

# HAVEN ON EARTH

It's the ultimate romantic getaway and is home to one of Australia's most Instagrammable baths. But Thalia Haven, which is nestled on a secluded section of Tasmania's East Coast, is also a great spot for families, writes **Linda Smith**.

**M**y two young boys are giggling and splashing in the bath tub together, like they've done at home many times before, surrounded by mounds of fluffy white bubbles.

But this isn't any ordinary bath time.

For starters, they're not inside. And they're not playing with bath toys. Instead, they're keenly watching for whales in the vast expanse of sparking blue ocean that stretches before them. They're enjoying the cool evening breeze on their bare skin. They're admiring the pinks and oranges that streak the sky as the sun sets. And then they are gazing in awe at the night sky above, as the stars begin to shimmer in the darkness.

We're staying at Thalia Haven, a luxury, off-grid escape at Little Swanport, complete with a wood-fired sauna, an outdoor shower and the stunning aforementioned bathtub – exposed to the

elements – on the timber deck overlooking Great Oyster Bay.

Set on 52 rugged hectares, Thalia Haven consists of four stone buildings clustered around olive tree courtyards on the ocean's edge. The main building is home to a gourmet kitchen and dining area, a spacious living room with an open fireplace, a master bedroom and a bathroom, all with expansive ocean views. The nearby outbuildings offer a series of bedroom configurations, some with ensuite bathrooms, with the property able to sleep as many as eight people.

A stay at Thalia Haven feels like a visit to another world – to me, it's a bit like staying at a sprawling villa in Tuscany or the South of France, but with a distinctly Tasmanian flavour due largely to that ocean view, which is impossible to ignore.

The stone structure, surrounded by landscaped gardens featuring cheerful



clusters of pink daisies, is nestled beautifully into the hillside and looks like it has been here forever.

But, despite its old-world charm, the homestead was only designed and built 20 years ago by award-winning Hobart firm Morrison and Breytenbach Architects for owner Susan West.

West lived in the property for about 10 years before moving to Tasmania's Huon Valley so she could rent Thalia Haven to holiday-makers as a luxury getaway.

The property is the perfect example of off-the-grid living without sacrificing any creature comforts. A showcase of self-reliance, the house draws its water, electricity and warmth from the elements.

The property's guest book indicates it's a popular spot for weddings, elopements, honeymoons, wedding anniversaries and milestone birthday celebrations. It's also a popular spot for groups of friends or extended family members to stay, allowing people to eat and play together while still having space of their own to retreat to when required. Well-behaved dogs are also welcome.

With split levels inside the main building and a series of rocky ledges at the front of the property it probably wouldn't

be the safest option for families with an adventurous toddler, or for someone with limited mobility.

But we found the property to be a great fit for our family of four and my boys (aged six and eight) were old enough and sensible enough to navigate the property safely – they loved exploring the garden, ambling over boulders on the rocky foreshore and keeping an eye out for resident rabbits and wallabies.

The only thing they were uncertain about was sleeping away from mum and dad (even though we had strategically packed a baby monitor), so we ended up dividing and conquering – I slept in the master bed with the eight-year-old while my husband and six-year-old stayed only a few short steps away in a separate stone building. The boys actually thought this one-on-one time was quite a treat.

And the upside of travelling with early-rising children is that you're never going to miss a sunrise. As soon as we woke each day during our two-night stay, we flung open the curtains and could watch the changing colours of the sky for a good hour or more before the sun finally peeked over the horizon.

At Thalia Haven you're about 2km from the nearest road or neighbour and, apart from the occasional passing boat, you really do feel like you're the only person on earth.

But, while it definitely feels secluded, you're also not far from civilisation if you need anything. Only a 15-20 minute drive away from Triabunna to the south and Swansea to the north, Thalia Haven is a great base for exploring the rest of the East Coast. But we happily settled in and didn't want to leave, only venturing as far as the property's beach (an easy walk from the main house) where the boys splashed happily in the water (undeterred that it was the middle of May) and played in the sand with a few giant pieces of kelp that had washed ashore, along with an assortment of beach toys provided by Thalia Haven. We also combed the beach for shells, watched two huge pelicans circle overhead, and scoured rockpools for crabs.

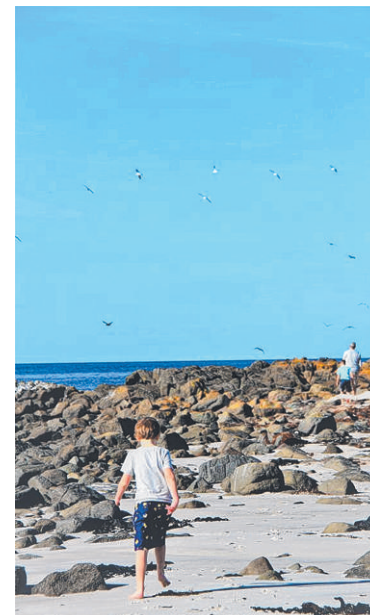
But mostly we just relaxed back at the house, enjoying that awe-inspiring view.

We were lucky enough to enjoy a weekend of blue skies and sunshine, which allowed us to comfortably dine alfresco on the timber dining setting or sit and enjoy a morning coffee on one of the many benches or rock ledges dotted around the property.

Even when we were inside, sitting by the fire in the living room or at the kitchen table with the sun streaming in, we had the doors ajar, allowing the gentle sea breeze – and the sounds of the water lapping at the shore – to float through the property.

The living room is well stocked with board games, card games, jigsaw puzzles, toys and crayons, while bookcases throughout the property offer a wealth of novels and cookbooks for guests to enjoy.

One morning the boys discovered an assortment of watercolour paints and



Clockwise from left: The breathtaking ocean views from Thalia Haven; the dreamy outdoor bathtub that overlooks Great Oyster Bay; the stunning ocean view; the property's buildings, which were built from East Coast stone; the well-equipped kitchen; and the nearby foreshore, is a great place to go beachcombing. Pictures: Loic Le Guilly, Marcus Walters and Linda Smith.



brushes, and suddenly we were enjoying an impromptu painting session at the kitchen table, attempting to capture the vibrant colours – of the rising sun, the glistening water and the surrounding farmland – on paper.

It was something we never would have done at home but that's the great thing about this type of holiday, as it gives you space and time to unwind and follow those whims.

Like brewing multiple cups of tea each day, and taking the time to sit and enjoy them fully while delighting in the meditative quality of the ocean.

Or whipping up a batch of buttermilk pikelets, piled high with fresh fruit, using supplies from the well-stocked pantry.

Or leisurely reading a magazine from cover to cover in front of a crackling fire.

Or learning to play chess.

Or toasting marshmallows.

Or taking yet another dip in that gorgeous outdoor bath (which I did multiple times during our stay).

The boys spent a lot of time staring out at the ocean while we were at Thalia Haven, wistfully hoping to see a dolphin, a seal, or any other marine inhabitant.

And on our final morning their persistence paid off, when Master Eight – to his absolute delight – spotted a pod of humpback whales frolicking in the distance as they moved up the coast. A couple of hours later, as we took one final look at the breathtaking view before checking out, we were lucky enough to spot another pod of whales, providing the perfect, memorable end to our weekend in this beautiful patch of waterfront paradise.

*The author was a guest of Thalia Haven.*

## MAKE A NOTE

Thalia Haven is located at Little Swanport, on Tasmania's East Coast, a 90-minute drive from Hobart. Prices start from \$1500 per night, with a two-night minimum stay (three-night minimum between December-February). The property can sleep as many as eight people. For bookings or more information head to: [thaliahaven.au](http://thaliahaven.au)

