

BY CATHY OSMOND

MONA, Hobart

# Infinity & beyond

CAN'T TRAVEL OVERSEAS? TAKE A MIND TRIP IN TASMANIA

In the fine-dining restaurant just after second course, you take off your shoes and sign the waiver. At the end of the chattering room by the soaring windows you are led to the steps of the large white sphere. Climbing in, you are instructed to lie face-up on a padded central platform. "Close your eyes," your guide says. The door is shut, and the artist's light show begins to tinker with your optic nerve, creating kaleidoscopes as individual as your brain. Fifteen minutes later you emerge, blinking, and totter back to your table.

"Can I interest you in a Moorilla chardonnay?" the sommelier asks, as you desperately try to straighten the deckchairs in your mind.

The interactive installation is called *Unseen Seen*, the artist is James Turrell, and the restaurant is in Mona. Where else but Mona, the extraordinary temple of ancient and modern art that's just 11 km up the River Derwent from Hobart but might as well be another planet. Turrell, a California-born artist who has attained global cult status with his pioneering light-based works, is the perfect fit for this place: just as the majority of the permanent works in Mona are not identified upfront by

name or artist (the theory being that labels are a barrier to unfiltered experience), I cannot describe *Unseen Seen*, except to say I loved a particular vision of glowing peach-coloured lace fringed in gold. That was mine to keep. The art is in the interior effect, existing somewhere between pupils, lizard brain and something called the Ganzfeld effect to create its stunning patterns.

Further into the beautifully executed seven-course feast in Faro restaurant there will be two more Turrell experiences, one involving stepping through a portal of light and into *Event Horizon*, an infinite space of shifting colours that you will, literally, have to see for yourself.

This head-trip is part of a golden ticket called the Full-On Turrell, available exclusively from a range of "premium cultural experiences for discerning travellers" curated by Cultural Attractions of Australia. (Sample: a private curator-led tour of the National Museum, Canberra; art



and dinner at the National Gallery; Pop the Question with Opera Australia; access all areas at Adelaide Oval; sleepover at Sovereign Hill.) At Mona, it means admission to Turrell installations, an expert guide, dinner at Faro, breakfast and lunch at Source restaurant and accommodation at one of Mona's eight beautifully appointed water-view pavilions. Full-on indeed, though there's time to do two full passes of the sprawling subterranean wormhole of treasures, from Egyptian artefacts to walls of vulvas via futuristic portals and a welcome cocktail bar.

Above-ground in Mona-land, delights include watching from the balcony of my chic pavilion as the last ferry of the day ploughs back to Hobart, and wandering the grounds among picnickers, tipplers and music lovers on what feels like a mid-summer's day. It's the perfect antidote to the post-Covid blues: a journey both amongst it all and entirely in my own head.

Perfect for: Art lovers, adventurers, foodies, families.

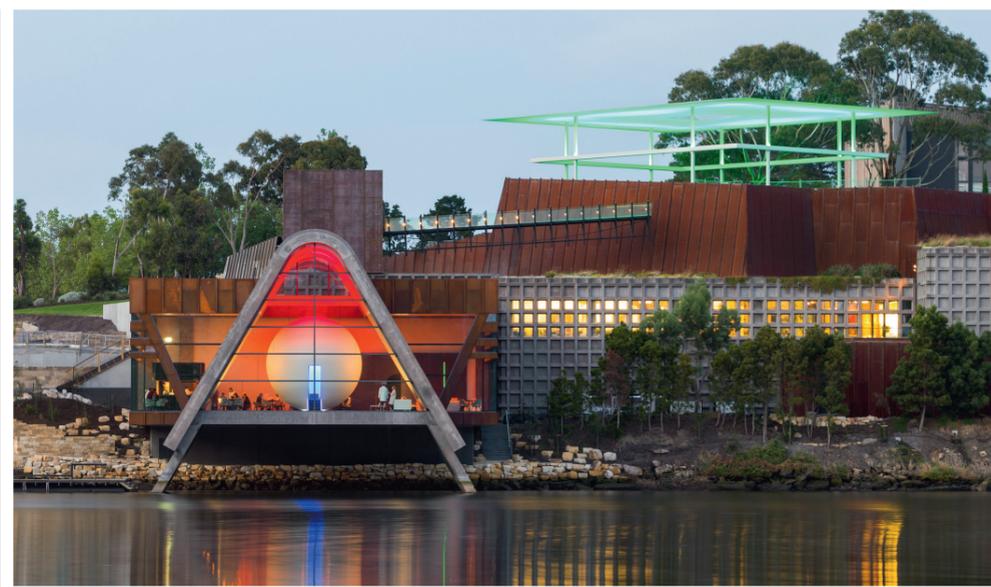
Must do: Spend some time above ground. There's lots to do: lounge on the green with a Moo brew, burger and live music; sample local wines; let the kids loose in the playgrounds; visit the House of Mirrors and drift among the sculptures.

Dining: Faro Bar + Restaurant is open for lunch Fri-Mon (à la carte or \$85 set menu, with museum entry), dinner Fri-Sun (set menu \$120, or \$350 seven-course "mystery feast" including wines and access to Turrell artworks). Sit down for a top-notch lunch at Source restaurant, or at Moorilla Wine Bar, which also has lighter all-day fare, takeaway and kids' options. By the lawn, Dubby's serves wow-factor burgers with vegan options. And in the museum's subterranean Void Bar, refuel with a cocktail and bar food such as a gourmet pizetta or salumi plate.

Getting there: Mona is 11km north of Hobart, 25-30 minutes by ferry or bus departing hourly from Brooke Street Pier. Ferry is \$23; Posh Pit private lounge access with drinks and canapes \$58. Limited parking.

Bottom line: Mona is open Fri-Mon, 10am-5pm. Museum entry \$30; under-18s, Tasmanians free. Cultural Attractions of Australia packages from \$80 to \$50,000 per person (the latter includes dinner with David Walsh); Full-On Turrell \$1500 per person including ferry upgrade, museum entry and Turrell artworks, guide, dinner with matched wines at Faro, breakfast and lunch at Source and a night at a Mona pavilion with pre-dinner oysters and sparkling wine.

culturalattractionsofaustralia.com; mona.net.au



Outside the square: *Unseen Seen* and *Event Horizon*, above; dining at Faro, far left; the museum; Lincoln by Nam June Paik

