredients, it is interesting craft and art markets and museums, it is the finest architecture preserved from the days of colonialism, it is roads that are drive-able and

places that range from quaint country town to wilderness tourist hub.

It is just a short distance to fly and absolutely worth the trip!

*The article is a collaborative effort, Amir pilots, negotiates, navigates and edits, in other words, he does all the hard work and Tamra writes and photographs. A great team.*

*By Amir and Tamra Hyster*