Governor Island Marine Reserve, with its spectacular underwater scenery, is recognised as one of the best temperate diving locations in Australia.

The marine reserve includes Governor Island and all waters and other islands within a 400m diameter semi-circle from the eastern shoreline of Governor Island (refer map). The entire marine reserve is a fully protected ‘no-take’ area. Fishing and other extractive activities are prohibited.

Getting there
Governor Island lies just off Bicheno – a small fishing and resort town on Tasmania’s east coast. It is located about two and a half hours drive from either Hobart or Launceston.

Governor Island is separated from the mainland by a narrow stretch of water; approximately 50m wide, known as Waubs Gulch. For your safety please do not swim, snorkel or dive in Waubs Gulch. It is subject to frequent boating traffic and strong currents and swells. The marine reserve is best accessed via commercial operators or private boat.

Things to do
The reserve is a popular diving location with over 35 recognised dive sites, including:

- **The Hairy Wall** – a granite cliff-face plunging to 35m, with masses of sea whips
- **The Castle** – two massive granite boulders, sandwiched together, with a swim-through lined with sea whips and yellow zoanthids, and packed with schools of bullseyes, cardboardfish, banded manwong and rock lobster
- **Golden Bommies** – two 10m high pinnacles glowing with yellow zoanthids.

The waters around Governor Island are deep and subject to strong currents and swells. Diving is only recommended for experienced divers with good local knowledge, or those under the leadership of an experienced guide.

Winter provides the best visibility – up to an astounding 30m – although water temperatures are a cool 11-14°C. During summer, water temperatures may reach up to 20°C however phytoplankton blooms often reduce visibility.

Tasmania’s largest colony of crested terns can be seen at Governor Island during the summer months. Cormorants, sooty oystercatchers, kelp and silver gulls are also common. Australasian gannets are also sometimes seen.

Walk up Whalers Lookout for superb views of Governor Island, the marine reserve and Waubs Bay.

Yellow zoanthids adorn granite boulder walls in the marine reserve. These flower-like animals use their tentacles to catch tiny food particles drifting past in the current.

Photo: Karen Gowlett-Holmes
Help our marine environment

Know the boundaries. If fishing, ensure you’re not in the marine reserve.

Take your rubbish home. Ropes, plastics and fishing line can harm wildlife.

Anchoring. Avoid anchoring on sensitive habitats such as seagrass beds and sponge gardens. Sandy seafloors are preferred; alternatively kelp-covered reefs.

Divers. Avoid damaging fragile marine life. Secure your gauges and equipment close to your body, ensure you have good buoyancy control, do not grip objects for support, and be careful not to cause damage with your fins.

Marine pests and diseases. To avoid their spread, after every trip clean and dry your fishing/dive/boating gear. Periodically and at least annually clean your boat hull.

Fish for the future. Where fishing is permitted, observe size, bag and possession limits. Only take enough for a feed. Get a copy of the latest Recreational Sea Fishing Guide or go to www.fishing.tas.gov.au for fishing information.

The entire marine reserve is a fully protected ‘no-take’ area. Fishing and other extractive activities are prohibited. The reserve is patrolled. Heavy penalties apply for fishing or interfering with marine life.

Going fishing? To ensure you’re outside the marine reserve, take note of the reserve boundaries on the map. There are also two white poles at each end of the island. When these are aligned, you are on the westernmost boundary of the reserve.

Do not swim, snorkel or dive in Waubs Gulch due to frequent boating traffic and strong currents. Snorkelling can be enjoyed in nearby Waubs Bay or Rice Pebble Beach.

If you’re boating, look out for dive flags denoting diver below. Boats must not exceed 5 knots within 120 metres of a dive flag. Vessels should keep at least 100 metres away from a dive flag.

Access to Governor Island is prohibited during the breeding season of Tasmania’s largest colony of crested terns – between 1 August and 31 March.

SCUBA diver exploring sponge gardens.
Photo: John Smith
**Special features**

Governor Island was one of the first marine reserves established in Tasmania in 1991.

The intertidal areas are dominated by the wave-tolerant brown algae bull-kelp, while the shallow reefs support a variety of other brown algae, including strap weed and cray weed. In deeper, calmer waters, communities of common kelp and a variety of red seaweeds thrive.

In the very deep waters (below about 20m), where insufficient light prevents algal growth, massive granite boulders are covered in a vibrant patchwork of invertebrates, including sponges, sea whips, sea fans, sea tulips, zoanthids, anemones, bryozoans and hydroids.

Fish are abundant and include the longsnout boarfish, banded morwong, old wife, shaws cowfish and schools of butterfly perch. Caves are crowded with bullseyes, cardinal fish and sandpaper fish, and the occasional draughtboard shark.

Hiding in caves and crevices in the rocks are southern rock lobsters and octopus - both common inhabitants of the reserve. During the cooler months large silvery schools of jack mackerel swirl past, sometimes hunted by a school of bottlenose dolphins which are regularly seen in the reserve.

Governor Island supports one of Tasmania’s largest colonies of crested terns. The adult birds feed within a few kilometres of their breeding site, plunge-diving for pelagic fish, squid or the occasional crab. If you visit the reserve in summer you might see clusters of chicks trailing closely behind their parents.

Australian fur seals can sometimes be seen hauled out and resting on Alligator Rock. Australian fur seals are the fourth-rarest seal in the world. Hunted to the brink of extinction last century, population recovery has been slow. They are fully protected.

A banded morwong with a school of longfin pike. Banded morwong can live for almost 100 years and are commonly seen on exposed reefs, often congregating in large caves.

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Example of marine life found at Governor Island Marine Reserve
Securing the future

Tasmania has one of the most biologically diverse and unique marine environments in the world. Over 80% of the plants and animals living in Australia’s southern waters are found nowhere else on earth.

Tasmanians are heavily reliant on a healthy, well-functioning marine environment. The benefits and enjoyment we get from our marine and coastal environments are central to our lifestyles and livelihoods.

Like marine environments world-wide, Tasmania’s marine environment is under increasing pressure. Human activities have caused observable changes to our marine environment, some of which you may have witnessed along your favourite part of the coast.

Marine reserves – the ocean equivalent of national parks – provide a safe haven for marine life. Like national parks, they are places set aside for everyone to enjoy. These protected areas, which are under less stress than non-protected marine environments, are more likely to cope with pressures of climate change or invasive species than ecosystems weakened by many years of human impact.

Marine reserves also provide scientists with opportunities to learn about our impacts on the marine environment by comparing changes in protected areas with non-protected areas, which helps improve management of our coastal waters.

Approximately 2.7% of immediate state coastal waters (i.e. excluding subantarctic Macquarie Island) are in marine protected areas (either marine reserves or marine conservation areas), of which 1.1% of state coastal waters are highly protected in ‘no-take’ sanctuary zones.

The conservation and sustainable use of Tasmania’s marine environment is everyone’s responsibility. By supporting marine reserves, you’ll be helping protect our extraordinary marine environment for future generations.

More Information

Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service
www.parks.tas.gov.au/marinereserves
Freycycles office: (03) 6256 7000

Weather
Boating forecast: (03) 6376 0555 or (03) 6233 9955
www.bom.gov.au/tas/forecasts

To help promote and care for reserves, join a community volunteer group. Contact Wildcare Inc: (03) 6233 2852
www.wildcare.tas.gov.au