

6 TRAVEL + INDULGENCE

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN, FEBRUARY 23-24, 2019
theaustralian.com.au/travel

The ruddy, weather-beaten complexion of sailor and boatbuilder Jay Lawry hints at a colourful life as he speaks laconically about his 50 years on the ocean. We've caught him at ease on his 39ft Huon pine ketch, Seasalter. Behind a silver beard and craggy features, his eyes sparkle and the conversation reveals a wealth of sailing knowledge garnered from decades in boat restoration, numerous voyages around Australia and two global circumnavigations.

He also relates the recent sadness of losing one of the great loves of his life, the sloop Mavourneen, when two months ago it struck a mystery object off the coast of New Zealand. Jay tells of the heartache of watching the vessel take on water for three hours before he was winched to safety by helicopter.

Jay's passion for the sea is one of many rich tales that surface as we meander around Hobart's waterfront during the biennial Australian Wooden Boat Festival. It's a sparkling weekend in late summer and a kaleidoscope of pennants and ensigns flap in the breeze amid the jungle of rigging.

The waterfront is buzzing with the energy of thousands of boat enthusiasts from Australia and abroad. Yachties rub shoulders with shipwrights, chandlers flog their wares and artisans with rare skills display their ornate creations. The romance of the sea appears in lusty bloom, and landlubbers like myself are easily seduced.

We start our day strolling through the Shipwrights Village, a bustling array of stands and demonstrations showcasing the ageless craftsmanship of wooden boatbuilding. An elderly blacksmith toils, hunched over the fire of his small hand forge; woodcarvers grind away on a medieval spring-pole lathe using tools dating back 200 years.

Further along, Massachusetts boatbuilder Bob Fuller shows us his carved wooden



PAUL GILBERT/BALLANTYNE PHOTOGRAPHY



ROBERT CATCHPOLE

Vessels at Hobart's Australian Wooden Boat Festival, left; HM Bark Endeavour, top; old dive helmets, above; a ship's wheel by boatbuilder Bob Fuller, below

DAMIAN HAARMSMA

FLYING THE FLAGS

A Tasmanian tribute to the world of wooden boats

DAMIAN HAARMSMA

steering wheels. He tells us of his many commissions, including a ceremonial helm for the aircraft carrier USS Bataan.

Next door, the tall figure of Greg Hattan stands proudly over his rugged timber driftboat, Obsession, explaining how he navigates the remote rivers and rapids of Oregon, taking fly-fishermen deep into the American wilderness. Strength, skill and a pair of timber oars are all he uses to take tours along the wild waters of the northwest in search of steelhead salmon. He's reportedly been described as part artist and part mad scientist in his passion for the outdoors.

We've wandered into the American Precinct, where we can almost see our reflection in perfectly polished wooden dinghies and sailboats. The impeccably built creations have been shipped to Hobart by the North West School of Wooden Boat Building in the US. Festival manager Paul Cullen says US boatbuilders were invited after Tasmanian organisers visited Washington's Port Townsend wooden boat festival two years ago.

"They really took the bait," says Cullen. "They filled two 40ft containers with wooden boats, including a 32ft Cornish gig. It came halfway around the planet to be with us."

We meander into Princes Wharf, transformed into a bustling modern maritime marketplace for serious boaties. Sparkling yacht winches, ship chandlery and monstrous 200hp diesel engines are on show alongside ornate Japanese chisels sold in sets valued at thousands of dollars.

Outside on the dock are antique maritime displays, including a collection of battered antique outboards. Proud owner Geoff Rowlings has spent decades collecting more than 100 of the tiny engines from across Tasmania. He speaks lovingly of their past. His favourite is a 1944 Coventry Victor, looking as bruised as a D-Day veteran. "It's got a crank-handle kickstart like a motorbike," he says with glee.

In the afternoon sunshine people soon begin lining the waterfront as the breeze picks up and the real spectacle begins: the Parade of Sail into Hobart. Nimble skiffs and sloops dart across the Derwent and small steam boats chug into their mooring. Suddenly on the horizon the towering square-riggers appear.

Gliding up the Derwent, the stately outline of HM Bark Endeavour slides towards our dock, with its great timber hull and tangle of rigging that would stretch for 30km. Behind comes the leviathan shape of the mighty James Craig, a former cargo barge from the 1870s that used to ply the world's trade routes. The harbour springs to life as hundreds of sailors come ashore.

We pass several hours drifting between

IN THE KNOW

The Mystate Bank Australian Wooden Boat Festival is the largest event of its kind in the southern hemisphere, with more than 500 boats on display around the Hobart waterfront. The next event is scheduled for February 5-8, 2021.
australianwoodenboatfestival.com.au
discovertasmania.com.au

the nine monstrous tall ships and hundreds of glistening wooden steamboats, punts and dinghies that have been painstakingly polished and shipped or sailed from different corners of the world.

A highlight is the 53ft Wright of Passage Mercator, where a young woman in a wheelchair tells us of her role in helping restore the vessel from a state of disrepair. The former Canadian ketch is part of the Sailors with Disabilities program based in Sydney, where disadvantaged and disabled youths spend 12 months refurbishing old boats and at the same time forging their self-esteem and a sense of purpose. Alongside is the stately 60ft Edwardian ketch the Hurrica V, rumored to have taken to sea with Errol Flynn aboard.

Late in the afternoon it's time to retire to a waterside tavern with views over the marina. The sun dips towards Mt Wellington as the sound of sea shanties wafts from a stage inside the nearby marquee. As I daydream about one day possessing my own piece of wooden-boat treasure, I recall the words of a couple of young shipwrights from Sydney who shared a taxi with me from Hobart airport that morning.

Barely out of high school, their sage advice is playing on my mind. "Don't ever buy a boat," one of them said. "Just make friends with someone who has one."



ROBERT CATCHPOLE

AUS60201TR-V1



enews

Immerse yourself in Malta

In the vibrant capital Valletta, you can indulge in the best of Maltese cuisine, revisit history in the medieval city of Mdina, or explore the grottos, caves, cliffs and lagoons located throughout the islands. With over 300 days of sunshine, it is always a good time to visit Malta.

Fares per person from:	
Economy Class	from AUD 1,319
Business Class	from AUD 6,709

Book by 31 March 2019.

qatarairways.com
 Visit your preferred travel agent

*Offer valid until 31 March 2019, unless sold out prior. Fares quoted above are for departures from Sydney and are the lowest adult return prices per person including taxes, fees, and airport charges. Economy Class fares are valid for travel between 1 September - 20 September 2019, and 14 October - 28 November 2019. Business Class fares are valid for travel between 4 June - 31 December 2019. Other sale dates may be available. Other sale fares are available from Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra. Fares may vary due to currency or tax fluctuations. Seasonal surcharges and weekend surcharges may apply. For all other terms and conditions please review at time of booking. Flights to Malta start 4 June 2019.

QATAR AIRWAYS

الخطوط القطرية

GOING PLACES TOGETHER