

A photograph of a child climbing a pink house in a miniature village. The child is wearing a white t-shirt, dark shorts, and a cap. The house has a green roof. In the background, there are other colorful houses, including a purple one. A woman in a blue hat and striped shirt is standing in the foreground, looking towards the houses. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the background.

TASMANIA

THE CHILDREN'S ISLE

Thankfully Tasmania has never really grown up, so it's the perfect place to take the family on a journey into a magical children's island. **BY PHOENIX ARRIEN**

Tasmania could have been designed just for children. Where else do you get steam trains chugging through wilderness or find the old woman who lives in a shoe? Even better, where else would you get lightning flashing above 16 model trains racing past tiny villages in an alpine wilderness?

Day turned into night as the room darkened – the train and village lights went on, a storm hit, thunder rumbled and lightning flashed. The children were riveted.

One of the best places to begin your wanderings is Strahan, a pretty town on the west coast of Tasmania, where we discovered a range of activities that took us into the magnificent wilderness clothing this part of the island.

The West Coast Wilderness Railway, a

heritage steam train leaving from Strahan, involved a historic fantasy of steam, dramatically steep mountains and the magical beauty of an untamed land. Halfway along we stopped for lunch and a walk, before the little red caboose huffed and puffed over forty bridges, plunging gorges and emerald-green fern gullies.

A different way to explore the wilderness is a cruise up the Gordon River. We stood on the deck of a large boat to watch the extraordinary sight of a clear mighty river wandering through thick undisturbed forests, in turn being watched by circling eagles. Stopping for a short walk through myrtle

beech and Huon pine forests exposed the children to the rich smells, forest debris and tangled trees of more than 100 wild plant species.

Heading to the north of Tasmania we discovered the village of Lower Crackpot. It's not only a mini-village of bright little houses, strange buildings and the old lady who lives in a shoe, but also includes mazes within mazes. In the centre of the biggest maze stood the Three Bear's House, a half-scale, two-storey, Tudor building.

Another favourite attraction encompassed all these things – trains, villages and landscapes. 'Alpenrail' is located in Hobart and walking into its enormous room, we knew we had struck gold.

A model of the Swiss Alps rose towards the ceiling. Magnificent snowy mountain ranges surrounded deep valleys inhabited