

ABOVE

SUBLIME FAIRWAYS, SUPERLATIVE GREENS, SUNNY SKIES: GOLFERS DON'T ASK FOR MUCH. POST-GAME, IT'S THE SAME. **JO MCKAY** FINDS FIVE REGIONS THAT DELIVER LUXURY LODGINGS, STUNNING SCENERY AND EXCEPTIONAL DINING.

PAR

Golf



Tasmania

Launceston and surrounds

It's fair to say that when Barnbougale (barnbougale.com.au) opened in 2004, it quickly became one of northern Tassie's greatest assets. The two courses may be tough – understatement alert! – but any golfer worth their spikes wants to take the challenge. The bonus is that there are exceptional eateries in nearby Launceston and surrounds, more than 20 wineries within easy reach and a host of other courses to try. All told, it's the stuff golf-travel dreams are made of.



PLAY

Positioned on the coastline near Bridport, Barnbougale is home to two of the country's top courses: The Dunes, a customary 18, and Lost Farm, an unconventional 20. Each has a distinct personality – like evil twins. The Dunes is the straight-up tricky one; Lost Farm the more mischievous. (Think you've lost your ball? No, there it is! Think you're safe? Think again.) On both courses, the rough will snatch errant balls before you can say "triple bogey". But take heart: there are striking vistas (pastureland, Mount Arthur and the beautiful Anderson Bay) to temper the sting.

Back in Launceston, tee off at the park-bushland setting of the 6013-metre course at Launceston Golf Club (launcestongolfclub.com.au), the oldest 18-hole course in the state, or at the well-groomed Country Club Tasmania (countryclubtasmania.com.au). Further west, try the tree-lined fairways of Devonport Golf Club (devonportgolfclub.com.au) and Ulverstone Golf Club (ulverstonegolfclub.com.au).

STAY

Between rounds at The Dunes and Lost Farm, book in to one of Barnbougale's slick new Ocean Villas. Overlooking the mercurial waters of Bass Strait, these two-bedders are chic and airy – a step up from the cottage- and lodge-style accommodation on the property. In Launceston, Two Four Two (hotel.qantas.com.au/twofourtwo) offers four modern self-contained apartments, perfect for daytripping golfers. The pick of the bunch is The Bakehouse, with its own private courtyard. Owner Pam von Stieglitz is a wealth of local knowledge: don't hesitate to tap her for suggestions, especially hotspot dining.

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EAT & DRINK

In Launceston, Stillwater (stillwater.com.au) remains the pinnacle nearly two decades after opening. The regionally focused and seasonally led menus show both confidence and flair. At smart newcomer Geronimo Aperitivo Bar & Restaurant (geronimorestaurant.com.au), the robust flavours are equally impressive (the Cape Grim beef tartare is a triumph).

For lunch, the Tamar wine trail is the best bet: Josef Chromy's restaurant (josefchromy.com.au) focuses on local produce and elegant award-winning vinos, while Timbre Kitchen at Vélo Wines (velowines.com.au) does big and small share plates.

As for wine-tasting, cellar doors of note include Goaty Hill, Sinapius, Jansz, Holm Oak and Delamere. Further towards Devonport, Ghost Rock has a range of crisp, balanced wines as well as platters with locally sourced produce, best enjoyed on the sun-drenched balcony.



(From far left) The Dunes, where the green meets the sea; Barnbougale's Ocean Villa

Gold Coast

Golfers may be notoriously focused on the game but when one of the country's top tee-off destinations becomes cool, they're as happy as the rest of us. An explosion of hip cafés and modern dining spots – particularly in locales like Palm Beach, Burleigh and Miami – has opened up a whole new world beyond the 19th. There's good shopping, too (thanks, Pacific Fair). And while the Goldie has an undeniably beachy focus (from surfing, stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking to snorkelling with turtles), there are also more than 20 courses in the region. For the golfing traveller, it's a bounty.

PLAY

First up, there's Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club (sanctuarycovegolfclub.com.au) for its two feted courses: The Palms, which reopened in 2011 following a spectacular \$8.8-million upgrade, and The Pines, designed by late golfing great Arnold Palmer. The Pines is private but guests of the InterContinental Sanctuary Cove Resort (hotel.qantas.com.au/sanctuarycove) can secure tee times. Between the two courses,

there are some 300 kangaroos so don't be surprised if you attract a marsupial gallery.

Nearby, Links Hope Island (linkshopeisland.com.au) features undulating fairways and 128 pot bunkers. "Challenging but not demoralising" is how general manager Tracey-Lea Tiley describes it. Final stop? RACV Royal Pines Resort (hotel.qantas.com.au/royal-pines) – 27 lush holes renovated by design expert Graham Marsh and the new home of the Australian PGA Championship.

STAY

It's been four years since InterContinental took over at Sanctuary Cove and it's looking better than ever: the revamped lobby exudes an elegant, grown-up ambience, while the 243 rooms nod to the original Queenslander, Colonial-style architecture. The graceful 0.4-hectare swimming lagoon remains a highlight.

Further south, between beach and hinterland, RACV Royal Pines Resort has upped the game with a \$60-million-plus overhaul. Features include an impressive fitness centre, decadent spa, several restaurants and the

Gold Coast's only undercover tennis courts (perfect for when Queensland chooses not to be its sunny self). Spa suites are the top pick.

EAT & DRINK

Rick Shores (rickshores.com.au) in Burleigh Heads is the eatery du jour. Why? It's a tie between the drool-worthy fried Moreton Bay bug roll and the phenomenal views. For sharing feasts, Social Eating House + Bar (socialeatinghouse.com.au) in Broadbeach is your go-to, while The Collective (thecollectivepalmbeach.com.au) in Palm Beach offers a modern take on the food-hall concept. Tuck into brunch-ish staples at The Paddock Bakery (paddockbakery.com) in Miami or head to sister site Bam Bam Bakehouse (bambambakehouse.com) in Mermaid Beach for the best baked goodies on the Coast. Japanese restaurant Kiyomi at The Star Gold Coast (hotel.qantas.com.au/stargoldcoast) – the \$850 million reincarnation of Jupiters – takes care of that special night out. Don't leave without ordering the crisp rice with spicy tuna and the Wagyu tenderloin with wasabi butter.



Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club's private course, The Pines



Jeff Jennings (previous page), Olivia Sattler



Western Australia

Mandurah

An hour's drive south of Perth, Mandurah is all about the great outdoors and has a laid-back, welcoming vibe. The area is centred on the 130-square-kilometre Peel-Harvey Estuary, a body of water more than twice the size of Sydney Harbour – as locals will quickly point out. Naturally, many activities have a water focus (fishing, surfing, beach-combing, dolphin-watching) but there's also a clutch of world-class golf courses designed to challenge and delight. And given that its Mediterranean-like climate usually means sun-filled days, there's not much more a links-lover could ask for.

PLAY

With sensational views of the Indian Ocean and a tight, tough layout, The Cut (the-cut.com.au) delivers thrills aplenty – tactical play will reap rewards. Smart golf also pays dividends at The Links Kennedy Bay (kennedybay.com.au), where a profusion of pot bunkers (aka pits of despair) lie ominously in wait. Take heed of the warning on the website: "Any untamed bravado will be dealt with in the severest manner."

Closer to Mandurah, Meadow Springs Golf and Country Club (msgcc.com.au) has the George Clooney of courses: handsome, quietly complex and delivering equal measures of drama and charm. Players of all levels will relish the tuart-tree-lined fairways and large, true greens.

STAY

Wedged between Mandurah Ocean Marina and the beach – and also centrally placed to access the region's best courses and many local restaurants – Seashells Mandurah (hotel.qantas.com.au/seashells) offers 64 apartments and villas well suited to travelling golfers. The Parkview and Beachfront villas are the standouts: large and light-filled, with generously proportioned kitchens that make pre-tee-off breakfasts a cinch. Post-game, chill beside the resort's infinity pool.

EAT & DRINK

Mandurah's dining scene is best described as exuberant. On weekend nights, the alfresco bars and eateries lining the waterways bristle with energy. Local favourites include The Peninsula, Oceanic Bar + Grill and Oyster Bar. One of the foreshore's newest establishments, Flics Kitchen (flicskitchen.com) is quickly gaining kudos for its "kinda like tapas" menu selection, while the crown for posh dining goes to long-timer Redmanna Waterfront Restaurant (redmanna.com.au), where the menu brims with super-fresh seafood.

The day after, indulge in a hearty breakfast at Cafe Moka (cafemoka.com.au). The best caffeine fix within walking distance of Seashells is a toss-up between 3 Hearts Ceramics & Cafe (3heartsceramicscafe.com) and Frisky Deer (friskydeer.com.au), a homewares store and café.

Tight and tough, The Cut calls for tactical play



Victoria

The Bellarine

Giving the Mornington Peninsula, its cousin across the bay, a run for its money, The Bellarine boasts four courses in *Golf Australia's* Top 100, along with stellar wine, restaurants and cafés and beautiful beachscapes. There's also a hive of off-course activities: you can ride a stand-up paddleboard on the river at Barwon Heads, cycle through pastureland on the Bellarine Rail Trail or stroll the buzzy enclaves of Barwon Heads, Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale. No wonder this region is fast becoming one of Australia's golfing go-tos.

PLAY

The Barwon Heads Golf Club (barwonheads.golf) is perfect for purists: 18 holes of undulating terrain and speedy greens. The signature 13th is picturesque – and often cruel. Nearby, Thirteenth Beach Golf Links (13thbeach.net) has two championship courses: The Beach, where accuracy is a must, and The Creek, with a slightly more forgiving roll.

Further north, Curlewis's clubhouse exudes laid-back ease (curlewisgolf.com.au); its sandbelt 18, however, is anything but. Pro Steve Brodie calls it "hard and fast"; that means lots of run. Strategic play is rewarded. Want more? Try the sweeping fairways at Portarlington GC (portarlingtongolf.com.au) – "player friendly", according to pro Matt Milne –

or cross the bridge to the unique Queenscliff GC (queenscliffgolfclub.com.au) on Swan Island, which has sensational views of the bay.

STAY

Traditionalists will admire the feel of Barwon Heads' heritage-listed clubhouse, with its stately lounge and lobby, plaid carpets and formal dining room. Each of the 19 rooms is light and comfortable; facilities include tennis courts, a billiards room and an extra nine-hole par-three course. As with most private clubs, strict dress codes apply.

For something more extravagant, book the Starhaven Retreat (hotel.qantas.com.au/starhaven), a guesthouse and B&B at Indented Head that features a cinema room, jet-stream spa and stunning views over Port Phillip Bay. One suite even has an infinity bath and a personal steam room.

EAT & DRINK

Your must-visit list is a diverse mix of standout cellar doors at Leura Park Estate (leuraparkestate.com.au) and Scotchmans Hill (scotchmans.com.au), charming Barwon Heads café Annie's Provedore (anniesprovedore.com.au) and fresh seafood at Advance Mussel Supply (advancemussel.com.au) – try the

The clubhouse at Barwon Heads GC overlooks the 18th (above); tee up a time to dine on produce-driven plates at Merne at Lighthouse in Drysdale



more-ish mussel risotto balls. Enjoy lunch in the garden at Basils Farm winery (basilsfarm.com.au) or on the deck of Mr Grubb at Oakdene (oakdene.com.au).

For regional food with glorious vistas, look no further than Jack Rabbit (jackrabbitvineyard.com.au). Finally, book the peninsula's hottest addition, Merne at Lighthouse (merne.com.au), for a showcase of seasonal produce overlooking a pretty olive grove.



New South Wales

South Coast

(From top) Narooma Golf Club's cliff-top third hole; one-hatted St Isidore in Milton

At almost 400 kilometres, the South Coast is a beguiling stretch of coastline. The beauty of the region, the array of water activities (surfing in Mollymook, deep-sea fishing in Bermagui, kitesurfing and whale-watching in Merimbula) and wave of cool dining options make it a very tempting escape indeed. For golfers, an abundance of courses only amplifies the attraction. Our suggestion? Split the holiday in two; spend a few nights in Mollymook before heading south, with a pit stop in Narooma, to the Sapphire Coast, where the name speaks volumes.



PLAY

Mollymook GC (mollymookgolf.com.au) boasts two courses: 6225-metre 18-hole Hilltop, with soaring trees and attractive fairways, and nine-hole Beachside, with beach and ocean views.

Impressive panoramas also feature on the front nine at Narooma GC (naroomagolf.com.au); the cliff-top third with its full ocean-carry was made famous by Paul Hogan when he filmed a cigarette commercial there in the mid-1970s.

Once you hit Merimbula, the must-plays are Tura Beach Country Club (turabeachcountryclub.com.au), carved into the coastline by design masters Peter Thomson and Michael Wolveridge, and the 27 manicured, tree-lined holes at Pambula-Merimbula GC (merimbulagolf.com.au). Still not enough? Nearby Eden, Tathra Beach, Bega and Bermagui all have courses worthy of a crack.

STAY

In Mollymook, Bannisters Pavilion (hotel.qantas.com.au/bannisters) is the place to be – and be seen. This latest addition to the Bannisters empire is a glamorous 35-room escape that combines the best of city-style service with a boutique

sensibility and beach vibe.

Post-game, the rooftop pool (and bar) is the spot to unwind. At the Sapphire Coast end, Airbnb is your ticket to luxury; Sybella in Merimbula (qantas.com/airbnb) is an elegant five-bedroom lakefront home with all the trappings you could want, including a swimming pool and sweeping water views – and a spacious balcony from which to enjoy them.

EAT & DRINK

Eight years after Rick Stein opened his namesake restaurant at Bannisters, it still rules as the must-dine eatery of the region. Seafood is king here – order the warm shellfish starter and the ever-popular fish pie. Leave time, too, for an evening to taste the farmhouse menu at one-hatted St Isidore (stisidore.com.au) in Milton. In Merimbula, sample succulent oysters at Wheelers Seafood Restaurant (wheelersoysters.com.au) or tuck into juicy burgers at Dulcie's Cottage (dulcies.com.au). For sensational sourdough and the necessary AM caffeine hit, head to Wild Rye's Baking Co (wildryes.com.au) in Pambula. ●