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**SANTA'S LITTLE HELPERS**  
Inside Amazon's Christmas warehouse

**THAMES TOWN, SHANGHAI**  
A little piece of England in China

**HAPPY HERDS**  
Recipes using virtuous venison

## Sweet smell of success

The blooming of Michael McIntyre

## Four of the best places to stay in Tasmania, by Francesca Syz

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**The Islington** While the quirky Henry Jones Art Hotel in Hobart tends to hog the limelight (and to be fair, it is very good), the city's only five-star hotel, the Islington, is quietly brilliant. Built in 1947 with views across to Mount Wellington, the hotel feels like a grand but comfortable home. It recently underwent a major refurbishment, gaining an airy, modern central conservatory (right) and a new wing housing six of the 11 blissfully large and comfortable rooms. The first thing you notice is the truly exceptional collection of mostly Asian and contemporary Australian art, which fills the hotel. On closer inspection, you may spot work by Picasso, Matisse and others. You'll also find the world's largest collection of Tasmanian pinot noir in the bar. Step outside to explore the landscaped gardens ('ornamental' and 'herb' to name two) or stay in, and stretch out in front of the open fire. Personal service is everything here and the owners can arrange just about anything, including a chauffeured tour of nearby Cole River Valley. **The details** Rooms from £220, including breakfast. For holidays that include a stay at the Islington, contact Turquoise Holidays (01494-678400; [turquoiseholidays.co.uk](http://turquoiseholidays.co.uk)).



**Mountain Valley Wilderness Retreat** The only place left in Tasmania where you are almost guaranteed a sighting of the highly endangered Tasmanian devil in its natural habitat right from your deck, Mountain Valley Wilderness Resort is a remote hideaway set within a private forest reserve and a fantastic option for hikers or those wanting a genuine bit of wilderness. It is owned and run by Len and Pat Doherty, who have spent the past 30 years lovingly developing the place. Today, accommodation is in five simple, rustic log cabins, with en-suite bathrooms and kitchenettes. You can either bring your own food or have a home-cooked dinner delivered to your room. Len is a wildlife fanatic and will take you on dusk walks to see platypus in the nearby river, or on a forest habitat tour. He will also leave scraps of raw chicken on your doorstep at night – if you leave the porch light on, you can watch the devils come and feed. **The details** Queen Fauna rooms from £125, including breakfast provisions. To book a holiday that includes a stay at Mountain Valley Wilderness Retreat, contact Wildlife & Wilderness (0845-004599; [wildlifewilderness.com](http://wildlifewilderness.com)).

**Villa Howden** The French were the first Europeans to explore many parts of Tasmania, so you'll find it littered with French names and references. The new 10-suite Villa Howden, essentially the last luxury outpost before Antarctica, was built about 20 years ago in the style of a French chateau and overlooks the D'Entrecasteaux Channel (named after the explorer who discovered it in 1792) on an estate that sweeps right to the water's edge. Its owner, the interior designer Val Harding, bought it to use as a holiday home, before turning it into a hotel earlier this year. All suites are beautifully designed – book the Tower suite for its antique French bed and glorious views across the bay. Food, served in the elegant conservatory, is sourced from local farms and fishermen; for cocktails try the piano bar with its bay-facing deck. Don't miss the indoor saltwater swimming-pool, which opens out on to the gardens. Only 25 minutes south of Hobart, the villa is also just a short drive away from the ferry that whisks you over to the ravishing Bruny Island National Park. **The details** Rooms from £220, including breakfast. For holidays that include a stay at Villa Howden, contact Wexas Travel (020-7590 0610; [wexas.com](http://wexas.com)).



**Lemonthyme Lodge** The extraordinary Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park in Tasmania's Central Highlands is said to have the cleanest air in the inhabited world. While most of its visitors stay at the gorgeous Cradle Mountain Lodge at the heart of it all, Lemonthyme Lodge is a lesser-known but excellent affordable alternative, 30 minutes' drive from the mountain down a winding, unpaved road within pristine rainforest wilderness. It is much more basic than Cradle Mountain Lodge, but has as much to offer in terms of wildlife and hiking, and you'll be far less likely to bump into other human beings. There are six levels of accommodation, furnished in a simple style, from cosy rooms in the lodge itself, to individual cabins of up to three bedrooms. For a treat, book one of the four Luxury Wilderness suites with views over the treetops through panoramic windows. The lodge's Whispering Woods restaurant offers a good selection of local wines. **The details** Rooms from £125, including breakfast. To book a holiday that includes a stay at Lemonthyme Lodge, contact Tailor Made Travel (0800-988 5887; [tailor-made.co.uk](http://tailor-made.co.uk)). Next week: hotels with cookery courses