

GETAWAYS | *North-east coast Tasmania*

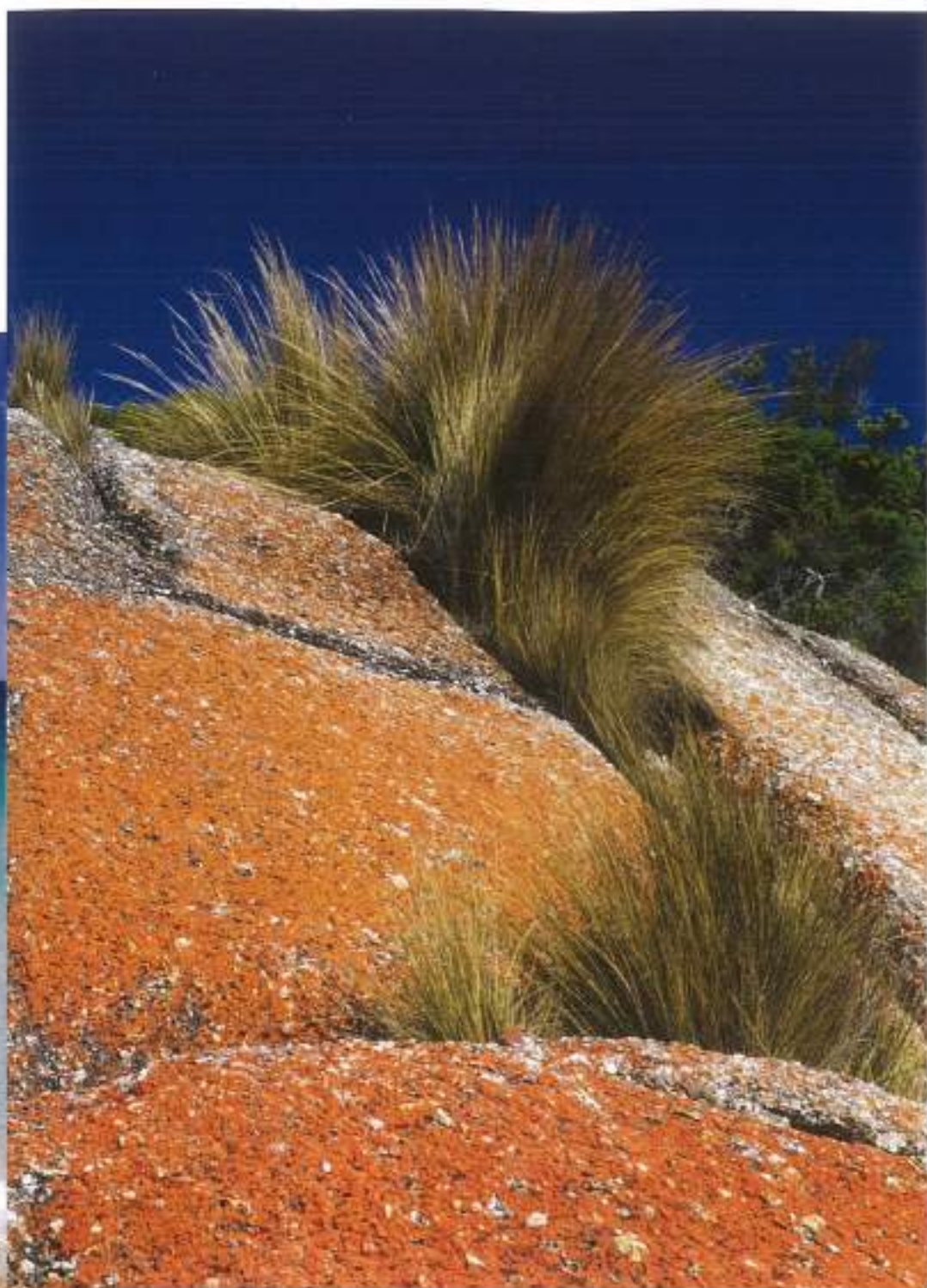
# WALKING ON COUNTRY

WORDS JOCELYN PRIDE

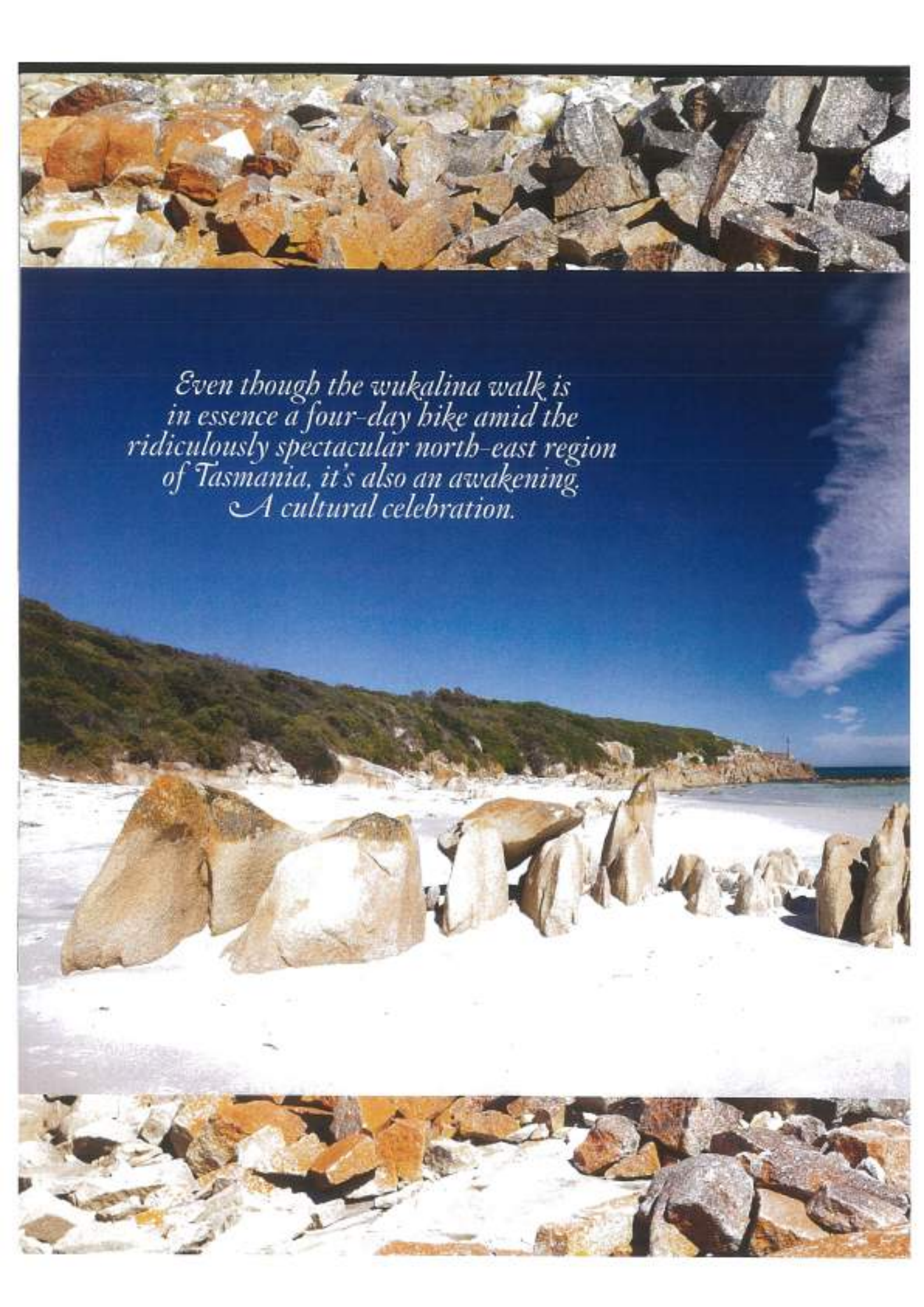




LEFT TO  
RIGHT  
*The surreal beauty  
of Tasmania's Bay of  
Fire. Red lichen  
forms a stark contrast  
against grass and sky.*



A new GUIDED WALK exposes Tasmania's oft-forgotten,  
*FASCINATING ABORIGINAL* heritage in  
beautiful, DRAMATIC FASHION.



*Even though the wukalina walk is  
in essence a four-day hike amid the  
ridiculously spectacular north-east region  
of Tasmania, it's also an awakening.  
A cultural celebration.*



CLOCKWISE FROM  
MAIN: Granite boulders  
appear to block your path  
on the wukalina walk.  
The inviting lounge at  
Lupatani house. You  
only need to carry the  
bare essentials.



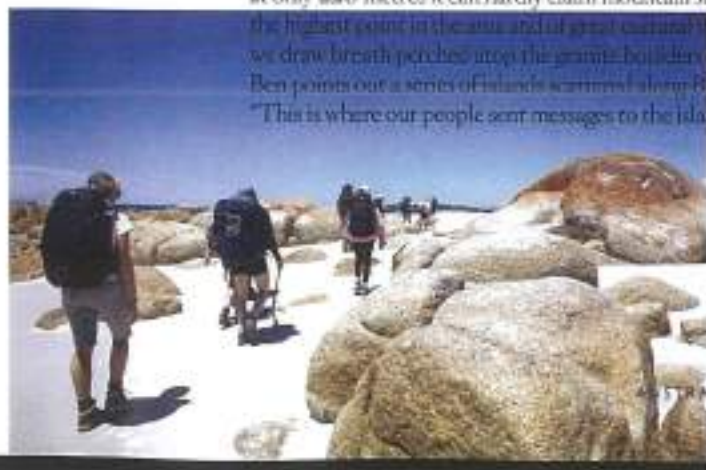
"YA PULINGINA, WELCOME TO COUNTRY," Ben Leed says with quiet reverence, his eyes filled with emotion. "My ancestors have walked here over thousands of years." Ben's words hang on every delicate, laced frond of bracken, whisper through the gnarled trunks of peppermints and she-oaks and penetrate the vast blueness above. A prolonged silence blankets our small group and for a split second even the birdsong takes a pause. This is a significant moment, not only for Ben, one of our three palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) guides, but also for Clyde Mansell, the founder of Tasmania's first Aboriginal owned and operated tourism venture. For Clyde, it's the realisation of a lifelong dream.

As chairperson of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania, Clyde first proposed the wukalina walk more than a decade ago. "I wanted something powerful to connect our community and to share our cultural stories," Clyde said earlier in the day at the Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania in Launceston before we bussed to the start of the walk. "As an elder, unfortunately I was born in a difficult time for Aboriginals in Tasmania. It's not about blame, it's about moving forward." And even though the wukalina walk is in essence a four-day hike amid the ridiculously spectacular north-east region of Tasmania, it's also an awakening. A cultural celebration. A journey of discovery.

Carrying our packs stuffed with personal bare essentials for four days of hiking in weather that can change faster than the flick of a lizard's tongue, the first part of the walk meanders the leisurely trail to the peak of wukalina (Mt William). Also known as 'Bill's Hill', at only 220 metres it can hardly claim mountain status, however it's the highest point in the area and of great cultural importance. As we draw breath perches atop the granite boulders of the summit,

Ben points out a series of islands scattered along Bass Strait.

"This is where our people sent messages to the islands by lighting →





LEFT TO RIGHT:  
*The sleeping huts  
 of leahyuni huni are  
 nestled in the bush.  
 Each has a clever winch  
 system that lifts one  
 complete wall to open onto  
 a safari-style bed.*

*Built entirely on palawa principles,  
 the elegance of the camp is in  
 its simplicity.*

fires. One fire told them people were coming from the islands and two were lit when people were leaving," says Ben. On our descent, we peel off the main track and Ben pushes through the bushes to reveal a hidden trail created specifically for the wukalina walk. The Narnia-esque experience feels like 40,000 years have been wound back and we're creeping through a secret palawa passage linking the mountain to the ocean.

The ruggedness brings a heightened awareness – an arousal of the senses. Breathing in the heady scent of eucalyptus mingled with the sweetness of kunzea bushes, marvelling at the neat stacks of wombat scat that look like building blocks and feeling grass-tree spikes swish against our legs.

Along the way Ben forages for bush tucker. We taste thirst-quenching she-oak nuts and young shoots of sagg, a type of clumping grass. In a glade sprinkled with Southern grass-trees, Ben digs around a base beneath the 'skirt' of a tree and pulls out a lump of sap. "Mixed with a bit of roo-poo this makes strong glue," he says.

As the late afternoon sun paints the landscape gold, we catch sight of our home for the next two nights. Two of our group are the proud parents of one of the architects who ingeniously designed leahyuni huni (resting place) camp and their gasps can be heard above the rest of our oohs and aahs.

A narrow boardwalk leads us to the welcoming flames licking the edges of a large fire pit. Nestled behind is a box-like communal hub made of charred local timbers with a series of sliding doors, revealing a stunning domed lounge, family-style kitchen and bathroom lined with Tasmanian blackwood. Built entirely on palawa principles, the elegance of the camp is in its simplicity. Touches of Aboriginal culture add to the ambience, from the kelp fruit baskets in the kitchen to the wallaby skins scattered over the bearhugs in the lounge room. Everything is designed to spark curiosity and imagination.

Dotted among the trees, the sleeping huts are barely visible. As mini versions of the domed lounge, a clever winch system lifts one complete wall to open onto a safari-style bed draped with wallaby skins. It's like being in a cocoon.

We dine al fresco on a selection of locally sourced traditional and modern fare. Mutton bird and wallaby steaks are cooked over the fire pit and there's also salmon, organic salads and vegetables topped off with a choice of Tasmanian white, red, cider, beer or mineral water. As the embers glow and slowly blink into darkness, we sit transfixed listening to stories of creation, like how the son of the sun and moon first created the palawa with a tail like a kangaroo. "We're all linked to the sky and land," says Ben. →



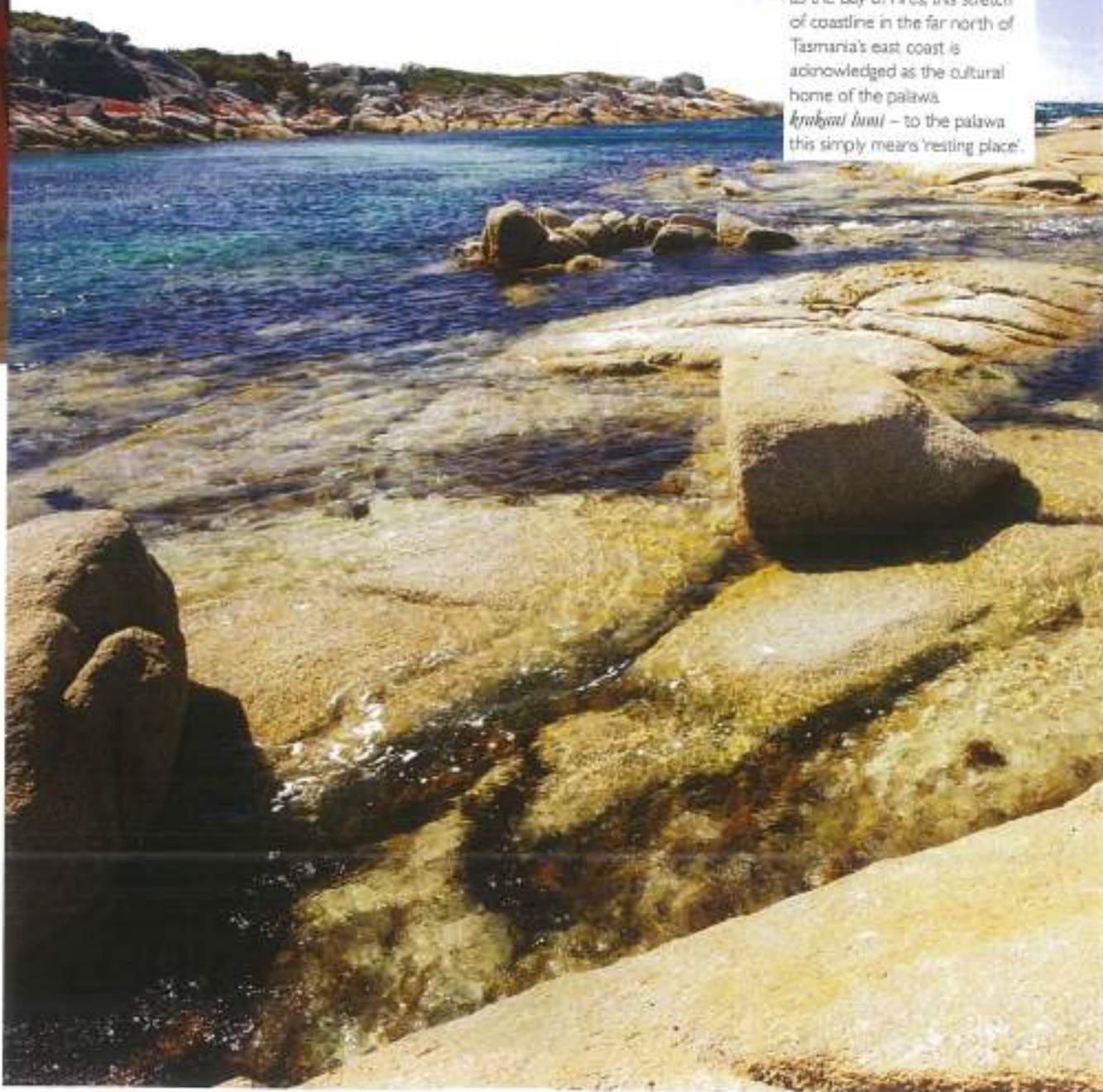


#### AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECTURE

The designers of Krakani Lumi lodge, Poppy Taylor and Mat Hinds of Taylor + Hinds Architects, brought home top honours at the international Asia-Pacific region 2018 INDE Awards ([indeawards.com](http://indeawards.com)), held in Singapore on 22 June. Their design scooped the grand prize of the evening, The Building, which recognises projects that 'advance architecture and its capacity to respond to place-specific, cultural needs'. Other Australian candidates in this category included Jackalope and Pt. Leo Estate on the Mornington Peninsula and Sydney's Paramount House Hotel (see p42 for review).

**CLOCKWISE FROM THIS IMAGE:**

*Explore the rugged beauty of the Bay of Fires. The walk includes a night at a lighthouse keeper's cottage. The guest accommodation at *krakani launi* blends seamlessly into the surrounding bush.*



**GLOSSARY**

*palawa* – the name for Aboriginal Tasmanians who came to the island around 40,000 years ago when a land bridge joined Tasmania with the mainland.

*wakylina* – the name for Mt William in the palawa kari language.

*lampuna* – commonly known as the Bay of Fires, this stretch of coastline in the far north of Tasmania's east coast is acknowledged as the cultural home of the palawa.

*krakani launi* – to the palawa this simply means 'resting place'.



The following day is all about relaxing and hiking the area around camp. Without our packs, it's easy walking as we explore the quintessential Tasmanian beach in front of the camp. At low tide we search for signs of wildlife. The sea gently laps the shore and the soft morning light illuminates the patterns of animal tracks crisscrossing the chalk-white sand. After spotting wombat, wallaby and numerous bird tracks, we strike gold: Tasmanian devil tracks.

"See they have an unusual gait," says Ben as we examine each paw print. "DFT [devil face tumour] wiped out more than 85 per cent of the Tasmanian devils in wukalina. Last year 33 disease-free animals were brought here from Maria Island and so far, so good." In a strange twist of fate, wukalina is where the first case of DFT was recorded in 1996. "This is good habitat for devils, they've thrived here in the past."

In addition to the animal tracks, the beach is a porthole into the history and culture of the palawa. From interpreting the ink marks on a cuttlefish to discovering 101 uses for kelp, everything has meaning, especially the shell middens.

"This is both a dining table and rubbish dump," says Ben as we stand in front of a massive mound scattered with shells, bones and tiny fragments of tools. "It's where our people ate together and managed waste." An outdoor museum. "Studies show this midden is probably more than 30,000 years old." Even at one meal a day, that's over 10 million dinners eaten at this table.

From *krakani lumi*, the next day it's a 17-kilometre hike to our final destination - *larapuna* (Bay of Fires). Due to the warm weather, we get an early start. With dead calm seas and no wind, →







*Nature's masterpiece  
is a breather.  
Fringed with  
snow-white sand  
smudged with  
perfectly sculptured  
orange rocks.*

each bay we cross seems even more stunning than the last. "The older the beach, the finer the sand," remarks Ben as our boots squeak along the foreshore. Settling into a rhythm, we hike at a good pace, sometimes clambering through the outcrops of burnt orange lichen-covered granite rocks, other times catching our breath and laying on the 'marsupial lawns', known hunting grounds of the palawa.

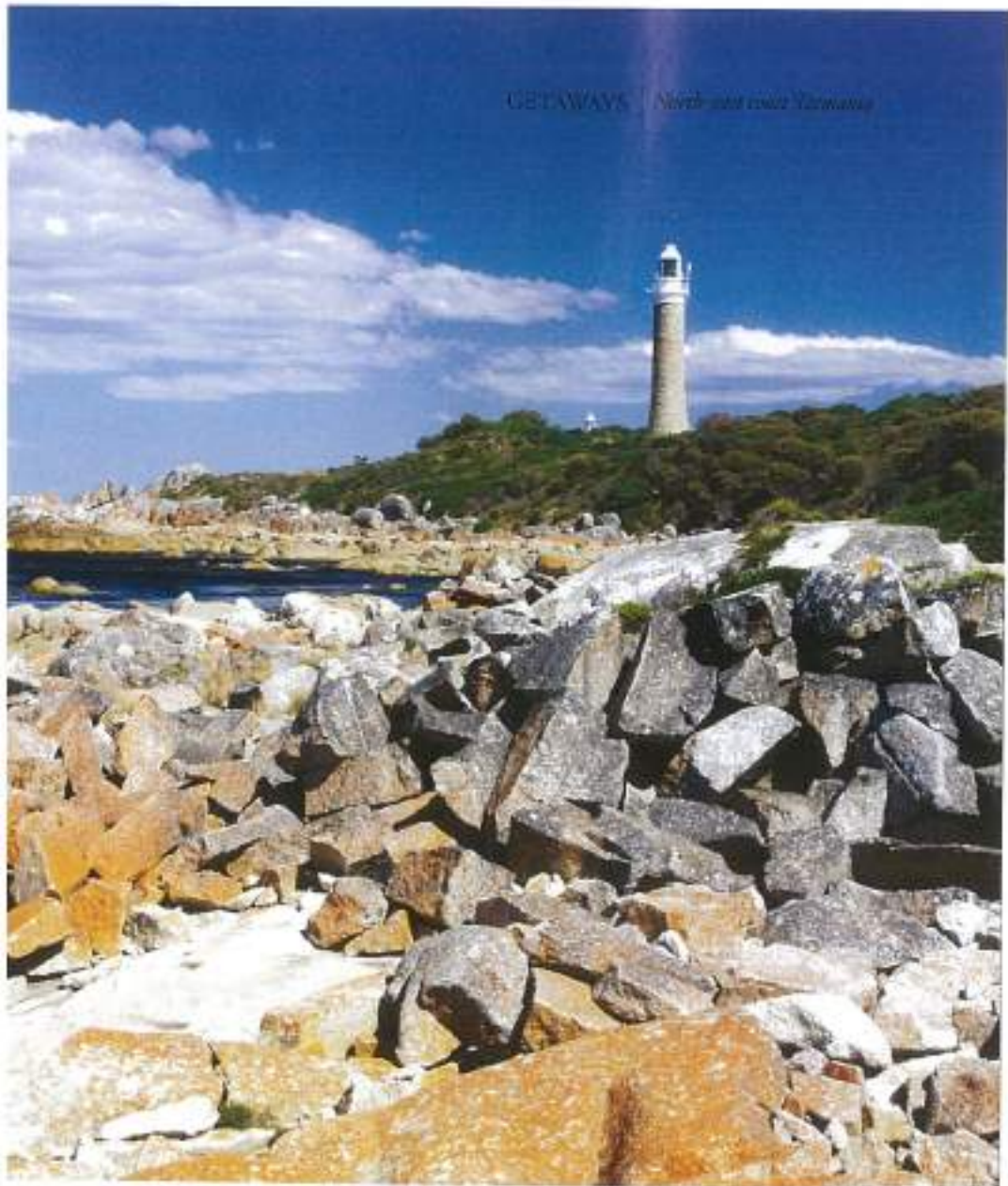
By mid afternoon we round the last bend, climb the last hill to Eddystone Point and officially set foot at the start of Irapuna. Nature's masterpiece is a breather. Fringed with snow-white sand smudged with perfectly sculptured orange rocks, a swirl of aquamarine water stretches to the horizon blurring into the royal blue sky. We switch the hiking boots for swimmers and splash into the water to double check it's real.

To complete the dreamlike experience, our home for the night is straight out of a story

book – a classic lighthouse keeper's cottage, elegantly restored by the same architects who designed Kralumi. Minimalist yet cosy, with white-washed stone walls, rich wooden floors, contemporary furniture. Aboriginal art, and the smell of a roast wafting from the kitchen, it's the perfect spot to finish the walk.

In the morning, before heading back to Launceston, we climb the magnificent spiral staircase to the top of the lighthouse, built in 1889. As we stand drinking in the picture-perfect view, Ben encourages us to reflect on the hike and visualise the scene as it was thousands of years ago. Apart from a couple of modern boats bobbing around on the water it could well be another day in the life of the palawa. A dramatic sweep of untouched coastline, filled with nature's bounty. "We never owned the land," says Ben, "the land owned us." ☺





## DETAILS

### *Getting there*

Qantas flies to Launceston from most state capitals. Guests are picked up from the airport or a designated hotel and taken to the Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania, the meeting place for the walk.

### *Playing there*

The wukalina walk operates at various dates from November through to April. The four-day hike is all-inclusive with two nights staying at krakani lumi camp and one night in the lighthouse keeper's cottage at Eddystone Point. All meals, snacks and wines showcase Tasmanian produce. Guests may borrow a 40-litre (tried and tested) backpack, gaiters, Gore-tex jacket and water bottle. Extra luggage can be left at the departure point in Launceston. Based on twin share, the cost per person is \$2495. [wukalinawalk.com.au](http://wukalinawalk.com.au)

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

*The spectacular draped lounge of krakani lumi. The lighthouse at Eddystone Point. Tassie druids leave tracks in the sand. The communal areas are furnished from local timbers. Hiking through tall grasses. Clean timber lines offer a minimalist yet rustic feel at krakani lumi.*

