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Oxford Word of the Month – March: Tassie tuxedo

noun: (also Tasmanian tuxedo) a quilted jacket filled with a light insulating material; a puffer jacket.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In the online version of the *Lonely Planet* travel guide, some helpful advice is given to those contemplating a trip to Tasmania (or Tassie):

A ‘Tassie tuxedo’ – aka a down-filled ‘puffer’ jacket – is mandatory Tasmanian garb in any season. Wear it to the pub, wear it to a barbecue, wear it on the Three Capes Track ... Indeed, it’s fair to say that Tasmanians are casual when it comes to attire: clad in hiking boots and woollen beanies, many locals look as though they’re about to hurl themselves into the bush at any moment. (lonelyplanet.com)

The puffer jacket referred to here is the lightweight ‘puffy’ quilted jacket padded with down, feathers or synthetic fibre, and traditionally associated with mountain climbers, bushwalkers and skiers. In recent years the puffer jacket has become especially fashionable. Its association with Tasmania can partly be explained by the popularity of outdoor activities, easy access to wilderness areas, and an unpredictable climate. In the island state, light warm layers are a necessity. But the *tuxedo* element in this term tells us something more.

Lonely Planet says ‘Tasmanians are casual when it comes to attire’. In a 2018 promotional publication from the Hobart City Council, the informality of Tasmania’s capital city is highlighted:

Many of us love how Hobart is not an arrogant or pretentious city. It is the type of place where we can wear a black puffer jacket, affectionately known as the Tasmanian Tuxedo, out to dinner. (Hobart: A Community Vision for our Island Capital)

This explains the ironic use of *tuxedo* – a garment usually worn as formal evening attire. It is unclear whether the term’s origins lie in a variant of the well-attested term *Canadian tuxedo*, used to refer to someone wearing an all-denim outfit and used in a derogatory way to refer to the casual and unsophisticated fashion tastes of some Canadians.

The **Tasmanian** or **Tassie tuxedo** is casual wear that Tasmanians will happily wear in a formal setting as well as in the great outdoors. Evidence for **Tassie tuxedo** has increased in the last two years. Most is found in online forums and postings from Tasmanian sources, suggesting the term is used primarily by locals. One of the earliest examples comes from a 2014 fundraising site for the Salvation Army:

This year I'm asking for not only donations to my cause but I challenge you to join me sleeping out! Grab your Tassie Tuxedo and brave the cold for just one night for a good cause. (sleepingoutforthesalvos2014.gofundraise)

The use of the term without explanation tells us that **Tassie tuxedo** was already familiar to Tasmanians at this time. Ten years earlier, a posting on a community forum demonstrates that the longer form **Tasmanian tuxedo** is likely to have been part of the local vernacular from around the beginning of the century: 'Yeah the slick back look goes well with my "tasmanian Tuxedo"!!!! 'D.' (4wdaction.com, 2004).

Tassie tuxedo will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *The Australian National Dictionary*. **lly**, has largely fallen out of use today.

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