



The scallops clack like castanets as Andrea Cole hauls the black plastic basket out of the sea and onto the metal floor of the boat. “They don’t like it out of the water much,” she shrugs, then deftly opens a scallop with a small-handled knife and slices the muscle from the shell.

The scallop sits in its lustrous splendour with the sun making diamonds of the seawater surrounding it. She hands it to me and I suck the scallop straight off the shell. It’s sweet, yet salty as the sea and completely delicious – the freshest seafood I’ve ever eaten.

The sun is warm on my back, the water is still, and the light has etched shadows onto the rocky mountains known as the Hazards that form the lumpy backbone of the

wash her oysters before she sells them. But it’s hard work. It takes three years to grow an oyster to a size that’s ready to eat and, in that time, every oyster gets brought in from the marine farm leases, checked for size and taken back out again up to six times. The timing of the harvest depends on the low tide. If it’s 2am in the middle of a Tasmanian winter, that’s when it has to be done. Sounds like a nightmare.

And, in fact, I’m already living a dream. I’m on a food tour of Tasmania with Gourmet Safaris. By the time we meet Andrea on her aptly named boat, *Perseverance*, we’ve already tasted walnuts straight off the tree, sipped vodka flavoured with native pepper berries at The Lark Distillery in Hobart, seen saffron growing and been amazed by blue mushrooms.

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Freyncinet Peninsula behind us. A sea eagle loops overhead. It’s another dreamy day in Tasmania.

Tasmania is a dangerous place for a dreamer. Around every corner is another fantasy of a lifestyle change. One moment I’m dreaming of leaving the big city for life on a strawberry farm. Kate’s Berry Farm looks ideal, gazing out to the Hazards from the hills south of Swansea. The rows of strawberries slope down to the eucalypt-shaded dam where a playful platypus lives. The attic windows of Kate Bradley’s simple wooden farmhouse face that inspirational view and her strawberries are completely delicious.

But, after a luscious strawberry ice-cream, we move on. Suddenly I’m imagining life in an olive grove, such as the one at Coombend Estate at Swansea where Jo and John Fenn-Smith make wine and grow olives. The olive trees are laden with bright-green fruit and the silvery foliage shimmers. All around are wooded hills and sloping vineyards. The sounds of birds echo in the quiet and off to the east is the sea.

Andrea breaks into my daydream with a creamy fresh oyster and a reality check about life as an oyster farmer. It’s true she lives and works in one of the most beautiful places on earth. The water here is so clean she doesn’t even have to

We’ve also decided that a good measure of an apple is how loud its crunch is (the loudest are straight off the tree), tasted blackberry and chocolate jam on homemade scones at the top of a mountain, and eaten plenty of meals and drunk lots of fine wine. The raw scallops and fresh oysters from Andrea’s leases near Coles Bay mark a halfway point in our gastronomic journey.

If you fancy doing your own food tour of the glorious east coast of Tasmania, Hobart’s Salamanca Place markets are the perfect starting point. Every Saturday the bustling waterfront is packed with stalls selling local food and crafts. The beautifully presented vegetables of the Hmong hill tribe, who migrated to Tasmania from Laos some 20 years ago, take up one area. Apple growers from the Huon Valley bring in their fresh-from-the-tree treasures and there are also local olive oils, raspberries, mushrooms and potatoes.

With a car full of produce, head north, stopping at the wineries of Cambridge and Coal River to collect more supplies. Don’t miss lunch at Meadowbank Estate Vineyard Restaurant where new chef André Kropp turns local produce into some of the best food on the island. Just up the road is Richmond, a colonial-era village where the ►