About Tasmania

Where

Latitude 40˚ south, longitude 144˚ east.

Features

Australia's smallest and most southerly state is about 250 kilometres (150 miles) south of the Australian mainland.

About the same size as the Republic of Ireland and a little larger than West Virginia, Hokkaido Japan or Switzerland, Tasmania is 315 kilometres (189 miles) from west to east and 286 kilometres (175 miles) north to south. The main island is at the centre of an archipelago of more than 300 islands, with a coastline of more than approximately 5400 kilometres (1864 miles).

Climate

Tasmania has a mild, temperate climate with four distinct seasons. The climate is a maritime one, rarely extremely hot or extremely cold. Summer is from December to February when the average maximum temperature is 21˚ Celsius (70˚ Fahrenheit). Winter is from June to August with an average maximum temperature of 12˚ Celsius (40˚ Fahrenheit).

Annual Rainfall

The average rainfall over Tasmania in 2008 was 986mm. Hobart has the second lowest rainfall (after Adelaide) of all Australian capital cities, with an average annual rainfall of 626mm (Australian Bureau of Meteorology).

Island Population

Tasmania's population is 502,600 people (estimated as at 30 June 2009) and its capital city, as of the 2006 census, there were 205,566 people in the greater Hobart area. According to the census, approximately 12.0 per cent of greater Hobart's residents were born overseas, commonly the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany and the Netherlands.

Capital City

Nestled at the foot of Mount Wellington (1271 metres or 4169 feet), Hobart overlooks the wide River Derwent, where schools of dolphins can be seen from nearby beaches. Rich in character, its historic centre features colonial Georgian and Regency buildings. Hobart's harbour bustles with fishing vessels, yachts and cafes by the sea.

Land Information

The mountain ranges of Tasmania's South West date back 100 million years when ancient sediments were deeply buried, folded and heated under enormous pressure to form glistening white quartzites and schists. In the South West and central highlands, there are remnants of a dolerite plateau cap mountains such as Precipitous Bluff and Tasmania's highest peak, Mt Ossa. Nearly 37 percent of Tasmania is made up of World Heritage Area, National Park, Conservation Area's and Reserves (data retrieved May 2007).

Flora

Vegetation is diverse, from alpine heathlands and tall open eucalypt forests to large areas of temperate rainforests and moorlands. Many plant species are unique to Tasmania; their ancestors grew on the ancient supercontinent called Gondwana, before it broke up 50 million years ago. Unique native conifers include Huon pines, with one strand of the trees on Mt Read estimated to be up to 10,000 years old. Kings lomatia, commonly known as Kings Holly, and probably the oldest living plant on earth, was discovered in 1937. Botanists have determined that only 500 specimens of the plant exist in Tasmania's remote south-west wilderness and believe that one of the plants, which reproduce by cloning, has lived in the area for at least 43,000 years.

Fauna

Tasmania is the last home of several species that once roamed the Australian continent. It is the only place to see a Tasmanian devil, eastern quoll and spotted-tailed quoll in the wild. The striped Tasmanian tiger, or thylacine, was Australia's largest carnivorous marsupial and is a modern-day mystery. The last documented tiger died in captivity in 1936 and though the animal is considered extinct, there have been many unsubstantiated sightings since then.

History and Heritage

Aboriginal people have lived in Tasmania for about 30,000 years, well before the last Ice Age. They were separated from the Australian mainland about 12,000 years ago when the seas rose to form Bass Strait and flooded the landbridge.

Tasmania was originally named Van Diemen's Land by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642. The island was settled by the British as a penal colony in 1803 and the name was changed to Tasmania when convict transportation stopped in 1853.

Tasmania has preserved a rich legacy of heritage, including Australia's oldest continuously operating theatre, the Theatre Royal in Hobart; the country's first Jewish Synagogue, still in use in Hobart; and its oldest golf course, in the historic town of Bothwell. The nation's oldest bridge and church are at Richmond, and on the corner of Murray and Macquarie streets in Hobart, the only remaining Georgian intersection in the country. Many colonial dwellings are in use as private homes or tourist accommodation.

Economy

The Tasmanian economy comprises a number of niche industries: high speed catamaran ferries are literally shipped all over the world, while The Wooden Boat Centre School of Boatbuilding has established a new industry preserving the skills and traditions of another age. Tasmania is a natural larder: clean air, unpolluted water and rich soils help produce speciality cheeses and dairy products, mouth-watering seafood, Atlantic salmon, beef, premium and boutique beers, fine wines, specialty honey, mineral waters, fine chocolates, fresh fruits, and crisp vegetables. Other export agricultural products include essential oils such as lavender, premium wool popular in Europe and Japan, and pharmaceutical products.

Getting to Tasmania

Travel is easy, whether by air from Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide or Canberra, or by sea from Melbourne. Passenger and vehicle ships – Spirit of Tasmania I and II – operate overnight crossings, with additional day-time crossings during peak summer periods. For more information visit: **www.spiritoftasmania.com.au**