

In the wake of Bass & Flinders



FAR LEFT:
The Deal
Island group.

LEFT: Peak
hour on
King Island.

Shelley Ross heads south for some island hopping in Bass Strait, uncovering a handful of bush strips and hidden destinations that are throwing out the welcome mat to visiting pilots.



So what are you into? Fishing? Golf? Bushwalking? Crayfish feasts? Maybe you just want to get away from the rat race for a while. Well step right up; we've got you covered in this instalment of Destinations.

It's summertime and we don't actually mind that you're reading this from your swaying hammock trying not to spill your beer, but you can't let your flying get rusty just because it's the silly season.

When considering a destination for this month, I needed to limit my scan to cooler parts of the country. It's no fun flying around where the mercury has risen to unsociable levels, making it pretty disgusting to do anything in an aeroplane after about 0900. And for that matter, if you've partaken of a few too many festive Toddies and are thinking of visiting the outback, you'd better ring first; the locals are probably in the hammock next to yours as we speak. This is their off-season, and if they're not fighting bush fires or renovating the guesthouse most of the tourist operators will be heading for the coast in search of a sea breeze.

After watching friends sailing in about the last 30 Sydney to Hobarts, there's one place I know

that does a lovely sea breeze. Bass Strait only seems to crack a mention when the southerly bluster that regularly kicks in around Boxing Day promises to wreak havoc on the southbound fleet. So for a change of pace and a rest from the red dirt, I thought we might head on down to the top of Tassie, get some local Mexicans along to help translate, and see what's going on in those cheeky little islands on the way.

Mission

As far as local flying destinations go, you'd be hard pressed to find a more clued-up team than at Lilydale Flying School in Victoria's Yarra Valley. Operating since 1968, Lilydale has a robust charter business, air safari program and busy training school owned by veteran aviators Roger, Neroli and Jonathan Merridew.

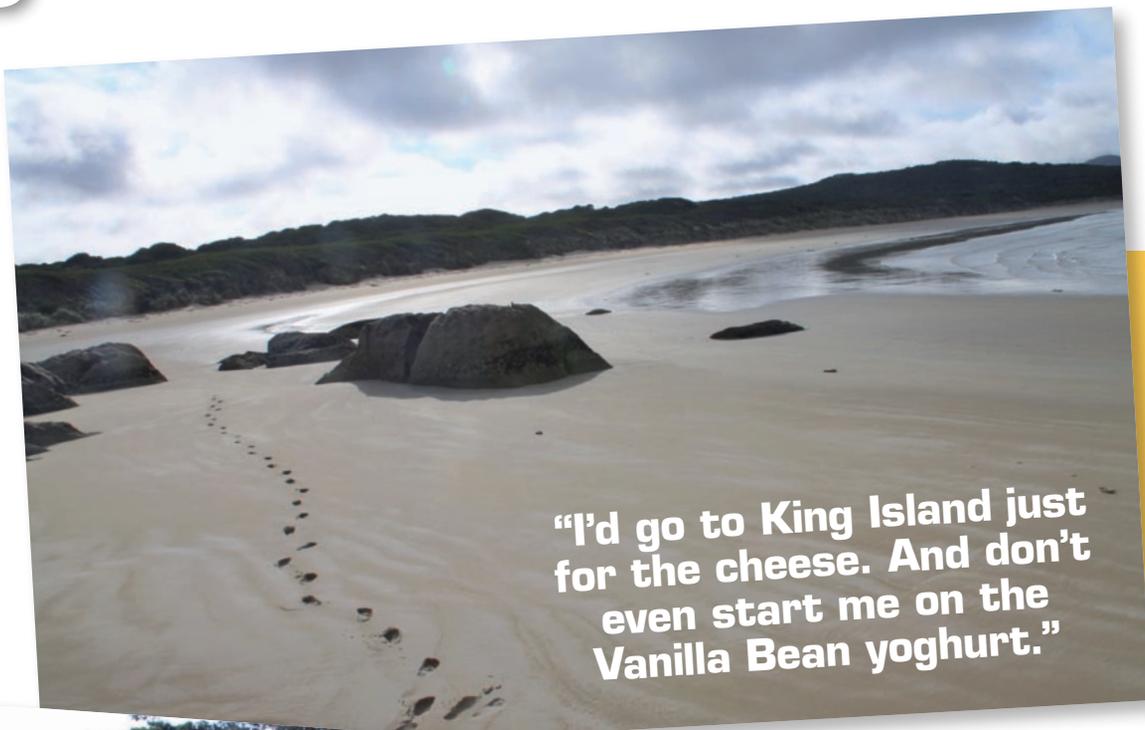
I knew that these guys would have the good oil on some knockout destinations to suit a summer getaway, and they didn't disappoint. As it turned out, I didn't have to do too much persuading before Jonathan had spread the word and gathered a bunch of their willing

PPLs to join our little safari. Come to think of it, over the years I've run into a suspicious number of Lilydale pilots out and about in all corners of Oz, though I guess you can't blame them for wanting to get out of Victoria.

Jono planned a nice little three-day getaway. The plan was to take off from Lilydale, over the Mornington Peninsula and leave the coast just past Apollo Bay, call in at King Island for lunch, then fly on to Three Hummock Island for an overnight stay at their beach house. Next day, cross the last stretch of Bass Strait to refuel at Wynyard on the northwest coast of Tasmania, drop into Barnbougle Dunes golf course (an hour's drive north of Launceston) for lunch, then fly on to Flinders Island for our second night before heading back to the mainland on day three.

Well, that all worked, with loads of highlights along the way, and the waypoints could easily be incorporated into a longer Tasmanian safari. I need to emphasise that we're not talking about an advanced nor complicated flying exercise here. 13 of us were distributed across five aircraft from Lilydale – four Piper Archers and

The world's cleanest air, and you've got it all to yourself on Three Hummock Island. Population: two.



“I’d go to King Island just for the cheese. And don’t even start me on the Vanilla Bean yoghurt.”

LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM:

Early morning on Three Hummock beach.

(L-R) Lilydale’s Jono Merridew and managers Beverley and John O’Brien wait for cocktails at the Three Hummock Bar.

Departing Three Hummock.

RIGHT: Welcome to Three Hummock – own airstrip, comfy guesthouse, great hosts. Who knew?



a Warrior – some of the pilots with relatively few hours, and everybody totally enjoyed the planning, flying and destinations. There was a fair bit in it as we all brushed up on the various precautions regarding bush strips and flying across water.

That’s the thing about fleet flying though, particularly when it’s led by an experienced commercial pilot or instructor; it gives nervous pilots the confidence to get up and do a trip they might otherwise consider way out of their comfort zone. Take the water crossing for example; we were in constant contact not only with Melbourne Centre as we crossed the Strait back and forth, but also with each other, which is always a welcome reassurance on any over-water passage.

King Island

Southern Victoria was forecast to toss a bit of low cloud and muck at us on the first day (how unusual), but we managed to avoid most of that and found some sunshine, enough to enjoy those wonderful views that the Mornington Peninsula and Great Ocean Road are famous for.

Despite sitting in the path of the Roaring Forties and other assorted weather goodies that Bass Strait delivers, King Island is one place

you’ve got to get over to. And can I suggest not sailing? This one is a no-brainer for light aircraft pilots, and your passengers are going to love the whole deal.

At 115kts in your C172, you’ll be across the pond in around 25 minutes, and will soon have the little white lighthouse on Cape Wickham square in your sights. It’ll doubtless be blowing oysters off the rocks when you arrive – it usually is – but have a look in the ERSA and you’ll see all those lovely choices of runways available for you. Park clear of the RPT apron and wear your ASIC to wander into the terminal.

As you settle in, you’d be excused for thinking you’ve landed on a patch of Mother England. Stretching from coast to coast on this little island, it’s a carpet of lush green pastures. We’re talking seriously contended cattle here; no wonder the locals rave about their beef and dairy products. Before I get too carried away about anything else, it has to be said I’d go to King Island just for the cheese. And don’t even start me on the Vanilla Bean yoghurt; this place is where it’s born. The King Island Dairy Shop Tasting Room – you’ll never want to leave.

To get around though, you’ll need to organise car hire from the airport, so do that before you get





there, grab a map and you'll be set. We didn't stay the night this time, but last time I flew in, we all stayed at the Boomerang by the Sea motel – modest but very comfortable ensuite rooms with gorgeous views out to the wild and windswept coastline, with breakfast supplied. There's a good restaurant there, but we walked around to the KI Golf & Bowling Club for a few drinks overlooking the 18th hole and out to the Southern Ocean, before heading out to dinner.

If you'd prefer to stay down at Grassy on the south end of the island, check out the King Island Holiday Village. Get the affable owner, Ian Johnson, (Ph: (03) 6461 1177), to tell you all about the King Island Racing Club or visit www.kiracing.com.au to read about their fly-in race meets in January. Sounds like a top weekend; they have to fly in the stewards, jockeys and bookies! At last year's fly-in, around a dozen aircraft crews stayed at the Rocky Glen Retreat, over on the east coast at Naracoopa, about a 20-minute drive from the airport. They very much welcome pilots and the tariff at time of going to print was \$150/nt for a king room with continental breakfast.

While the King Island racing season climaxes with the fly-in event on January 29, the season actually runs from December 4 and includes six other meets in the lead-up to the finale. And fly-in visitors are welcome at each event.

Back to important things, like eating; if you like your world class beef wrapped in pastry, do not leave

the island without driving into Currie, the main town, and trying at least seven varieties of the hand-made pies from the Bakery on Main Street. When they're in season, you'd also better go for the crayfish pie. It's won awards and stuff. And if you're looking for a Gourmet Walking experience whilst you're here, have a look at the King Island Grazing Trails on www.kingisland.tas.gov.au.

It's not a fast-paced holiday you're going to be offered here at King; so go with the flow and enjoy the step back in time to an old fashioned friendly village atmosphere.

Three Hummock Island

Wow, this is an eye-opener. Sitting just off the coast of north-west Tasmania, Three Hummock Island must be the world's best kept secret. It is scientifically proven to have the purest air on the planet. Combine that with pristine beaches, untouched inland lakes and forests and a host of animals, flora and birdlife and you know you've found a very special place. And you're probably going to have it all to yourselves.

The island has a population of two. John and Beverley O'Brien are the managers of Three Hummock and will warmly welcome you and your passengers to their patch of paradise and make your stay a memorable one.

Give the O'Briens a call and they'll send you the airstrip information. You'll be using the Telecom strip, just south of the middle of the island.



ABOVE: Final approach at Barnbougle Dunes Golf Links – Australia's number one public golf course.

RIGHT: Pipers galore lined up at Barnbougle – nice little stopover for lunch or overnight.



It's a decent east-west oriented grass strip, 900m long and stands out well as you approach. When we visited, the short cross strip was unserviceable and there was a slight hump at the intersection. As is required with most bush strip landings, talk to the managers in detail about the current strip condition before you arrive.

There was plenty of room to tie down all five planes for the night and John and Beverley were there to greet us on landing and offer us a lift back up to the accommodation. You can walk the eight kilometres if you wish, but good luck with that. Best to hop in with John and get the low-down on the island as he guides his 4WD through the melaleucas and tea-tree scrub along the track to Chimney Corner.

The O'Briens have spent the last several months renovating the Beach House, which now presents beautifully, sleeps 12 comfortably, plus there's another cottage nearby which sleeps six.

It's a self-catering arrangement here, so you'll need to take in your own food for your stay. That's not the hassle that it sounds; think BBQ or a vat of Geraldine's Spaghetti Bol

to heat up. Too easy. There's a big modern kitchen and BBQ, great outdoor deck overlooking the beach, a cosy library where you can read the fascinating history of the original settlers of the island and there's even a tree-house out the back.

That magnificent untouched beach is about 40 yards down the path; a dramatic west-facing lookout just up the hill and acres of rolling green paddocks to make the choices at sunset a tough task. John and Beverley's love of the island and enthusiasm for its unique natural attributes are infectious from the word go. You will definitely come across the other residents, hundreds of them, as you wander the island, but they all have feathers, fur or joeys. The Cape Barren Geese with new born babies were beautiful.

If you're looking to refuel the next day, Three Hummock to Wynyard is a quick 50nm and for the last half of that you can follow the Tassie coast down from The Nut near Stanley. From Wynyard, it's a really scenic cruise along the north coast past Burnie, Devonport, the mouths of the Rubicom and Tamar Rivers, past George Town and on towards Bridport. Just check the status of

Unexpected flower show atop Table Cape, Wynyard, as we begin our scenic flight across the northern coast of Tassie.



R362A near Beechford before you go scooting into firing range of those enthusiastic Army troops down below.

Barnbougle Dunes Golf Links

I'd heard about Barnbougle Dunes from a friend: "If you're a golfer, which I try to be from time to time,

Barnbougle is a Mecca," he said. "It's rated the seventh best public access course in the world, and certainly the number one in Australia."

If you happen to be a flying golfer, then you've hit the jackpot. Located alongside the second fairway is a well maintained 800m grass airstrip from which it's an easy walk up to the clubhouse for lunch, a round of golf,

or an overnight stay if you wish. They offer two-bedroom cabins or four-bedroom villas for larger groups. We stayed for lunch and sampled some great local Tasmanian fair while we waited for three of our group to play a quick nine holes.

Barnbougle Dunes is a private airstrip, but General Manager Gary Dixon is happy to encourage

visiting pilots who wish to use the club facilities, and just asks that you contact the club (Ph: (03) 6356.0094) before you leave home and they will forward you the landing strip details. There had been five chartered Chieftains bringing in guests the day before we called in. An easy flight over from Melbourne makes it a popular getaway for groups of stressed out mainlanders and once they've travelled charter, says Gary, they rarely go back to commercial airline travel. The savings to be made in time and effort far outweigh the extra dollars spent. It's a dramatic setting for a golf course, right by the beach, and designed to challenge the ability of most who choose to play here.

Flinders Island

Our motto for this trip is, 'here for a good time, not a long time', so we bank away over the coastal fairways of Barnbougle after lunch and our little fleet is soon cruising over a glistening Bass Strait, heading northeast this

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need to get hold of if you're planning a trip to this part of Flinders. Mick Grimshaw is the chair of the Flinders Island Tourism Association, local cattle farmer and general all-round rogue, (Ph: 0427 100 342). He and Daryl Butler, owner of Palana Retreat (Ph: 0438 622 555), will go out of their way to help you get the most out of your stay and help you with any queries you may have.

Accommodation that night for some of us was at the Palana Retreat. Palana is a tiny holiday hamlet at the very northern tip of Flinders, population: *one*. (And we thought Three Hummock was sparse.) Daryl is the only permanent resident. He fell in the love with the place eight years ago whilst visiting from Melbourne, built himself a house, then built an even better one next door for you and me to stay in. Daryl will pick you and your passengers up from the airport and deliver you to the door of this gorgeous two-bedroom beach house and – such a treat for visiting pilots – even throw you the keys of the spare car out the



front which you're welcome to use throughout your visit.

Whilst you crank up the BBQ on the front deck, overlooking the billabong below and the amazing expanse of Palana Beach, you'll even be able to order a local bottle of wine from Daryl. His liquor licence is still shiny new, but it works just fine. He'll also organise catering before you get

there. If you're anything like me when I'm away flying, the only thing I want to make in the food department is a reservation, so I palm off any cooking if humanly possible.

Bush walks, beach walks, blow-your-mind fishing, kayaking on the billabong, or just chilling out in this ultra comfortable retreat ticks just about all the boxes, if you are a group

of four or less. It has internet access so you can check the weather on your laptop, file a flight plan and do all that responsible stuff before you leave.

JJ's On The Bay at Killiecrankie is where you'll find a great coffee, light meal and art gallery, showcasing locally produced art and craft from the region. You might even catch a local or two to share a yarn with, if

3 day 3 night package including accommodation and car hire



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King Island Holiday Village

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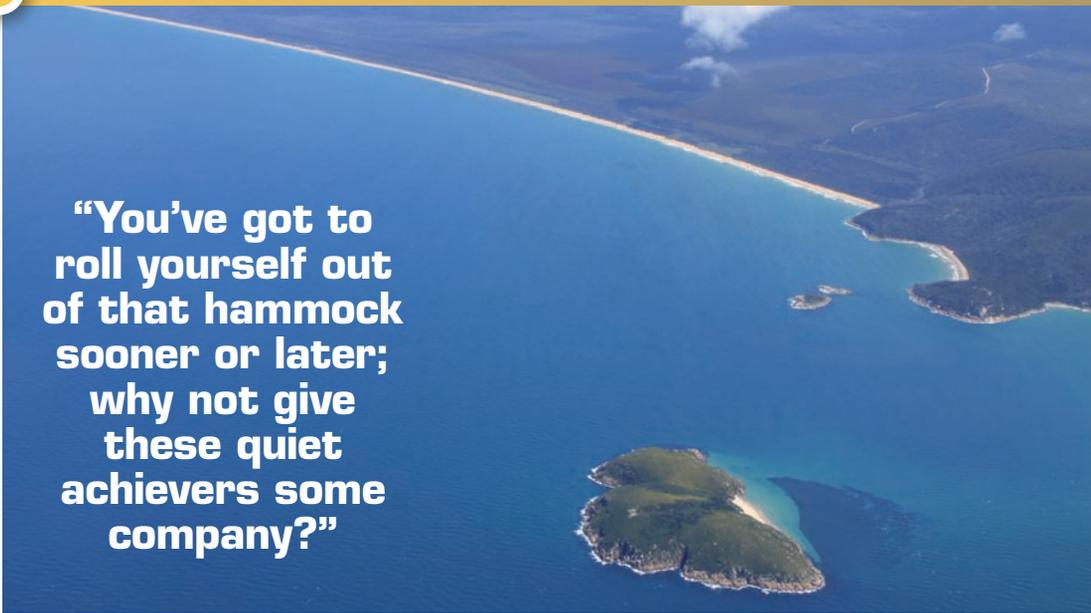
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* For travel options to King Island From Victoria
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ABOVE: Ninety Mile Beach.

RIGHT: Palana Beach at the northern tip of Flinders Island.

you’re having withdrawals from city chaos. JJ’s is open for the summer from January onwards and can be reached by phoning 0409 068 167.

Another handy accommodation option, right next door to JJ’s and a two minute walk to the beach is the Killiecrankie Bay Holiday House. Run by born-and-bred

Flinders Island residents, Alan and Margaret Wheatley, this is a fully self-contained five-bedroom house that sleeps from two to 10 people and is an easy 15-minute walk from the airstrip, although pick ups can be arranged. If you are thinking of catching a crayfish to cook for yourself, Alan can also point you

in exactly the right direction, or he can arrange to have one in the house when you arrive, if it’s cray season. In fact, there isn’t a question about Flinders that Alan or Margaret won’t be able to answer.

On the way around to Killiecrankie, take a quick detour to The Docks, a stunning beach not far from Palana that’s cornered the market on massive granite boulders and offers crystal clear water for swimming.

If you’re up for more sophisticated activities on Flinders, you’ll find there are the usual adventures on offer, like scuba diving, snorkelling, boat charters and 4WD tours. A Next G mobile phone will get coverage over most of Flinders Island.

A less trodden path

Jonathan Merridew flies frequent charters down to these Bass Strait islands from Lilydale, which explains why he knows the whole area like the back of his hand. He rates it amongst his favourite destinations – friendly locals, an

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So c'mon, you've gotta roll yourself out of that hammock sooner or later – why not give these quiet achievers down here some company? They all seem to work tirelessly in an effort to show off their beautiful patch of Australia, and I bet you won't find it hard to fill those seats in your plane. If you're coming from afar, give Lilydale a call if you want to get checked out in one of their aircraft; they've got a well kept fleet of high and low wings for hire. You might

even prefer to sit back and relax with the Princess, (or the boys and the fishing rods) and let one of the Lilydale crew do all the hard work on your individually designed charter.

I personally found it refreshing to spend a good part of the three days way off the beaten track. Now I'm dying to go further into Tassie, and maybe investigate St Helens, Freycinet Peninsula, Maria Island, Bay of Fires, Wineglass Bay ... so many dreams ... I'm thinking a seafood marathon all the way down the east coast to Hobart. 

Checklist

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KING ISLAND

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www.boomerangbythesea.com.au
www.rockyglen.com.au
King Island Car Rental, Ph: (03) 6462 1282
P&A Car Rental, King Island, Ph: (03) 6462 1603
The King Island Dairy Shop is closed Saturdays.

THREE HUMMOCK ISLAND

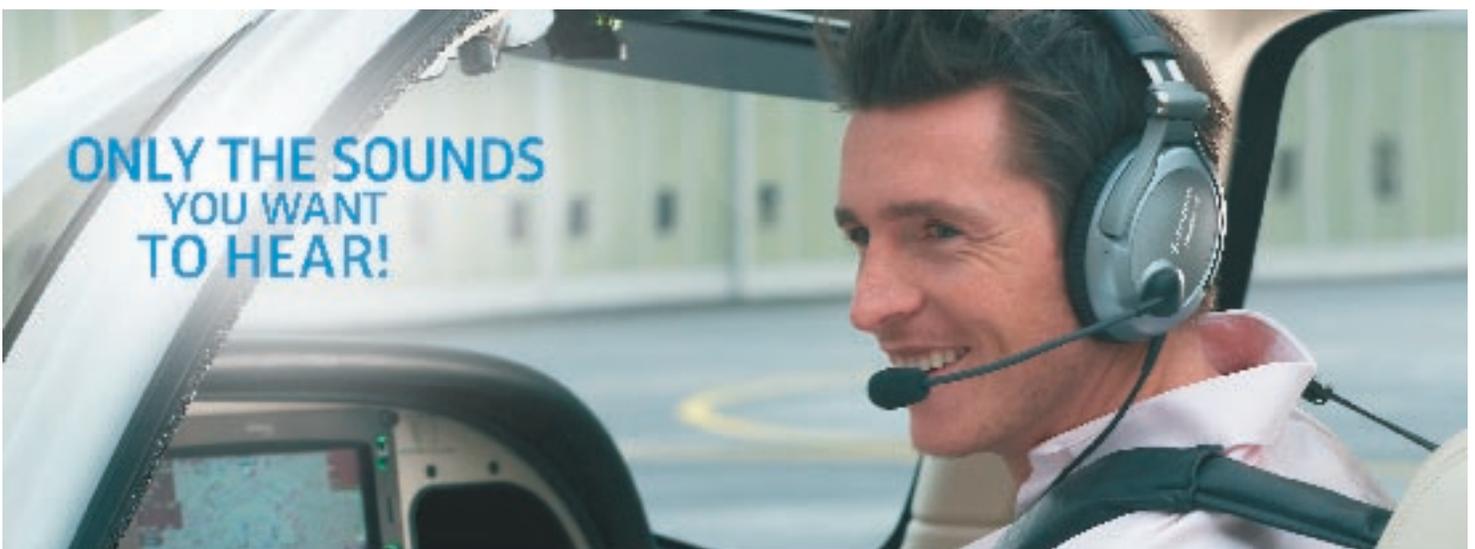
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www.visitflindersisland.com.au
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Alan Wheatley, Ph: 0407 598 560; Margaret, Ph: 0428 592 130
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