

Port Arthur

Port Arthur is located on the Tasman Peninsula, in the far south east corner of Tasmania, Australia's island state. Port Arthur was originally established as a severe penitentiary for convicts from England who misbehaved and committed crimes in Australia's mainland convict colonies at the time.

The area is now an important historical site and the hard times suffered here, can be felt when visiting Port Arthur, leaving people most affected by what they see. However it is an extremely interesting place to visit and offers amazing natural scenery and a coastline that offers surfing, sea kayaking and bushwalking. Port Arthur is often visited in a day trip from Hobart which is only an hour and a half drive away. There are a number of places to stay in Port Arthur, from camp grounds to motels and bed 'n' breakfasts.

History, Sights & Attractions

Port Arthur settlement began in 1830 when Governor Arthur chose the Tasman Peninsula as a penal colony for prisoners who committed further crimes in their colonies. The site was chosen as it was a 'natural penitentiary', with the peninsula connected to the mainland by a 100 metre stretch of land, that was once manned by chained guard dogs to deter escapee convicts. The prisoners were originally employed to build a timber station and in later years, were involved in the first industries of ship building, shoemaking, smithing, timber and brick making.

The Port Arthur Historic Site is the tourist information centre that boasts an excellent interpretive gallery, where you can follow the convict's journey from England to Tasmania and their experiences at Port Arthur.

About 20 kilometres from here is the Coal Mines Historic Site, where you can learn about the harsh lives and working conditions of repeat offenders from Port Arthur, who worked underground extracting coal. Also look out for Doo Town, a curious community of shacks or shanty houses that are themed with Doo names, such as 'She'll Doo' and 'Humpty Doo.'

Port Arthur, other than its historic sites is a great place to visit for its natural beauty. Surfing, sea kayaking and bushwalking are very popular in the region and you'll find the coastline breathtaking. A short drive from Port Arthur takes you to Remarkable Cave, a pretty cave-like opening in the rock that leads out to sea. Also from this spot you can walk to Crescent Bay, it takes about 4-5 hours (return).

The Tasmanian Devil Park is a popular spot to visit, particularly at 11am when the Tassie Devils are fed. There are also a number of other native animals such as wombats and eagles.

The Bush Mill can be visited for its historic timber mill, steam railway and settlement displays. There are also nightly ghost tours to the convict ruins and there's also a cruise to the Isle of The Dead, an adjacent island cemetery, the resting place for a thousand convicts.

Climate

Port Arthur has a cool climate year round. In summer the average daytime temperature is 18.5 °C, while in winter it drops to about 11°C. At any time of year, it's recommended to bring some warm clothing.