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RUTH DAWKINS

Ruth Dawkins is a writer, originally from Scotland but now based in Tasmania, where the cold winters and generous measures of whisky make her feel very much at home. She blogs at dorkymum.wordpress.com and can be found on Twitter as [@dorkymum](https://twitter.com/dorkymum)

***There's no better way to get to the heart of a city than through the people that live there. Every month we ask someone, clearly in love with their city, to take us on a personal tour and tell us what makes it so special. You may feel inspired to visit one day or to rediscover the charms of a city closer to you, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy some armchair travel.**

What brought you there and where are you from originally?

I'm from the Isle of Harris, but have lived in various places across the UK. We were in Hertfordshire when my husband was approached about a job at the University of Tasmania. At that stage I didn't even know where it was, and had never visited Australia before, but we came for a visit and fell in love with the city.

How long have you lived in Hobart?

We made the leap in in September 2013, so a little over two years ago.

Tell us what makes it unique.

It's a perfectly sized place. Only 200,000 people live here so it has many of the advantages of a big city but it's easy to get around and never feels too crowded. It's also



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- 1 Some of Hobart's colourful street art
- 2 The post office in NoHo (North Hobart)
- 3 The original Lady Nelson was built in England in 1799 to explore Australia. This replica is based at Hobart's waterfront and can be hired out
- 4 Chocolate this way: the Battery Point district
- 5 Inside Camo Tuesdays, Ruth's favourite coffee shop

brilliantly situated within Tasmania; if you drive for just half an hour you can be on a beach, up a mountain, or out in the bush.

What's it like in January?

January is the middle of summer and it's a really busy month. There is a big food festival, a contemporary arts festival and lots of activity around the end of the Sydney-Hobart yacht race. The weather is warm and the city is full of visitors.

What time of day do you most enjoy and why?

I enjoy late afternoon. Tasmania doesn't get as hot as the rest of Australia, but on a nice January day it can still be about 25C around 4pm so I love it when my husband comes home from work and we can sit out on our deck sipping a glass of cold Tassie Chardonnay and watching our son play. »

MY CITY*: HOBART

RUTH DAWKINS INTRODUCES TASMANIA'S CAPITAL, WHERE IT'S SUMMER DOWN UNDER - AND YOU CAN SPOT BOTH SEALS AND STREET ART



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“The air in Tasmania is some of the cleanest in the world – you can see it in the clear, crisp light”

What’s the nature like?

Inescapable! If you’re down at the waterfront you stand a good chance of seeing a seal or a dolphin. If you live in the outer suburbs you’ll easily see animals like wallabies and possums in your garden, and wherever you are in the city you’ll be woken up by birdsong every morning.

Where’s your favourite outdoor space?

I love Long Beach. There’s a kids’ playground, a grassy area for ball games, and a sandy beach that is great for paddling and sandcastles. All the parks have free gas barbecues for people to use, so at this time of year there’s usually the smell of sausages in the air.

Tell us about the light and colours of your city.

The air in Tasmania is some of the cleanest in the world, and you can see that in the clear, crisp light – you can often look up and see individual sunbeams cutting through the sky. We often have beautiful sunrises and sunsets, and it’s one of the best spots for watching the *aurora australis*, or southern lights. It’s a bright place at ground level, too. There is a lot of fun street art, and people seem to take great pride in their gardens and

flowers – those different but equally colourful sides to the city seem to co-exist happily.

Tell us about the people who live there.

Tasmanians are very friendly and welcoming; everyone takes the time to smile and say hello, and people on the bus love a good chat. It’s a great community to be part of.

Where are your favourite places to gather with friends?

I love NoHo (North Hobart) where there are plenty of coffee shops like Sweet Envy and Room for a Pony. I also love the restaurants and bars down at the docks, places like The Glass House and Frank. I’d say go to NoHo to meet for cake, and to the waterfront for cocktails.

Tell us about eating in your city?

There is a big focus on local, seasonal, organically produced food here. Tasmania is famous for its apples, cherries, wine, whisky and seafood. You don’t have to go to an expensive restaurant to get a great meal; sometimes the smaller and simpler places are better because they let the great produce speak for itself.

What’s your favourite way to get around?

I like to walk whenever possible. Even on the ten-minute walk to school with my son there will be something interesting to talk about – a bird species we haven’t seen before, or a boat coming up the river. It is a quiet but

constantly moving city and you definitely experience that best on foot.

What types of shop do you most like to visit?

There are very few chain stores in Hobart; it’s nearly all independently owned shops. It’s wonderful for buying gifts because there is so much beautiful craft and artwork to choose from. It’s good for bookshops, too. Fullers and the Hobart Bookshop are both great, but I also love the second hand stores like Déjà vu Books in Salamanca.

Where do you like to escape to?

I like heading out to Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary for a cuddle with the kangaroos, up to New Norfolk for a browse around the antique shops, or down the Huon Valley for beautiful views and a quick cider at Willie Smith’s Apple Shed.

- 1 Catching up at Camo Tuesdays, a popular haunt for coffee
- 2 The Winston in NoHo has a wide range of beer and American food such as buffalo wings and pulled pork
- 3 The waterfront, home to wildlife, boats – and cocktail bars
- 4 A seal pops up to say hello at Hobart’s docks
- 5 Barrels at Lark Distillery. Hobart is well known for its malt whisky

What has been your best discovery?

There’s a grungy old petrol station in Sandy Bay that is home to several of the city’s best secrets. There’s a pop-up shop there, where you’ll often find a local maker or craftsperson. There’s a wonderful coffee place called Camo Tuesdays, and there’s Maning Reef, which does the best woodfired pizzas and fish and chips in all of Hobart.

What do you miss most if you’ve been away?

I am always thrilled to get back to the big skies and the slow pace of life. I find bigger cities like Melbourne quite overwhelming now when I visit – the noise in particular »



- 1 Filigree architecture in Battery Point
- 2 The trademark fare of Taco Taco, a van that travels around Hobart
- 3 This seahorse stands proud outside Mures Seafood restaurant on Hobart's waterfront



is a real sensory overload – so every time I go away I feel very lucky that I'm coming home to Hobart.

What would surprise a newcomer?

I think the range of activities and experiences that are packed into a small space is surprising. If you're used to cities that sprawl on for miles, it's also surprising when you head ten minutes out of Hobart and suddenly find yourself in the middle of forest and bush land.

If you could change one thing, what would it be?

I'd expand the options for clothes shopping. I'm not very fashion conscious, but even I really struggle to find new clothes here. There are some lovely small boutiques if you want something for a special occasion, but we could do with something like Gap for affordable basics.

What keeps you there and where else would you like to live?

Hobart really spoils you as a city. The closest UK equivalent I can think of is Edinburgh, but the weather is much better here so I'm hoping we can stay! 5

RUTH'S PERSONAL TOUR

FAVOURITE SHOP

The Maker

Salamanca Arts Centre is one of those places where I pop in to buy a gift and always end up leaving with something for myself too. themakerhobart.com.au

FAVOURITE GALLERY

Spacebar Gallery

This place is packed full of quirky objects and contemporary artworks from local designers. spacebargallery.com.au

FAVOURITE BAR

The Winston

The Winston in NoHo. An amazing range of beers on tap and an American-inspired menu. thewinstonbar.com

FAVOURITE RESTAURANT

Taco Taco

It's not strictly a restaurant but I'm a huge fan of Taco Taco, a food van that travels around the city. facebook.com/TacoTacoTas

FAVOURITE MARKET

The Farm Gate market

Sunday morning is the best place for picking up local produce. An explosion of colour. farmgatemarket.com.au

FAVOURITE HOTEL

The Alabama Hotel

The funkiest place in town. Each of its 17 rooms is decorated with original art and vintage touches. alabamahobart.com.au

PLACE TO SEE BY NIGHT

Museum of Old and New Art

Head out to the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) for the sunset sequence of James Turrell's *Amarna* – a large-scale art installation that creates a light show to complement the natural conditions at the start and end of the day. mona.net.au/james-turrell/

BEST VIEW

Top of Mount Wellington

Brave the narrow, twisty roads to head to the top of Mount Wellington and look out over the city.

THE ONE THING YOU HAVE TO SEE

Bruny Island

Take a trip there on a Pennicott Wilderness Journeys boat, or catch the ferry from Kettering, just south of Hobart.