

Eastern Cape



Entry into the Eastern Cape is likely to be along the N2 from Cape Town, where you'll be struck by the beauty of the Tsitsikamma National Park, before the landscape flattens out past Cape St Francis and Jeffrey's Bay, through Port Elizabeth and on to East London. Inland to the north are the rolling hills of Grahamstown and surrounding 'settler country', which soon gives way to the majesty of the semiarid Karoo, dotted with intriguing towns such as Graaff-Reinet. Beyond East London lies the subtropical Wild Coast, and to the north the mountain ranges of the North-Eastern Highlands. You get the picture: for its relative size, the province has a remarkable range of differing climates, topographies and vegetation.

It has a complex history, too, one of settlement, migration, tragedy and conflict. In the 19th century, Trekboers clashed with the Xhosa eight times along the Great Kei River, and just about everywhere in a guerrilla conflict with the British. Later the area became a wellspring of resistance heroes including Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, Chris Hani and Oliver Tambo.

Xhosa culture dominates the former apartheid 'homelands' of Transkei (the Wild Coast) and Ciskei, nominally independent republics that were used as dumping grounds for 'undesirables'. Today these regions celebrate their heritage with institutions such as the Nelson Mandela Museum in Mthatha. If you prefer the less complicated culture of animals, the province has excellent wildlife parks offering a viable safari alternative to parks such as the Kruger.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking or riding the spectacular **Wild Coast** (p282) with its crashing waves, shipwrecks, spectacular gorges and hidden waterfalls
- Hitting the breaks at **Jeffrey's Bay** (p245), a world surfing centre
- Putting your head in the clouds at magical **Rhodes** (p295), South Africa's only ski spot
- Admiring the 360-degree views or meditating in the forest glades of **Hogsback** (p274)
- Spending tranquil hours by a waterhole with the elephants of **Addo Elephant National Park** (p255)
- Strolling down the well-kept streets of exquisite **Graaff-Reinet** (p266) and artistic village **Nieu Bethesda** (p271)
- Searching for the elusive Cape clawless otter in the magnificent **Tsitsikamma National Park** (p242)
- Visiting the **Nelson Mandela Museum** (p293) in Mthatha, a celebration of the struggle for freedom



■ POPULATION: 7.3 MILLION

■ AREA: 169,580 SQ KM

Climate

The rainfall and climate of Eastern Cape reflects the region's geographic variation, with a moderate climate on the coast, heavy rainfall (including snow in winter) in the mountains and low rainfall on the fringes of the Karoo. Average temperatures in East London and Port Elizabeth range from 26°C in summer to 18°C in the winter months of June to August, while further inland in the Karoo, temperature variations are far more extreme, with the thermometer plunging to around 6°C in winter, and rising as high as 40°C in summer.

National Parks & Reserves

The Eastern Cape is scattered with national parks and private reserves, wildly varying in quality and facilities. Flora and fauna are just as varied – from the pachyderms at Addo Elephant National Park (p255) and the rare Cape mountain zebra at Mountain Zebra National Park (p266) near Cradock to the subtler attraction of rare plants – and beach-loving wildebeest – in remote Dwesa Nature Reserve (p286).

Language

Start practising those tongue clicks – Xhosa is the predominant language in the Eastern Cape. Whites here speak either English or Afrikaans.

Getting There & Around

Travelling around the western side of the Eastern Cape isn't too hard – numerous bus services ply the route between Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London (which also both have international airports), stopping at major towns on the way and continuing to Durban, Johannesburg (Jo'burg) and Pretoria.

Further off the beaten track, notably on the Wild Coast and in the Eastern Highlands, users of public transport will have to take to the minibus taxis to find their way into more obscure spots. Some places in the highlands and on the Wild Coast are only accessible on foot or horseback.

Even if you have your own car, travel isn't always simple – in many parts of the Wild Coast, for instance, there are no reliable maps and no signposts, but there are lots of stray cows, food-seeking pigs and errant children wandering the roads.

WESTERN REGION

The western region includes the self-designated 'Sunshine Coast', which encompasses the coastline running from Nature's Valley to Port Alfred. Further inland is Grahamstown, at the heart of an Anglo-centric area originally home to the '1820 Settlers' (see p260). Also in this region are the recently extended Addo Elephant National Park and the exclusive, internationally renowned Shamwari Game Reserve.

NATURE'S VALLEY

☎ 044

Nature's Valley is a small village nestled in yellowwood forest (*outeniqua* or 'they who bear honey'; thought to be derived from the name of a Khoesaa group once resident in the forest) next to a magnificent beach in the west of Tsitsikamma National Park. This is where the Otter Trail ends and the Tsitsikamma Trail begins (see p242), but if you don't want to walk for that long, there are plenty of shorter hikes in the area.

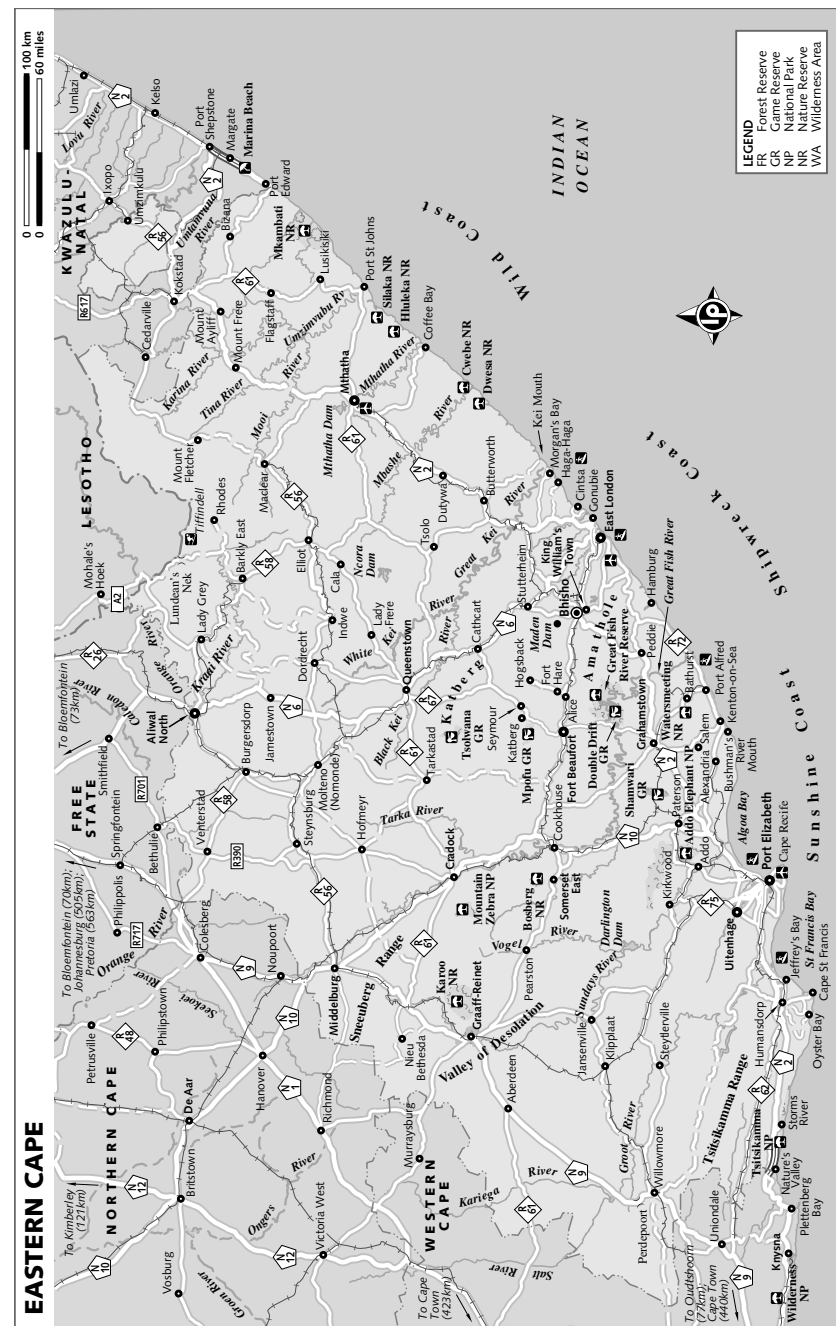
Nature's Valley Trading Store & Information Centre (☎ /fax 044-531 6835; Beach Rd) is the hub of the village, incorporating a pub-restaurant and a small shop. Staff here can help with pamphlets on the surrounding area.

One of the most popular places to stay is **Nature's Valley Rest Camp** (☎ 042-281 1607, bookings 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 1-2 person camp sites R100, forest huts d R260), the national park camp site, east of town and a 2km walk from the beach. It's a lovely spot at the edge of a river with clean ablutions and shared kitchens and laundry. Keep food well stored; there are pesky primates everywhere.

Another good option is **Hikers Haven** (☎ 044-531 6805; patbond@mweb.co.za; 411 St Patrick's Ave; dm R70, d with breakfast R250), a large and very comfortable home near the beach, with an attic dorm for backpackers and hikers. It's deservedly popular with Otter Trail groups, so bookings are essential. The guesthouse can arrange transport to the start of the Otter Trail (see p242).

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Nature's Valley, although the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) will drop off or pick up here on request.



TSITSIKAMMA NATIONAL PARK AREA

This **park** (adult/child R80/40) protects 82km of coast between Plettenberg Bay and Humansdorp, including the area 5km out to sea.

The park lies at the foot of the Tsitsikamma Range and is cut by rivers that have carved deep ravines into the ancient forests. The flora varies from huge stinkwood and yellowwood trees to ferns, lilies, orchids and coastal *fynbos* (fine bush), including proteas. It's a spectacular area to walk through.

Elusive Cape clawless otters, after which the Otter Trail is named, inhabit this park; there are also baboons, monkeys and small antelopes. Birdlife is plentiful.

Several short day walks give you a taste of the coastline if you don't have time to tackle the longer hikes such as the Otter Trail. The waterfall circuit (four hours) on the first part of the Otter Trail is recommended.

Orientation & Information

The main information centre for the national park is Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (right), 68km from Plettenberg Bay, 99km from Humansdorp and 8km from the N2. The park gate is 6km from the N2. It's 2km from the gate to the main camp, which is open 24 hours and has accommodation, a restaurant and a shop selling supplies, as well as an information/reception centre. You can also pay park entrance fees and get information at Nature's Valley Rest Camp (p240).

Otter, Tsitsikamma & Dolphin Trails

The 42km **Otter Trail** (per person R500) is one of the most acclaimed hikes in South Africa, hugging the coastline from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley. The walk, which lasts five days and four nights, involves fording a number of rivers and gives access to some superb stretches of coast. A good level of fitness is required for the walk, as it goes uphill and down quite steeply in many places.

Book the trail through **SAN Parks** (☎ 012-426 5111). The trail is usually booked up one year ahead. There are often cancellations, however, so it's always worth trying, especially if you are in a group of only two or three people (single hikers are not permitted).

Accommodation is in six-bed rest huts with mattresses but without bedding, cooking utensils or running water. Camping is not allowed.

The 64km **Tsitsikamma Trail** begins at Nature's Valley and ends at Storms River, running parallel to the Otter Trail but taking you inland through the forests. This hike also takes five days and four nights, although it's considered to be easier than the Otter Trail. You only need to pay accommodation costs for the **hiking huts** (per person per night R70).

Unlike the Otter Trail, there is little difficulty getting a booking, and midweek you may have the trail to yourself, except during school holidays. Accommodation is in huts. Book both the trail and accommodation through the **Forestry Department** (☎ 042-281 1712), or contact Nature's Valley Rest Camp (p240) for information.

The **Dolphin Trail** (www.dolphintrail.co.za; per person R2700) is ideal for hikers who don't want to carry heavy equipment or sleep in huts. Accommodation on this four-day, three-night hike, which runs from Storms River Mouth to the banks of the Sanddrif River, is in comfortable hotels, and luggage is carried on vehicles between overnight stops. The price includes all accommodation and meals, guides and a boat trip into the Storms River Gorge on the way back. To book, contact **Tsitsikamma National Park** (☎ 042-281 1607) or visit the trail's website.

One of the best places to stay near the Dolphin Trail is Misty Mountain Reserve; see opposite.

Bloukrans River Bridge Bungee

At 216m, this is the world's highest **bungee jump** (☎ 042-281 1458; www.faceadrenalin.com; per jump R580), 21km west of Storms River directly under the N2. Jumps run seven days a week; if you're not sure if you have the gumption, you can walk out to the jumping-off point under the bridge for R50. You can also try the Flying Fox *foefie*-slide (zipslide), for R150, under the bridge, a hair-raising 200m slide across the gorge. Bookings are only available to large groups; individual jumps are on a first-come, first-served basis. You can call to check availability or just turn up at the site between 9am and 5pm daily. You can also buy local curios at the on-site Tsitsikamma Khoesaan Village.

Sleeping & Eating

Bloukrans Backpackers Lodge (☎ 042-281 1450; www.tsitsikamma.org.za; dm/d with shared bathroom R90/180) This functional backpackers is right

next to the bungee jump site and near the start of some shorter walking trails, and includes a decent bar. You can also stay at the adjoining Bloukrans Chalets (four/six people R480/680).

Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; camp sites/forest huts/family cottages R140/230/730) This camp offers forest huts, chalets, cottages and 'oceanettes'; all except the forest huts are equipped with kitchens (including utensils), bedding and bathrooms. When booking, it's worth asking if there are any winter (May to August) discounts on offer. When we asked SAN Parks, there weren't any, but some readers have told us about a 10% discount on forest huts and a 35% discount on camping (May to November).

Tsitsikamma Falls Adventure Park (☎ 042-280 3770; www.tsitsikammaadventure.co.za; Witelsbos; s/d with breakfast from R180/360) A family-run guesthouse about halfway between Nature's Valley and Jeffrey's Bay, and near a beautiful waterfall where you can abseil or take a *foefie*-slide across the falls. There's a range of accommodation to choose from according to your budget.

Misty Mountain Reserve (☎ 042-280 3699; www.misty-sa.co.za; chalets per person R400, 4-person cottage R1000). This is a great place to stay if you want to hike the Dolphin Trail (opposite). Accommodation is in luxury wooden cottages or chalets with wonderful views and full amenities. There's a restaurant (mains R50) if you don't feel like cooking. To get to the reserve look out for the Bluelilybush turn-off on the N2 6km east of Storms River Village; head 6.5km down this road.

Storms River Restaurant (☎ 042-281 1190; mains R70; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the reception complex to Tsitsikamma National Park, this place has great views of the coast and reasonable prices. There's also a small shop and an outdoor terrace with a boardwalk over the rocks to the river mouth.

For information on Nature's Valley Rest Camp, see p240.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport to either Nature's Valley or Storms River Mouth Rest Camps. Greyhound, Intercape and Translux buses run along the N2 (see p158 for contact details in Cape Town, and p254 for details in Port Elizabeth), from where it's an

8km walk to Storms River Mouth. The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops at Nature's Valley on request.

STORMS RIVER

☎ 042

Don't be confused between Storms River and Storms River Mouth in Tsitsikamma National Park. From the N2 the Storms River signpost points to this village that lies outside the national park. The turn-off is 4km east of the turn-off to the national park, which is signed as Storms River Mouth (or Stormsrivermond in Afrikaans).

Storms River is an odd little hamlet with tree-shaded lanes, a few places to stay and an outdoor centre. **Tsitsikamma Tourism Information Office** (☎ 042-280 3561; www.tsitsikamma.net) at the PetroPort petrol station, 4km east on the N2, provides information.

East of the village on the N2 is the **Big Tree**, a huge, 36m-high yellowwood, and a forest with many fine examples of candlewood, stinkwood and assegai. The 4.2km **Ratel Trail** (admission R4) begins here, with signs describing the trees in this forest, one of the best-preserved in South Africa.

Activities

Most activities on offer are organised by **Storms River Adventures** (☎ 042-281 1836; www.stormsriver.com; Darnell St, Storms River). These include a tree canopy slide (R395), a 'wood-cutter's journey' forest tractor ride (R90) and an overnight bush experience (all equipment provided) at the Konga Bush Eco-Camp (R350).

Sleeping & Eating

BUDGET

Tube 'n Axe (☎ 042-281 1757; tube-n-axe@telkomsa.net; cnr Darnell & Saffron Sts; camp sites R50, dm/d with shared bathroom R70/200; ☺) If you are after a post-bungee rest, try the elevated two-person tented accommodation (R160) away from the main house. Otherwise, the dorms are close enough to the bar for you to hear adrenaline junkies reliving their experiences over the pool table while quaffing the hostel's own-brand beer. The hostel rents out mountain bikes (R80 per day) and organises a *foefie*-slide tour (R250) of the nearby Witelsbos Falls.

Storms River Rainbow Lodge (☎ 042-281 1530; rainbow@lantic.net; 72 Darnell St; dm/d with shared

bathroom R70/200; 🏠) This is a comfortable, quiet and homely backpackers, with lovely gardens at the back. There's one self-catering cottage (R250) sleeping up to four or five people, and some rooms with private bathrooms inside the house. A healthy breakfast costs R25.

MIDRANGE

Ploughman's Rest (☎ 042-281 1726; www.ploughmansrest.co.za; 31 Formosa St; s/d with breakfast R210/390) This friendly B&B is just off the eastern side of the road before you enter Storms River. Accommodation has a log-cabin feel, and there are two terrific new timber-and-brick self-catering family units (R200 per person) designed to offer privacy for each generation. Ask about their reduced winter prices.

Tsitsikamma Village Inn (☎ 042-281 1711; www.village-inn.co.za; d from R295; 🍷 🏠 🚰) This is an extremely attractive three-star hotel, offering rooms, each with a four-poster bed and individual décor, set around a lawn. There's a restaurant and bar, which are popular with tour groups.

Armagh Country Guest House (☎ 042-281 1557; www.thearmagh.com; d R350; 🏠) This homely guesthouse has a relaxed feel to it. The Rafters restaurant (meals R100) serves hearty five-course dinners of home-cooked South African fare.

TOP END

Tsitsikamma Lodge (☎ 042-250 3802; www.tsitsikamma.com; d low/high season R385/425, ste low/high season R405/445; 🏠) This lodge, 8km east of Storms River, is a group of log cabins set close together around a very tidy garden. The deluxe rooms have an open fireplace, spa bath and CD player. But it's too close to the road to have a wilderness feel, and it's all slightly tacky, particularly the coy 'striptease river trail'. Low season runs from April to October, and high season from November to March.

Getting There & Away

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops at Storms River, but there's no other public transport to the village. Buses and minibuses running along the N2 could drop you off at Bloukrans River Bridge or Tsitsikamma Lodge, both right next to the road, from where it's a 2km walk.

CAPE ST FRANCIS

☎ 042

Cape St Francis, 22km south of Humansdorp, is a small and unpretentious town chiefly famous for the Seal Point and Bruce's Beauties surf breaks. If the surf's not up or you prefer land-based activities, you can walk up the **lighthouse** (admission R10), built in 1888 and the tallest masonry tower on the South African coast, or enjoy a late-afternoon drink at the so-called 'Sunset Rocks'. Whales can be seen offshore between July and November.

St Francis Bay (☎ 042-294 0076) is an ever-growing upmarket resort 10km north of Cape St Francis, partially constructed around a network of canals. Visiting off-season, when many of the holiday homes are deserted, the town has a rather bleak and surreal air to it. It does, however, come to life in the high season, when it's jam-packed with sun-seeking yuppies zooming around the canals on speedboats or swimming off the beach.

There is some evidence to suggest that the scale of development around St Francis Bay is starting to impact on the supply of windblown sand to beaches in the area, an environmentally damaging phenomenon known as 'sand starvation'.

Sleeping & Eating

Cape St Francis Resort (☎ 042-298 0054; www.capestrancisco.za; Da Gama Way; camp sites/d R65/215, Christmas season R250/400; 🏠) The various chalets and units at this well-run resort are big, clean and attractive, many with TV and outside kitchen. There's a restaurant, a small shop and a bar on site.

Seal Point Lodge & Backpackers (☎ 042-298 0284; www.seals.co.za; Da Gama Way; dm/d R75/220; 🏠) This well-located lodge is just 200m from the legendary Seal Point. Dorms are clean, and the spacious doubles in self-catering units are good value. Downstairs you'll find the lively Full Stop Pub (mains R15 to R25), which also does food. Boards and wetsuits can be hired, and hiking, fishing and kite surfing arranged.

Lyngenfjord House (☎ 042-298 0444; www.lyngenfjord.co.za; 7 Lyngenfjord Rd; s/d with breakfast R470/720; 🏠) A classy but friendly B&B, exquisitely furnished and surrounded by panoramic views. Dinner is available and includes local specialities such as blesbok and calamari.

SURFING IN THE EASTERN CAPE *Chester Mackley & David Malherbe*

The Eastern Cape coast is one of the greatest and most consistent surfing regions in the world. Head the Kombi anywhere between Jeffrey's Bay and Port Edward for excellent, uncrowded surf, and meet some of the friendliest locals in the country.

Jeffrey's Bay is world famous and those with the slightest interest in the motion of the waves will have heard of Supertubes. In July it hosts the Billabong Pro and in August the Pro Junior competition – partying, bands and a few hangersover are commonplace. Keep your eye on the low-pressure systems – anything below 970 millibars and you will be in heaven.

Heading north, **Port Elizabeth** is at its best with an unusual easterly swell or a big south swell and a southwesterly wind. With the right conditions, excellent waves can be found, particularly at the Fence, a hollow wedging left on the south side of the harbour wall.

Rock on to **Port Alfred** where there are excellent right-handers from the eastern pier of this sleepy fishing town.

Then on to **East London**, home of the legendary Nahoon Reef, a world-class right-hander known to be one of the most consistent waves in the country. This thick, juicy wave rises from deep water and thumps down on a boulder reef. If you find yourself stuck in the bowl, this wave will rattle your bones. Nahoon Beach and the Corner are the nursery for East London grommets and ideal for debutants wanting to learn to surf. Buy the duds at Buccaneers pub a beer and they'll let you in on Graveyards, Yellow Sands and Igoda.

Further north is **Wacky Point**, a great barrelling right-hander on a big swell. Then finally there's the **Wild Coast**, which boasts some of the most spectacular (and dangerous) coastline you will ever see and point breaks reputed to be as good as Supertubes, some known and many others as yet unnamed and yet to be surfed.

Some rooms have private balconies; try to get one facing the sea. Prices go up slightly in high season (December to April).

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Cape St Francis, but the Seal Point Lodge & Backpackers (opposite) will pick up from the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) drop-off at Humansdorp.

JEFFREY'S BAY

☎ 042 / pop 25,000

A far cry from its origins as a sleepy seaside town frequented by young families, 'J-Bay' takes its place as one of the world's top surfing destinations. It is certainly South Africa's foremost centre of surfing and surf culture. Boardies from all over the planet flock here to ride waves such as the famous Supertubes, once described as 'the most perfect wave in the world'. June to September are the best months for experienced surfers, but novices can learn at any time of the year.

Development is raging at a furious pace, with shopping in the myriad clothing stores almost overtaking surfing as the main leisure activity, but so far the local board-waxing vibe has been retained. The biggest

surf crowd comes to town every July for the Billabong Pro championship.

Information

Most ATMs are in Da Gama Rd, the main thoroughfare.

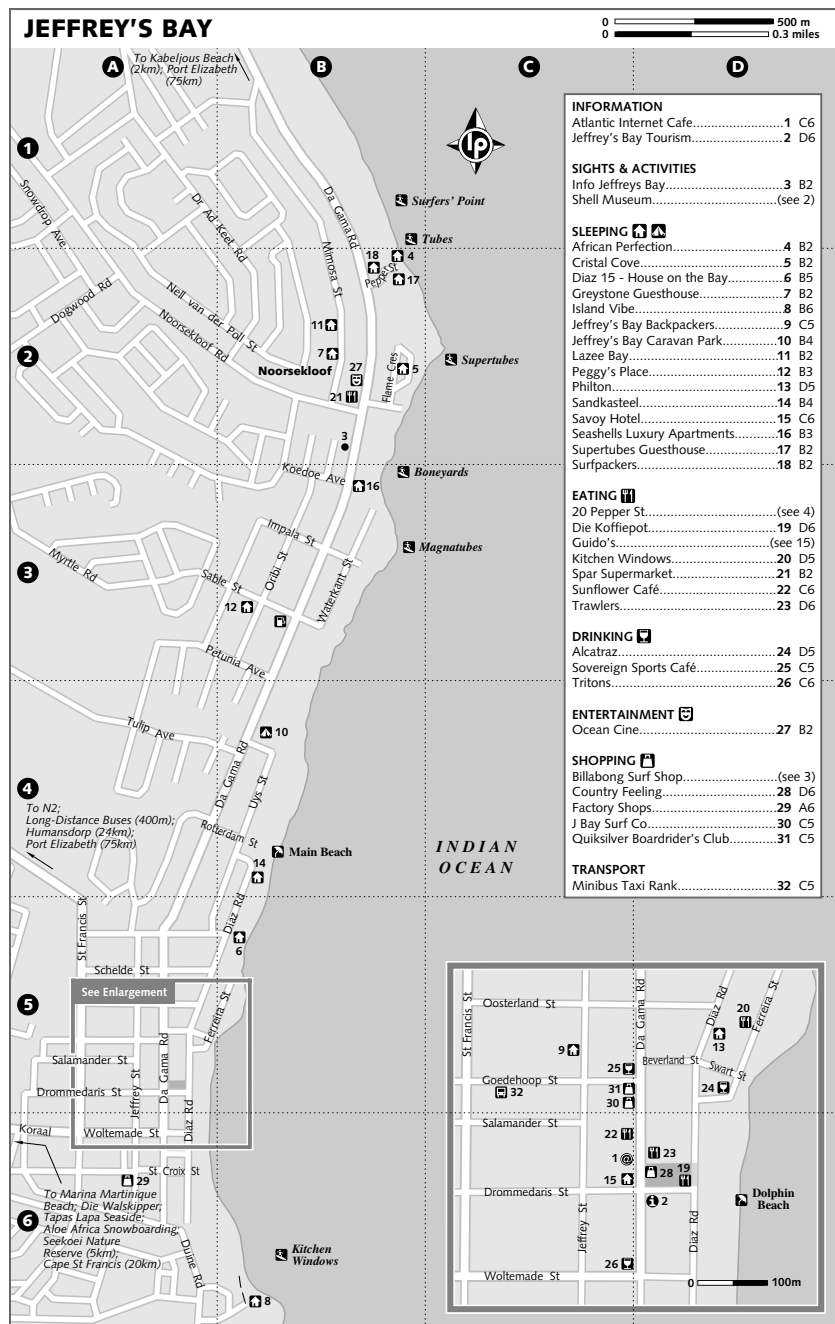
Atlantic Internet Café (☎ 042-293 2399; Da Gama Rd; per min R0.40; 📶 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Also puts digital photos onto CD and provides free tea and coffee.

Jeffrey's Bay Tourism (☎ 042-293 2923; jbaytourism@telkomsa.net; Da Gama Rd; 📶 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Friendly and helpful, and can make bookings for accommodation.

Sights & Activities

The **Shell Museum** (☎ 042-293 1111, ext 286; Dromedaris St; admission by donation; 📶 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), next to the information office, contains over 350 deep-water and rare shells. They look beautiful but rather sad in glass boxes out of the sea.

For nonsurfers, there is **windsurfing** and great **bird-watching** at Kabeljous Beach, **dolphin- and whale-watching** from many of the surrounding beaches or **sand boarding** on nearby dunes. Sand boarding is just like snowboarding, with sand dunes replacing the snow. At **Aloe Afrika Sandboarding**



(☎ 082-576 4259; aloe@agnet.co.za; Marina Martinique; 2hr sessions R200), punters can try their luck on the slopes with instruction, while care is taken to minimise the impact on the environment.

Tours

Info Jeffrey's Bay (☎ 042-296 2563; www.infojeffreysbay.com; Spar Centre, Da Gama Rd) is a private information office that can organise a range of tours and activities in the region, including horse-riding, mountain biking, sand boarding, and township tours with local guides.

Sleeping

Like many places in this part of Eastern Cape, J-Bay is choc-a-block with holiday-makers between mid-December and mid-January, so you'll have to book way ahead for accommodation at this time. There's a good range of B&Bs and backpackers but no really upmarket hotels.

BUDGET

Peggy's Place (☎ 042-293 2160; pegjay@yahoo.com; 8a Oripi St; camp sites/dm/d R35/50/200) A wonderfully rustic, friendly place in a comfortable old house on the outskirts of town, near the surf area and justifiably loved by readers. A self-catering flat is available for R200/350 in the low/high season.

Island Vibe (☎ 042-293 1625; ivibe@lantic.net; 10 Dageraad St; camp sites/dm/d R40/70/180) The most popular backpackers in town, Island Vibe is 500m south of the city centre but the attendant raft of surfies attests to its prime location. Activities on offer include surf lessons (R180), drumming, horse-riding and kite surfing, plus of course plenty of drinking and partying. For those wanting a quieter time, the new, beautifully decorated beach house has double rooms (R250) only and a separate kitchen. Breakfast and dinner are on offer in the open-air restaurant.

Cristal Cove (☎ 042-293 2101; www.cristalcove.co.za; 49 Flame Cres; dm R60, d from R150; ☎) Offering a choice of either neat rooms within self-catering flats or new en-suite, sea-facing doubles, Cristal Cove is a chilled-out backpackers with a personal touch. It's also a stone's throw from Supertubes. Free pickups can be arranged from the buses at Humansdorp.

Jeffrey's Bay Backpackers (☎ 042-293 1379; backpack@netactive.co.za; 12 Jeffrey St; dm/d R60/150; ☎) A

colourful house conveniently located near the centre of town and offering lots of local information. There are bicycles and surfboards for hire, surf lessons and a free shuttle to Supertubes when the surf's up.

Surfpackers (☎ 042-293 2671; 1 Pepper St; dm/d with shared bathroom R70/150) A new kid on the block, right opposite the chi-chi accommodation near Supertubes. Rooms are very clean and very blue, and the large grounds mean there's plenty of space to chill and hang your wetsuit out to dry.

Jeffrey's Bay Caravan Park (☎ 042-200 2241; fax 293 1114; Da Gama Rd; camp sites low/high season R75/135) Somewhat exposed but well located near the sea midway between the town centre and the surf, and offering plenty of plush lawn.

MIDRANGE

Jeffrey's Bay Tourism can put you in touch with a good selection of B&Bs and self-catering establishments.

Lazee Bay (☎ 042-296 2090; lazeebay@worldonline.co.za; 25 Mimosa St; d with breakfast R300; ☎) One of J-Bay's best guesthouses, noticeable up on a hill above Da Gama Rd thanks to its bright blue frontage and memorable for its warm welcome, funky décor and great sea views. There's a pool deck, a braai (barbecue) area and a bar.

Savoy Hotel (☎ 042-293 1106; savoy@lantic.co.za; 16 Da Gama Rd; s/d with breakfast R320/560; ☎) One of the town's first buildings and still its only hotel, the Savoy won't win awards for atmosphere but recalls a more innocent age thanks in part to cheesy Italian murals and a bingo hall. Rooms are drab but clean.

Supertubes Guesthouse (☎ 042-293 2957; supertubes@agnet.co.za; 10/12 Pepper St; s/d with breakfast R350/500, s/d luxury rooms with breakfast R550/800; ☎) A stalwart of J-Bay accommodation, this is right in the prime surfing spot and provides luxurious accommodation with very smart bedrooms, sharing a kitchen. Surf lessons can be arranged.

Sandkasteel (☎ 042-293 1585; www.sandkasteel.co.za; 3 Diaz Rd; 2-/3-bedroom flats R350/610) Good-value, no-frills flats loved by recent graduates of colleges, universities and surf schools.

Greystone Guesthouse (☎ 042-296 0616; greystone@telkomsa.net; 11 Mimosa St; d with breakfast low/high season R360/500; ☎) A large, airy house with a range of neat sea-themed rooms and studios. Many have a corner bath, fridge

or kitchenette, and there's a sizzling hot outdoor Jacuzzi and a pool table. There are also two self-catering units.

Philton (☎ 042-293 1287; 25 Diaz Rd; 2-/3-bedroom flats R400/500) This doesn't look like much from afar, but its combination of beachside location, good-sized self-catering units with balconies and fantastic sea views make it excellent value.

African Perfection (☎ 042-293 1401; www.africanperfection.com; 20 Pepper St; s/d with breakfast R450/800; 🍴) A massive circular wooden staircase is the centrepiece of this impressive luxury option, with all rooms offering stunning sea views in earthy tones and textures. There's also a four-sleeper self-catering loft (R1500) and a separate restaurant in the basement (see right).

Seashells Luxury Apartments (☎ 042-293 1104; www.seashell.co.za; 125 Da Gama Rd; 2-/3-bedroom flats R630/840; 🍴) The apartments are rather nondescript but are serviced, spacious and well located directly in front of Magnatubes.

Diaz 15 – House on the Bay (☎ 042-293 1779; www.diaz15.co.za; 15 Diaz Rd; 2-bedroom flats with breakfast from R1350; 🍴) This place has luxury apartments with tiled floors, leather sofas, and patio doors opening onto well-kept lawns. There's an infinity pool right on the ocean's doorstep.

Eating

Trawlers (☎ 042-293 1353; 19 Da Gama Rd; meals R15-30; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A greasy takeaway serving hamburgers, chips and calamari.

Die Koffiepot (☎ 042-293 2590; Dolphin Beach; snacks R20; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) You don't need to speak Afrikaans to figure out that this place offers a solid caffeine and pastry fix while staring out at the big blue.

Guido's (☎ 042-293 2288; 36 Da Gama Rd; pizzas R20-30; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Guido's is part of a chain of neo-Italian restaurants that are very popular throughout the Eastern Cape. The interior features lots of plaster columns and fake Roman statues, and the menu consists mostly of passable pizzas and a variety of pasta dishes.

Kitchen Windows (☎ 042-293 4230; Diaz Rd; mains R36-50; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Bookings are essential at this, one of the town's more upmarket eateries. A great view of the sea complements splendidly cooked fresh fish and a good selection of salads for lunch. Enter on Diaz Rd.

Sunflower Café (☎ 042-293 1682; 20 Da Gama Rd; mains R40; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun & Mon) This bright, cheerful and friendly café does some healthy and vegetarian options.

20 Pepper St (☎ 042-293 1728; 20 Pepper St; mains R50-80; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Savour sushi, sashimi and Thai-style calamari in this classy, well-styled tile-and-bamboo eatery below African Perfection guesthouse. There's a decent wine selection, too.

Tapas Lapa Seaside (☎ 042-292 0119; Marina Martinique; mains R50-85; 🍴 dinner) Tapas Lapa is just across the car park from the seashore, so the sand on the floor has to be shovelled in! Meals feature decent seafood, and there's a bar next door.

Die Walskipper (☎ 082-800 9478; Marina Martinique; seafood platters R120; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This alfresco restaurant is just metres from the lapping sea at the Marina Martinique beach. It specialises in seafood, plus crocodile and ostrich steaks. At weekends, the long trestle tables are packed with locals enjoying giant platters of oysters, calamari, crab and langoustine.

For self-caterers, **Spar supermarket** (Da Gama Rd) offers a decent selection of food.

Drinking & Entertainment

Tritons (☎ 042-293 3893; 12 Da Gama Rd) A traditional pub with a TV for sports, Triton's is a popular drinking spot. It also offers big breakfasts and traditional South African *potjiekos* (meat and vegetables cooked in a cast-iron pot over an open fire). A move was imminent when we were there, so ask ahead if it's still in this location.

Sovereign Sports Café (☎ 042-293 2311; Da Gama Rd) A cavernous and popular drinking spot with the requisite big-screen TV. Hot dogs and burgers are available to sop up all that beer.

Alcatraz (☎ 042-293 1801; Time Out Bldg, Ferreira St) Dishes up all the same ingredients as the other two – plus games machines and pool tables – but dispenses with food altogether.

Ocean Cine (☎ 042-296 2702; Wavcrest Centre, Da Gama Rd; admission R20) Near the Spar supermarket; screens current movies.

Shopping

The clothing industry has really taken off in J-Bay, with much of the stuff on sale made and designed in the town itself.

Billabong Surf Shop (☎ 042-296 1797; Da Gama Rd) Hires boards for R15 per hour and wetsuits for R10 an hour, and stocks a big range of new and used boards.

Quiksilver Boarder's Club (☎ 042-293 2203; Da Gama Rd) This shop also has a good selection of boards and baggies, a coffee shop and a quaint Surfing Museum upstairs.

Clothing emporia in the town centre include **Country Feeling** (☎ 042-200 2611; Da Gama Rd) and **J-Bay Surf Co** (☎ 042-200 2617; cnr Da Gama Rd & Goedehoop St), which sells surfboards for R2800 to R3000.

Check the various factory shops at the lower end of Jeffrey St for the best bargains, as well as the local independent stores dotted around the high street.

Getting There & Away

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops daily at hostels in both directions. A fare from Jeffrey's Bay to Cape Town costs R380 and takes 12 hours; Port Elizabeth to Jeffrey's Bay costs R70 and takes two hours. The **Sunshine Express** (☎ 293 2221) runs door-to-door between Port Elizabeth and Jeffrey's Bay (R100, one hour).

Minibus taxis depart from the **Friendly Grocer** (Goedehoop St); it's R12 to Humansdorp (30 minutes) and R35 to Port Elizabeth (one hour).

Long-distance buses (Greyhound only) plying the Cape Town–Port Elizabeth–Durban route arrive at and depart from the stand at the Pick 'n Pay centre on St Francis St (Map p246).

PORT ELIZABETH

☎ 041 / pop 1.5m

Port Elizabeth, the Eastern Cape's biggest town and its major transport hub, seems to have something of an identity crisis. It is known by South Africans as 'PE', by the locals as the 'friendly city', by marketers as part of the 'Sunshine Coast' and by the local government as the core of 'Nelson Mandela Bay' – an area incorporating the city centre, the nearby industrial area of Uitenhage and the huge, sprawling townships that surround both. In keeping with this, its buildings are a hodgepodge of styles and have a dishevelled charm: monuments at once to its growth period (the 1880s) and to its boycott-era stagnation (the 1970s).

While many consider Port Elizabeth no more than a charmless, convenient place to stop for a rest and stock up on supplies before moving onward, it does offer some of the Eastern Cape's best bathing beaches. If you do end up here for a few days, take a look at the interesting South End and Port Elizabeth museums or explore the vibrant *shebeen* (drinking establishment) scene of the surrounding townships.

Orientation

The train station is just to the northwest of the city, which is circled by a ghostly freeway. The beachfront runs between Humewood and Summerstrand, a couple of kilometres southeast of the centre. Shops and businesses are concentrated in the big malls: the Boardwalk at Summerstrand, and Greenacres, just west of the town centre on Rte 102.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Boardwalk Internet Café (☎ 041-583 4725; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; per hr R40; 🌐 9.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun)

MONEY

There are branches of all the major banks along Govan Mbeki Avenue, located in the city centre.

Amex (☎ 041-583 2025; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; 🌐 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun)

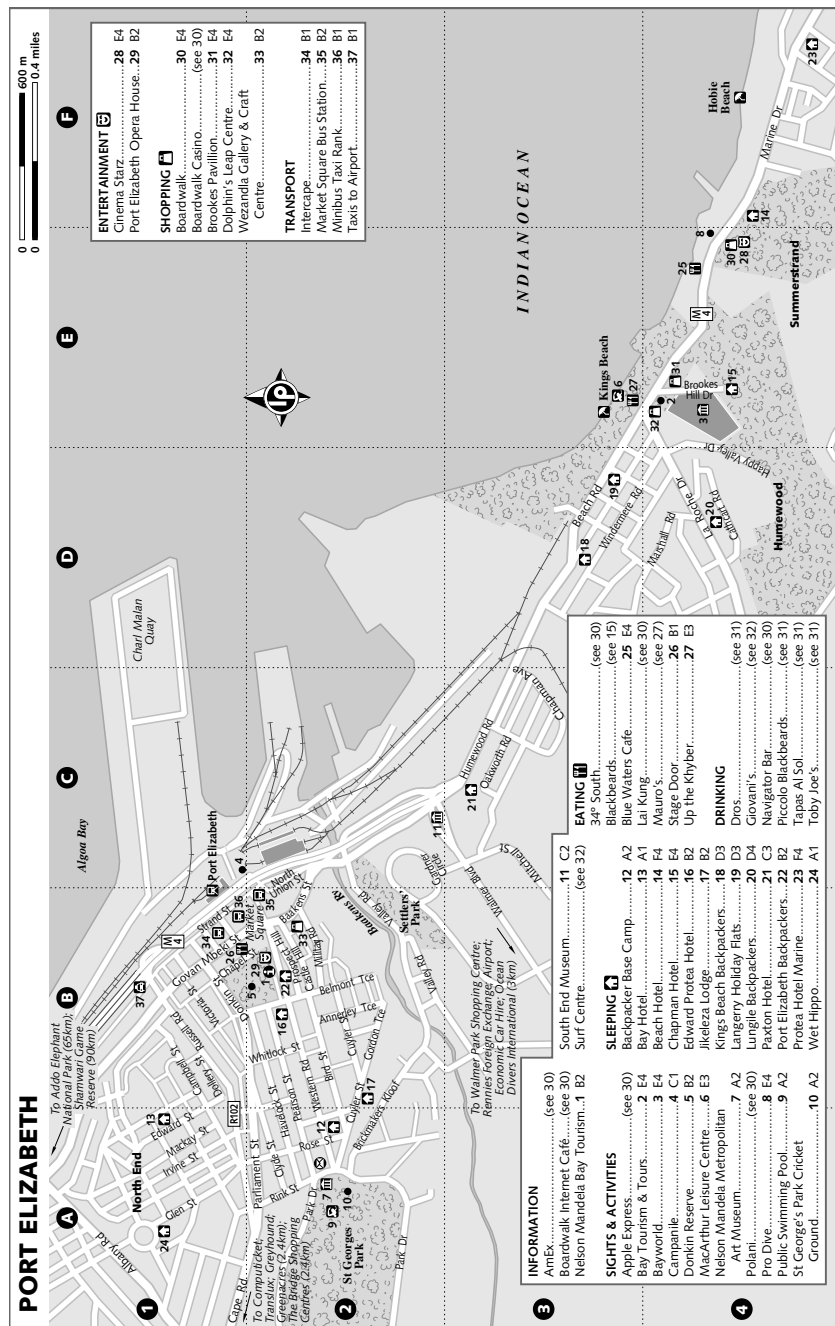
Rennies Foreign Exchange (☎ 041-368 5890; Walmer Park Shopping Centre; 🌐 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) About 3km from the town centre.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism (☎ 041-585 8884, 041-583 2030; www.nmbt.co.za; Donkin Reserve; 🌐 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) Has an excellent supply of information and maps, including of the Donkin Heritage Trail (R18), which details a two-hour self-guided walk around the city's historic buildings. It's in the lighthouse building in Donkin Reserve and its handy visitors' guide includes details of disabled-friendly sights and accommodation.

Dangers & Annoyances

The city centre can be dangerous at night – take a taxi if you're going out. The main beachfront, however, is considered one of the safest in the country.



Sights

SOUTH END MUSEUM

This small but fascinating **museum** (☎ 041-582 3325; admin@semuseum.co.za; cnr Walmer Blvd & Humewood Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) records multicultural Port Elizabeth, a vibrant district once known as South End. The apartheid bulldozers put an end to the neighbourhood during forced removals between 1965 and 1975 under the infamous Group Areas Act. The inhabitants, which included blacks, coloureds, Asians and whites, were relocated to parts of the city designated by race.

BAYWORLD

One of the best and largest museum complexes in the country, **Bayworld** (☎ 041-584 0650; www.bayworld.co.za; Beach Rd; adult/child R31/15; ☎ 9am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm) incorporates the Port Elizabeth Museum, an oceanarium and a snake park. Alongside the many stuffed and pickled marine mammals in the museum is some beautiful Xhosa beadwork incorporating modern materials, and a replica of the Algosaurus dinosaur.

At the oceanarium, trained dolphins and seals perform at 11am and 3pm daily. It's old-fashioned, tacky and exploitative, but still has the kids in raptures and carries a strong educational message about pollution and marine conservation.

NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN ART MUSEUM

Port Elizabeth's **art museum** (☎ 041-586 1030; www.artmuseum.co.za; 1 Park Dr, St George's Park; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 2-5pm Tue, Sat & Sun) is housed in two rather handsome buildings at the entrance to St George's Park. It has a permanent collection of paintings and sculpture by contemporary South African artists, some older British and Eastern works, plus regular rolling exhibitions and graduate shows.

CAMPANILE

This **bell tower** (☎ 041-506 3293; Strand St, ☎ 9am-12.30pm Tue-Sat, 2-4pm Sun & Mon), visible from the city centre, was erected to commemorate the landing of the 1820 British Settlers. Unfortunately, it's located near the entrance to the harbour and railway station, a bit of a dodgy area. If you're keen to climb the 53.5m structure via 204 steps to view the

largest carillon of bells in the country, do so in a group if possible.

DONKIN RESERVE

The Donkin Reserve is immediately behind the town centre and has good views over the bay. It's a handy point for getting your bearings. The **pyramid** on the reserve is a memorial to Elizabeth Donkin, the beloved wife of Sir Rufane Donkin, once the governor of Cape Province. A plaque on the pyramid pays tribute to: 'One of the most perfect human beings, who has given her name to the town below'.

Also on the reserve is the **Port Elizabeth Opera House**, the oldest in the country (see p254).

STEAM TRAIN

The **Apple Express** (bookings through Eas'capism ☎ 041-583 2030; www.apple-express.co.za; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; adult/child R120/60; ☎ alternating Sat Jan-Aug, every Sat Sep-Dec) tourist steam train runs a day trip to Thornhill and back, with a two-hour stop for a braai. It crosses over the highest narrow-gauge bridge in the world.

Activities

The wide sandy beaches to the south of central Port Elizabeth make the town a major watersports venue. Kings Beach stretches from the harbour breakwater to Humewood Beach; both beaches are sheltered. Catamaran sailors and surfers make for Hobe Beach, which is 5km from the city centre.

If you prefer calmer waters, there's a rather beautiful **public swimming pool** (☎ 041-585 7751; St George's Park; adult/child R4/2.50; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10.30am-6pm Sun) in among the trees and lawns of St George's Park.

Just up the road is **St George's Park Cricket Ground** (☎ 041-585 1646), the home of Eastern Province Cricket and famous for its band-playing supporters who turn one-day internationals into tub-thumping affairs.

There's a bigger pool complex with a whale-viewing jetty at **MacArthur Leisure Centre** (☎ 041-582 2285; Kings Beach Promenade; adult/child R30/15; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Sep-Apr). The MacArthur complex includes a pool bar and two restaurants, with direct access to the beach.

Good **diving sites** around Port Elizabeth include some wrecks and the St Croix

Islands, a marine reserve. Contact either **Ocean Divers International** (☎ 041-581 5121; www.odipe.co.za; 10 Albert Rd, Walmer) or **Pro Dive** (☎ 041-583 5316; www.prodive.co.za; Shark Rock Pier, Beach Rd, Summerstrand; per dive R275); both of these offer PADI and NAUI diving courses, starting at around R900.

The **Surf Centre** (☎ 083-656 8429; Marine Dr, Humewood; surfboards/body boards per day R100/30) sells and hires surfboards and body boards. Its surf school will teach you how to use them for R150 per day.

Port Elizabeth's blustery climate also makes it a popular **windsurfing** destination, with many private tour operators around town. Contact Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism (p249) for a list of reputable companies.

Tours

Bay Tourism & Tours (☎ 041-584 0622; www.baytours.co.za; Beach Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) runs local tours, including trips to Addo Elephant National Park (R550) and city/townships (R250).

There are several cross-cultural township tours, which give the opportunity to visit squatter camps, *shebeens* and *abakhwetha* (initiation camps for boys). The guides are locals who are proud of the Port Elizabeth townships' part in the antiapartheid struggle, and highlight places of historical and political interest along the way. The cost is from R200 to R250 per person for a half-day tour and includes a light lunch or dinner at a *shebeen*. Contact **Calabash Tours** (☎ 041-585 6162; calabash@iafrica.com), **Tanaqua Tours** (☎ 041-452 7692) or **Molo Tours** (☎ 082-970 4037).

Raggy Charters (☎ 073-152 2277) offers cruises led by a qualified marine biologist to St Croix, Jahleel and Benton Islands. You can see penguins, Cape fur seals, dolphins and whales on its half-day tour, which departs at 8am daily (R450).

For a sunset yacht cruise, including a fish barbecue, contact **Polani** (☎ 041-583 2141; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand). Boats go towards Cape Recife, and there's a good chance of seeing dolphins en route. The R120 price tag doesn't include drinks.

Sleeping

As you might imagine, Port Elizabeth is well provided with accommodation, mostly of a very good standard. The tourist office in Donkin Reserve can help with lists of B&Bs. Most of Port Elizabeth's fairly unex-

citing hotel choices are lined up along the beachfront.

BUDGET

Lungile Backpackers (☎ 041-582 2042; lungile@netactive.co.za; 12 La Roche Dr, Humewood; camp sites/dm/tw/d with shared bathroom R40/65/160/175; ☎ ☎) Port Elizabeth's most popular and busy backpackers is contained in an airy Swiss-style home minutes from the beachfront. The large entertaining area rocks most nights, and the dorms and tiny camp site can get full when the Baz Bus arrives, so book ahead. There are also some handsome stone-flagged doubles with their own bathrooms (R195). The hostel does pick-ups from the airport and city-centre bus stops.

Jikeleza Lodge (☎ 041-586 3721; winteam@hinet.co.za; 44 Cuyler St; camp sites/dm/s/d with shared bathroom R55/70/135/170; ☎) Jikeleza Lodge is small and clean rather than especially charming, but there's a big garden and braai area, and it's a good place to organise township visits and other local tours.

Backpackers Base Camp (☎ 041-582 3285; pebasecamp@yahoo.com; 58 Western Rd; dm/s/d with shared bathroom R60/120/160; ☎) Its entrance is far from welcoming, but this is a neat backpackers near St George's Park. Rooms have plush futons, there's a bar with pool table and a lounge with an open fireplace, plus an indoor braai.

Wet Hippo (☎ 041-533 6260; www.wethippo.com; 14 Glen St, Richmond Hill; dm/d with shared bathroom R60/160; ☎) Port Elizabeth's newest backpackers is pretty smart, with a sunny kitchen, a big pool and a pretty garden, all set in a leafy suburban street far from the hustle of the beachfront.

Kings Beach Backpackers (☎ 041-585 8113; kingsb@agnet.co.za; 41 Windermere Rd, Humewood; dm/d with shared bathroom R65/160; ☎) A quieter, more intimate backpackers, with some so-so cottage rooms and comfortable en-suite doubles (R190). High-speed Internet (R30 per hour) and satellite TV keep you connected to the world, and the staff can help organise tours in the area.

Port Elizabeth Backpackers (☎ 041-586 0697; pebakpak@global.co.za; 7 Prospect Hill; dm/d with shared bathroom R75/180; ☎) This friendly, laid-back hostel is in a 100-year-old building within walking distance of the city and places to eat and drink up on the headland. It's quieter and less ritzy than Lungile, but still very

comfortable, with a braai area and a garden. Breakfast costs R20 – try the homemade bread! The hostel organises transport to the Owl House Backpackers in Nieu Bethesda (see p272).

MIDRANGE

Bay Hotel (☎ 041-585 1558; info@bayberry.co.za; 7 Lutman St; s/d with breakfast R250/375) An upmarket place that feels more like a B&B than a hotel, with very reasonable rates for elegant rooms with plenty of character. It also has an attractive restaurant (mains R40) and bar attached.

Edward Protea Hotel (☎ 041-586 2056; edward@pehotels.co.za; Belmont Tce; s/d R410/550) The Edward Protea Hotel, in the heart of the city, is a gracious, old-style Edwardian hotel with comfortable rooms and charming colonial décor. It's a superior member of the Protea chain. A full English breakfast in the palm-filled courtyard restaurant costs R68.

Chapman Hotel (☎ 041-584 0678; www.chapman.co.za; 1 Lady Bea Cres, Brookes Hill, Summerstrand; s/d with breakfast R460/550; ☎ ☎) The family-run Chapman, overlooking the sea south of the city centre, is an upmarket choice with a waterfall horizon pool. Modern rooms have private balconies with sea views.

Paxton Hotel (☎ 041-585 9655; www.paxton.co.za; Camarvon Pl, Humerail; s/d R555/680; ☎ ☎) This is a fairly characterless corporate hotel in a concrete tower halfway between the beach and the city centre. There are some wheelchair-adapted rooms available.

In addition to the places already mentioned, there are dozens of self-catering flats along the beachfront. If you're looking for a clean, no-frills apartment, head for **Langerry Holiday Flats** (☎ 041-585 2654; langerry@icon.co.za; 31 Beach Rd; 1-/2-bedroom flats R180/350). All flats have TV, telephone and kitchen, and the two-bedroom ones have a microwave. The same company also has other blocks in the area.

TOP END

Neither of Port Elizabeth's top-end hotels is much to write home about, but they both have good views of the sea.

Beach Hotel (☎ 041-583 2161; resbeach@pehotels.co.za; Marine Dr, Summerstrand; s/d with sea view R850/1060, without sea view R695/860; ☎ ☎) The four-star Beach Hotel is part of the Protea chain. The terracotta and mint-green rooms are austere but have all the trimmings, and it's

well positioned opposite Hobie Beach and next to the Boardwalk. There is a dining room, sea-facing terrace for light meals, a bar and a coffee shop.

Protea Hotel Marine (☎ 041-583 2101; www.pehotels.co.za; Marine Dr, Summerstrand; s/d R770/970; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Protea Marine is one of the most expensive hotels in Port Elizabeth, so you'd think they could have increased the size of the swimming pool a bit – it's tiny, and right next to the road. Inside, things improve slightly, with a jazzy bar, a gym and comfortable, if characterless rooms with a bathroom and personal safe.

Eating

Most of Port Elizabeth's best cafés are in the Boardwalk Casino Complex in Summerstrand, at the far end of Beach Rd. The atmosphere is a bit artificial, but you can at least sip a cappuccino in peace away from the plastic fast-food joints of the beachfront. Try Dulce's Continental Diner or Tarantino's for lunch.

Blue Waters Café (☎ 041-583 4110; Marine Dr, Summerstrand; mains R30-90; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) A bright, lively café-restaurant with an imaginative menu – lots of seafood platters, salads and pasta, and a good black-mushroom vegetarian dish. It's quite popular, so book ahead.

Stage Door (☎ 041-586 3553; Phoenix Hotel, 5 Chapel St; mains R35; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Stage Door has won awards for good-value pub grub, but the surroundings are a bit grungy and the area can be dodgy at night. It's popular with students and middle-aged rockers.

Lai Kung (☎ 041-583 1123; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; mains R40-60; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's undeniably theme-park-ish across a lantern-adorned bridge in the Boardwalk shopping centre, but this is Chinese-run and Chinese-supported, so they must be doing something right. The Sichuan duck (R56) is tops.

34° South (☎ 041-583 1085; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; dinner R45-100; ☎ lunch & dinner) We've heard both very good and very bad things about this place, but what we liked most was the fact that you can pick your own ingredients from the goodies served up at its counter or select fine foods from all around the world on offer in the shop. If you'd prefer to be served, there's a large bistro-style seafood menu and an extensive wine list.

Up the Khyber (☎ 041-582 2200; Beach Rd; mains R46-64; ☎ lunch & dinner) Next door to Mauro's, this is one of two fairly classy beachfront options within the MacArthur Leisure Centre. Indian food has recently taken a back seat to the usual steaks and burgers, but there are a couple of vegetarian (and one vegan) curries on the menu.

Mauro's (☎ 041-582 2700; Beach Rd; mains R52-79; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Mauro's is something of an anomaly among the bucket-and-spade kitsch of the beachfront – a Californian-style bistro with very good interior décor and trendy black-clad waiting staff. It's within the MacArthur Leisure Centre complex, and has some outside tables looking over the beach.

Blackbeard's (☎ 041-584 0678; Chapman Hotel, 1 Lady Bea Cres, Brookes Hill, Summerstrand; mains R70-90; ☎ breakfast & dinner) Blackbeard's, and its sister restaurant Piccolo Blackbeard's at Brookes Pavilion, Beach Rd in Humewood, specialise in seafood platters – you can pick the ingredients to create your own platter.

Drinking & Entertainment

Wednesday seems to be the biggest night in the pubs and clubs, although Friday and Saturday are popular as well.

Toby Joe's (☎ 041-584 0082; Brookes Pavilion, Beach Rd, Humewood; ☎ Tue-Sun) Port Elizabeth's current hotspot for the young and studenty crowd is this cavernous pub, filled with bursting every night with surfer types, glamorous girls and the requisite scowling bouncers. There are live DJs at weekends, karaoke on Thursday, and Sunday deck parties on the wooden terrace. A 'smart casual' dress policy means guys can expect to be turned away if they're wearing flip-flops.

Giovanis' (☎ 041-586 3189; Dolphin's Leap Centre) A buzzy, trendy bar-diner with a fairly young crowd but a tad more sophistication than Toby Joe's. There's a big-screen TV, a long cocktail menu, loud music and American diner-style booths to cosy up in. It's busiest after 10pm on Friday.

Dros (☎ 041-585 1021; Brookes Pavilion, Beach Rd, Humewood) Part of the fast-growing South African chain, Dros is a favourite spot to quaff down a beer while watching the rugby. There's a pub grub menu and a good selection of wines, too.

Tapas Al Sol (☎ 041-586 2159; Brookes Pavilion, Beach Rd, Humewood) No tapas here, but live

bands play most nights and the Sunday afternoon deck party is legendary.

Navigator Bar (☎ 041-507 7777; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand) A swanky bar next to the casino, with plenty of chinos and high heels. Cocktails (from R20) are worth a try.

Boardwalk Casino (☎ 041-507 7777; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; ☎ 24hr) Try your luck on the slot machines or sample the dubious cabaret, but not before you've stashed your firearm in the special gun cloakroom near the entrance.

Port Elizabeth Opera House (☎ 041-586 3177; White's Rd) Port Elizabeth's opera house is the oldest in South Africa, with a beautiful 19th-century interior. It shows a lively programme of concerts, ballets, plays and jazz recitals – drop into the box office for the latest.

Cinema Starz (☎ 041-583 2000; the Boardwalk, Marine Dr, Summerstrand; admission R20) Shows five screens of blockbusters.

Shopping

Wezandla Gallery & Craft Centre (☎ 041-585 1185; 27 Baakens St) This brightly coloured arts and crafts centre has a good selection of artefacts made by local groups and a small coffee shop. Staff can also help with tourist information.

There's also the Brookes Pavillion, Dolphin's Leap Centre, and Boardwalk shopping malls in Humewood.

Getting There & Away

AIR

SAA (☎ 041-507 1111) has daily flights between Jo'burg (R1300 return), Durban (R1100), Cape Town (R1200) and Port Elizabeth. **SA Airlink** (☎ 0861-359 722) flies daily from Port Elizabeth to East London (around R750), Durban (R900) and Cape Town (R900). **Kulula** (☎ 0861-585 852; www.kulula.com) flies daily to Jo'burg. Return fares start at around R900.

BUS

Greyhound (☎ 041-363 4555; www.greyhound.co.za) buses depart from opposite Checkers at Greenacres Shopping Centre, around 3km from Humewood. Phone a private taxi or take a bus from the city centre – see opposite for details. Reservations can also be made at **Computicket** (☎ 083-915 8000; Greenacres Shopping Centre). **Translux** (☎ 041-392 1333; www.translux.co.za; Ernst & Young Bldg, Greenacres Shopping Centre,

Ring Rd) also operates out of the Greenacres Shopping Centre. **Intercape** (☎ 041-586 0055; www.intercape.co.za) only accepts telephone bookings; the buses depart from the **bus stop** (cnr Fleming & North Union Sts) behind the old post office.

To Cape Town

Translux has a daily bus to and from Cape Town (R180, 12½ hours) via the Garden Route.

Intercape also has two daily Garden Route services linking Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (R270, 12 hours).

Greyhound stops in Port Elizabeth daily on the journey between Durban (R325, 15 hours) and Cape Town (R270, 12 hours).

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) runs daily from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town (R810 one-way – hop-on, hop-off).

To Johannesburg

Greyhound has nightly buses from Port Elizabeth to Jo'burg (R335, 15 hours) via East London. Translux has daily services from Port Elizabeth to Jo'burg (R350, 14½ hours) via Bloemfontein (R240, 10 hours) and Graaff-Reinet (R315, 11 hours). From February to September, Intercape has daily services from Port Elizabeth to Jo'burg (R310, 15 hours) via Graaff-Reinet (R180, four hours).

To Durban & East London

Translux runs to Durban daily (R280, 15 hours) via Grahamstown (R75, 2½ hours), East London (R125, five hours), Mthatha (R170, nine hours) and Port Shepstone (R240, 13 hours). Greyhound runs to Durban daily (R300, 15 hours). Intercape runs between Port Elizabeth and East London daily (R120, six hours).

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) runs Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday from Port Elizabeth to Durban, and returns on Monday, Wednesday Thursday, Saturday and Sunday; it's R720 for a one-way hop-on, hop-off ticket.

CAR

All the big car-rental operators have offices in Port Elizabeth or at the airport, including **Avis** (☎ 041-581 4291), **Budget** (☎ 041-581 4242) and **Imperial** (☎ 5041-81 1268). Also try **Economic Car Hire** (☎ 041-581 5826; 104 Heugh Rd, Walmer).

MINIBUS TAXI

J-Bay Sunshine Express (☎ 042-293 2221) minibus taxis run between Jeffrey's Bay, Port Elizabeth and other coastal areas.

Most minibus taxis leave from the large townships surrounding Port Elizabeth and can be difficult to find. The **minibus taxi rank** (Strand St), a few blocks north of the bell tower, services the local area.

TRAIN

The **Shosholoz Meyl** (☎ 0860-008 888; www.spoor.net.co.za) runs overnight to Jo'burg (1st/2nd class R365/245, 18 hours) via Bloemfontein.

Getting Around

The **airport** (Allister Miller Rd, Walmer) is about 5km from the city centre. You can catch a minibus taxi (R4) from the minibus taxi rank terminus near Port Elizabeth station. This will drop you off on Third St, Walmer, from where the airport is a 10 minute walk. Taxis and hire cars are available at the airport. For a private taxi (around R65), call **Hurter Cabs** (☎ 041-585 5500) or catch one from the taxi rank on Strand St.

For information about bus services, contact **Algoa Bus Company** (☎ 041-404 1200), which runs scheduled central city services departing from the Market Sq bus station on Strand St.

ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

This **national park** (☎ 042-223 0556; www.sanparks.org; adult/child R80/40; ☎ 7am-7pm) is 72km north of Port Elizabeth, near the Zuurberg Range in the Sundays River Valley. Following a recent expansion, Addo now encompasses around 120,000 hectares of malaria-free wildlife viewing.

The park protects the remnants of the huge elephant herds that once roamed Eastern Cape. When farmers started to develop the area at the beginning of the 20th century, they found themselves in conflict with the elephants. A man named Major Pretorius was commissioned to deal with the 'menace', and until he was stopped by a public outcry, he seemed likely to succeed. When Addo was proclaimed a national park in 1931, there were only 11 elephants left.

Today there are more than 300 elephants in the park, and you'd be unlucky not to see some. A day or two at Addo is a highlight

of any visit to this part of the Eastern Cape, not only for the elephants but for the zebras, elands, kudus, warthogs, myriad birds and even lions and hyenas, relatively new introductions to the park.

Information

The park's dirt roads can become impassable in the wet, so the park is closed if there has been heavy rain – if in doubt, call ahead. There is a well-stocked **shop** (☎ 8am-7pm) at the park headquarters, 7km from the village of Addo on Rte 335. It offers food, curios and a respite from the heat, which in mid-summer can be intolerable.

The elephants of Addo were once addicted to the oranges and grapefruits fed to them during droughts, and took to mobbing vehicles containing citrus fruit. For this reason, no citrus fruits of any kind are allowed in the park boundaries. Do *not* get out of your car except at designated climb-out points, and if you're lucky enough to get close to the elephants, treat them with respect, however docile they may seem.

During the summer it's best to arrive at the park by midmorning and to stake out one of the waterholes where the elephants tend to gather during the heat of the day. In the winter, early mornings are the best time to see animals. For optimum wildlife-spotting, pick up one of the **'hop-on rangers'** (R50) at the gate, who can give you advice on where to go and explain what you're looking at in interesting detail. The park's own **vehicle** (2hr drive per person R150) can also be used for elephant-spotting drives.

Horse trails (2hr ride per person R100) are available twice a day – they go through the Zuurberg section of the park, which doesn't contain the lions.

Sleeping & Eating

Park accommodation can get very booked up at busy periods, so always reserve in advance if possible.

Meals are available at the park's restaurant (mains R30), which is presided over by the stuffed head of the legendary bull, Hapoor. If you've brought your own grub, the rest camp's shady picnic area has a fine view of the waterhole.

Several B&B places have sprung up around the tiny town of Addo, just a few kilometres from the park gate.

Homestead B&B (☎ 042-233 0354; homestead@webmail.co.za; camp sites R25, backpackers s/d R100/180, B&B s/d 250/500; 📍) Homestead is cheaper than others, and has a few backpackers' rooms and self-catering units, as well as camping, alongside the normal B&B accommodation.

Addo Rest Camp (bookings ☎ 042-223 0556; www.sanparks.org; camp sites/safari tents/forest cabins with shared bathroom R105/260/350, 4-person chalets R390) Addo's main camp site is at the main park headquarters. It's a great spot with a picnic area, and some of the accommodation overlooks a waterhole where elephants come to drink. Various accommodation options are available sleeping anything from two to six people, most of which are very well decorated and excellent value for money. Addo also has a bush camp (one to four people R440) and bungalows (one to four people R120) in the northern section of the park, which have to be booked in their entirety. Inquire at the park headquarters for details.

Chrislin (☎ 042-233 0022; www.africanhuts-addo.co.za; s/d with breakfast R450/700; 📍) This place has friendly owners and very pretty African-style huts on a working citrus farm. A big braai dinner can be provided for R100 per person.

Valley View (☎ 042-233 0349; www.valleyview.co.za; s/d with breakfast R400/500; 📍) This B&B has big, spacious twin and double rooms, full of character, in a 100-year-old farmhouse.

Getting There & Away

The park is signposted from the N2. Alternatively you can travel via Uitenhage on Rte 75; there are attractive citrus farms along the banks of the Sundays River from Uitenhage to Kirkwood.

SHAMWARI GAME RESERVE

Undoubtedly the most high-powered of the Eastern Cape's many private wildlife reserves, **Shamwari** (☎ 042-203 1111; www.shamwari.com; d all inclusive May-Sep R5900, Oct-Apr R9800; 📍 📍 📍), 30km east of Addo Elephant National Park, is an internationally renowned reserve dedicated to restocking large tracts of reclaimed land with animals that were common in the region before the advent of the farmers and big-game hunters. All of the Big Five (elephant, rhino, lion, leopard and buffalo) are present, and well-managed

wildlife drives mean that you'll have a very good chance of seeing at least four of them during the course of a couple of days' stay.

The **Wilderness Trail** (per person per night R950) is also available in the 3000 hectares of the reserve that have been set aside as an untouched Wilderness Area. Here you have the option of two-night camping trip, or four-night trip with the first and last days' accommodation at the base camp.

Room rates vary from lodge to lodge, and many are discounted by as much as 50% during April, May and June. Rates are all inclusive, but call ahead to check as some discounts apply only to South African residents.

Shamwari's volunteer programme, **African Global Academy** (☎ 046-624 5449; www.africanacademy.co.za), offers the chance to do hands-on conservation work at the various wildlife reserves in the Eastern Cape.

The reserve can only be reached if you have your own car (and at these prices, you probably will). If you're coming from Port Elizabeth, travel along the N2 towards Grahamstown for about 65km, take the Paterson turnoff (Rte 342), continue for a further 7km, then turn right at the Shamwari sign.

GRAHAMSTOWN

☎ 046 / pop 100,000

Grahamstown is the capital of Settler Country. The town's genteel conservatism and English-style prettiness belie a bloody history. The town centre has some fine examples of Victorian and early Edwardian building styles, with beautiful powder-blue and lemon-yellow shop fronts.

Of course, the British weren't the only people to settle in Grahamstown. Visit the nearby townships for a glimpse into the culture of the Xhosa – once rulers of the region, they were defeated by British and Boer forces after a fierce struggle.

Socially, the students from Rhodes University, who are to be found packing out the pubs and bars during term time, dominate the town. But as established artists settle here and the population ages, a new side of Grahamstown is developing, as evidenced by a sudden breed of beautiful people fraternising a raft of newly opened, trendy restaurants and chic bars.

Information

Go Sure Travel (☎ 046-622 2235; marianl.gbstravel@galileosa.co.za; Pepper Grove Mall, cnr African & Allen Sts) Handles bookings for all local travel; it is also the agent for most car rental companies and cashes travellers cheques (no commission charged).

Makana Tourism (☎ 046-622 3241; www.grahams-town.co.za; 63 High St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) This office, in a small building next to the Standard Bank, is efficient and friendly. It is an agent for Translux buses and also has Internet access (per hr R30).

Pick 'n Pay Centre (African St) A pleasant, open-air place north of the city centre that will handle your banking, telecommunication and grocery needs.

Post office (High St)

Standard Bank (Church Sq)

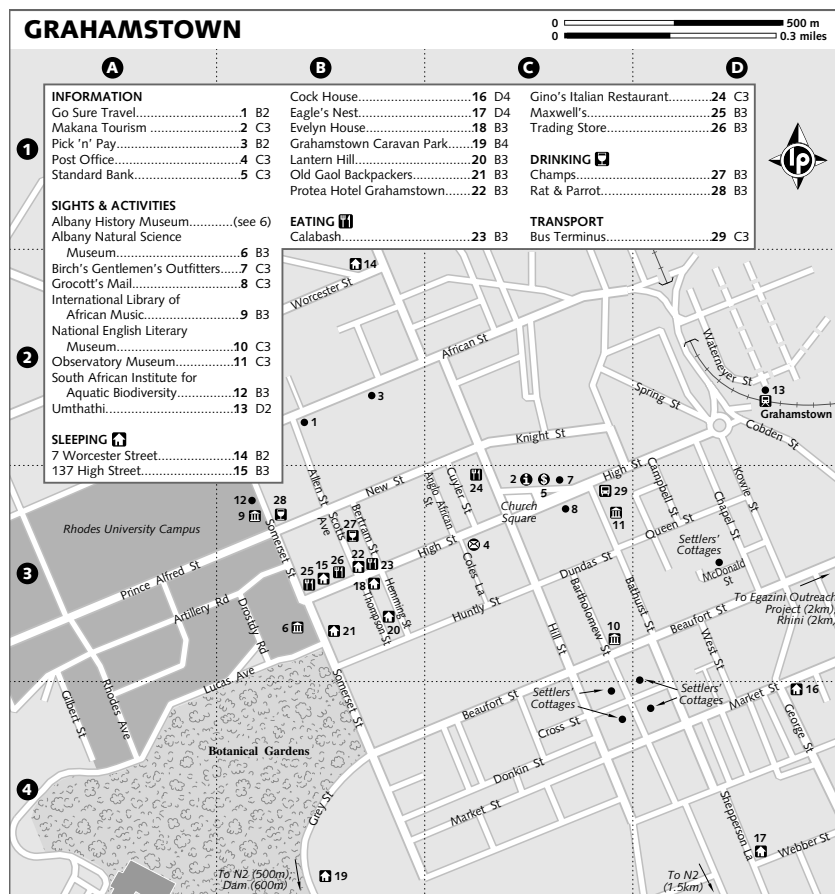
Sights & Activities

Grahamstown is rightly proud of its museums, four of which are administered by the **Albany Museum Group** (☎ 046-622 4450; www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum). The most interesting is the wonderfully eccentric **Observatory Museum** (Bathurst St; adult/child R8/5; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat). In this old house you'll find rare Victorian memorabilia, the Meridian Room (which shows that Grahamstown is 14 minutes behind South African time!), and the truly wonderful *camera obscura*. Built in 1882 and the only one of its kind in the world outside the UK, this is a series of lenses, a bit like a periscope, which reflect a perfect panoramic image of the town onto a flat white disc hidden in a tower in the roof. It's like watching a live, high-resolution movie of the city around you.

Also under the Albany aegis is the **Albany History Museum** (Somerset St; admission R5; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which details the history and art of the peoples of the Eastern Cape including the Xhosa and the 1820 settlers. The art exhibitions in its gallery change regularly.

There's also the **National English Literary Museum** (Beaufort St; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), which contains the first editions of just about every work by famous South African writers.

Considerably less exciting, but worth half an hour on a rainy afternoon, is the **Albany Natural Science Museum** (Somerset St; admission R5; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which depicts early human history and has some interesting artefacts, including a traditional Xhosa hut.



The second coelacanth (a marine fish with limblike pectoral fins) ever caught is exhibited in the **South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity** (☎ 046-603 5800; www.jlsmith.ru.ac.za; Prince Alfred St, Rhodes University; admission free; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), formerly the more lavishly titled JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology. Until 1938 this primitive fish was thought to have been extinct.

On the Rhodes University campus is the **International Library of African Music** (ILAM; ☎ 046-603 8557; http://ilam.ru.ac.za; Prince Alfred St, Rhodes University; ☎ 8.30am-12.45pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), a treasure trove of instruments and recordings – call ahead for an appointment. You can examine one of the 200 or so instruments, listen to field recordings and then

try and emulate what you have heard on *nyanga* pipes from Mozambique, a *kora* (stringed instrument) from West Africa or a Ugandan *kalimba* (thumb piano).

The best examples of preserved Victorian and Edwardian storefronts are **Grocott's Mail** (Church Sq), still a working newspaper office, and **Birch's Gentlemen's Outfitters** (Church Sq). The latter still has a marvellously old-fashioned 'slider', a pulley system that sends money and change across the ceiling to and from the central till. Staff will demonstrate if you ask them nicely.

For a taste of local student life, head to the **Dam** up Grey St on the way out of town. It's a place to chill out and have a swim, and on Fridays there are drumming sessions.

The surrounding area offers many outdoor activities including excursions to the Fish River and Addo Elephant National Park, and skydiving. Contact Makana Tourism for more information.

Tours

There are plenty of opportunities to meet local Xhosa in the safe and friendly townships around Grahamstown. **Umthathi** (☎ 046-622 4450; www.umthathi.co.za; Station Bldg, High St), with an office in the old train station building, organises township visits including a traditional Xhosa meal (R50), and visits to a herbal nursery in Rhini township. **Egazini Outreach Project** (☎ 083-428 9424; per group of 1-4 people R300) runs two-hour tours that allow you to relive the battle of Grahamstown through the eyes of young Xhosa historians. There is no office in town; just call.

Alan Weyer, a well-known local historian, conducts the **Spirits of the Past** (☎ 046-622 7896; www.spiritsofthepast.co.za; half-/full-day tours R475/775) tour through the so-called 'Frontier Country' around Grahamstown. Some include a visit to the Valley of the Ancient Voices, a pristine valley filled with rock art, relics and stone-age artefacts and all include a lavish picnic lunch with wine and beer. Again, no office in town, so call Alan directly.

Festivals & Events

Grahamstown bills itself as 'Africa's Festival Capital', with events of various kinds happening several times a year. The biggest is the hugely popular **National Arts Festival** (☎ 046-603 1103; www.nafest.co.za) and its associated Fringe Festival. The Fringe alone has more than 200 events. The festival runs for 10 days at the beginning of July, but re-

member two things: check ahead, as accommodation at this time can be booked out a year in advance, and nights can be freezing so bring something warm.

The **National Festival of Science, Engineering & Technology** (☎ 046-603 1106), held in late March, aims to promote 'a culture of science in a festive way', and features interactive exhibits, laser shows and inventors vying for innovation awards.

Growing in popularity is the **Makana Freedom Festival** (☎ 082-932 1304), held in late April. It's a festival of song and dance, with live bands playing in various venues in the townships around Grahamstown.

Sleeping

With more than 100 accommodation options in the area, including a dozen or so in the surrounding townships, we recommend checking in with Makana Tourism for a full list.

BUDGET

Umso Township Homestays (☎ 046-637 1632, 083-245 0496) Mrs Thabisa Xonxa arranges overnight homestays in good standard rooms in Grahamstown's townships. Ask Makana Tourism for more details.

Grahamstown Caravan Park (☎ 046-603 6072; Grey St; camp sites/4-bed rondavels/5-bed chalets R45/120/250) The park is a wooded, hilly spot off the N2, although it's a bit of a walk from the town centre. Bedding is not supplied for the rondavels.

Old Gaol Backpackers (☎ 046-636 1001; Somerset St; dm/s/d with shared bathroom R70/100/170) Built in 1824 and used right up until 1976, this former jail – now a national monument – offers the chance to feel like an inmate, complete with fingerprinting upon registration, a barred door and eerie 19th-century graffiti. The cells are all considerably more comfortable than in their previous incarnation, though you'll probably spend most of your time in the atmospheric bar anyway.

MIDRANGE

Eagle's Nest (☎ 046-622 7189, 082-657 0359; www.grahamstown.co.za/eaglesnest; cnr Webber St & Shepperson Lane; s/d with breakfast R175/340; ☎) This good-value B&B has two studio flats sleeping two to four people, with a kitchenette and an outside terrace.

CITY OF SAINTS?

Grahamstown's nickname is 'City of Saints', an appellation that is generally thought to refer to the town's 40 churches. But another, more interesting theory comes from a message reportedly sent during one of the region's frontier wars. In reply to a requisition for carpentry tools, including a steel vice, the quartermaster wrote, 'We regret no vice in Grahamstown'. The reply from headquarters read: 'Then I believe, sir, you must all be saints'.

Lantern Hill (☎ 046-622 8782; www.lanternhill.co.za; 2 Thompson St; s/d R275/380; ♿) Superbly refurbished recently, this friendly B&B has cosy and comfy wooden-floored rooms with TV and safe. Some of the rooms also have wheelchair ramps and bath rails. Owners Danny and Sterna Biermann speak German.

137 High Street (☎ 046-6223242; 137highstr@xsinet.co.za; 137 High St; s/d with breakfast R295/470; ♿) Well-situated within walking distance of museums and shops, this guesthouse in a charming Georgian cottage also has a private courtyard for functions and a restaurant locals claim makes the best cappuccino in town.

Cock House (☎ 046-636 1287; www.cockhouse.co.za; 10 Market St; s/d with breakfast R390/660) Lest you snigger, this was named after William Cock, one of the 1820 settlers, and was once home to author André Brink. Today it's a National Monument and a hugely popular guesthouse, with chintzy, comfortable rooms in converted stables and a pretty garden. The rustic restaurant (three-course menu R115) is very highly regarded and often booked out.

TOP END

Protea Hotel Grahamstown (☎ 046-622 2324; www.albanyhotels.co.za; 123 High St; s/d with breakfast R470/590; ♿) This hotel, in a characterless building in the centre of town, has modern but tasteful and fairly luxurious rooms with TV. There's a bar and a carvery.

7 Worcester Street (☎ 046-622 2843; www.worcesterstreet.co.za; 7 Worcester St; s/d with breakfast R550/1100; ♿) This luxurious guesthouse is filled with sumptuous period furniture and priceless artworks. The house was built in 1888 and once served as a student hostel – these days it provides accommodation to parents visiting their little darlings at Grahamstown's private boarding schools. Three-course dinner is available for R120.

Evelyn House (☎ 046-622 2324; www.albanyhotels.co.za; High St; s/d with breakfast R560/770; ♿) An annex of the Protea Hotel Grahamstown and just across the road, this is quieter and more upmarket, with a small pool of its own.

Eating & Drinking

Grahamstown's eating out scene and night-life is now starkly divided between places serving the trendy and/or affluent, a plethora of pubs and fast-food joints dotted around the town centre for students drinking hard and eating cheap, and swanky eateries for when their wealthy foreign parents come to town to check up on them.

Trading Store (☎ 046-622 9987; 131 High St; mains R35; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sun, dinner Wed, Fri & Sat) If any evidence were needed that Grahamstown is evolving, this is it: a supremely stylish New York-style café that's causing controversy among some city stalwarts seemingly threatened by its very existence. Garish floral wallpaper, bistro food (try the warm pear and chick pea salad, R30), 1970s chic, live jazz and an outdoor cocktail bar

combine to great effect in this historical building.

Maxwell's (☎ 046-622 5119; cnr Somerset St & High St; mains R70-110; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Offering excellent service and hearty lunches of self-styled 'colonialised' food, Maxwell's is gaining a reputation as the perfect place to avoid returning to work on a Friday afternoon, which means booking on weekend nights is a must.

Calabash (☎ 046-622 2366; 123 High St; mains R50-70; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Calabash offers traditional South African food in a warm, reed-ceilinged dining room. Xhosa hotpots and *pap en wors* (maize meal and sausage) are a speciality, and there are some spicy veggie options even meat-lovers would like. Still, the menu does offer the standard breaded calamari/T-bone steak fare as well.

Gino's Italian Restaurant (☎ 046-622 7208; 8 New St; mains R25-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) Grahamstown's most popular student restaurant is a very average pizza and pasta joint with an attached bar. The thick dough pizza special on Mondays wins undiscerning local plaudits. Entrance via Hill St.

Rat & Parrot (☎ 046-622 5002; 59 New St; mains R20-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) A pseudo-British drinking den and another popular student haunt, with surprisingly decent pub grub, loud music, a big-screen TV and a beer garden. It's closed on Sundays out of term time.

Champs (Scotts Ave) A laddish sports bar with pool tables and, later on, plenty of beer goggles.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart from the **terminus** (cnr High & Bathurst Sts). The **Be Bus** (☎ 082-652 0798) runs to Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred from Sunday to Friday, and **Mini Lux** (☎ 043-741 3107) runs to East London and Port Elizabeth from Sunday to Friday. Check with the tourist office for prices and times.

Intercape (☎ 046-622 2235; www.intercape.co.za) stops in Grahamstown on its daily run between Cape Town (R240, nine hours) and East London (R110, 2½ hours).

Translux (☎ 046-622 3241; www.translux.co.za) buses stop at the bus terminus on the daily run between Cape Town (R230, 15 hours), Port Elizabeth (R75, two hours) and Durban (R280, 12 hours), via East London and Mthatha.

Greyhound (☎ 046-622 2235; www.greyhound.co.za) buses also stop at the terminus on their way to Durban (R270, 13 hours) and Port Elizabeth (R70, two hours).

You'll find minibus taxis on Raglan St, but most leave from Rhini township. Destinations include Fort Beaufort (R25, two hours), King William's Town (R35, three hours), Port Elizabeth (R35, 2½ hours) and East London (R35, four hours).

BATHURST

☎ 046

From the thick vegetation along the road between Port Alfred and Grahamstown, this charming but scattered village of narrow lanes and neat hedges seems to appear out of nowhere. It's a famous Eastern Cape drinking spot, particularly during the annual December **Ox Braai**, a huge party that takes place around New Year's Eve every year. Open-air drinking and the barbecuing of vast quantities of meat are the main activities.

Near the turn-off to Bathurst (look for the Protea Hotel sign) is **Summerhill Farm** (☎ 046-625 0833; off Rte 67; tours adult/child R30/15; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), which has the dubious honour of being home to the world's biggest pineapple – a rip-off of the Big Pineapple on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia. Standing 16.7m high, it is a mere 70cm taller than the original (and no, it's not real). There's also a reconstructed Xhosa village where you can buy handicrafts; meals are available from the Protea Hotel restaurant. Tours in a tractor include pineapple tasting and take place at 10am, noon and 3pm daily.

Watersmeeting Nature Reserve (☎ 046-425 0876; admission per vehicle R10, plus per person R5; ☺ 7am-5pm), just outside town, protects the start of the Kowie River, where fresh and tidal waters meet. There's bird-watching in the forests here, plus a nice view of the horseshoe bend in the river. The road down to the river is steep and shouldn't be attempted after rain.

A good budget sleep option in town is the recently refurbished **Bathurst Arms 1820 Tavern** (☎ 046-625 0738; High St; dm R60), which offers clean, no-nonsense board and lodging above an English-style pub. This is the only place to get a meal after 9pm.

The **Pig & Whistle Hotel** (☎ 6046-25 0673; Kowie Rd; s/d R350/550; ☺ lunch & dinner) could be

A(NOTHER) GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

In 1820 British settlers, duped by their government into believing they were going to a peaceful land of plenty, arrived at Algoa Bay. In reality, they were arriving in a heavily contested border region, where Boers on one side of the Great Fish River and Xhosa on the other battled interminably over the cattle-rich country known as the Zuurveld.

Grahamstown was at the centre of the maelstrom. In 1819, in the Fifth Frontier War, 9000 Xhosa under the leader Makana attacked Grahamstown and very nearly defeated the garrison. The story goes that Makana would have succeeded had he not observed the Xhosa war code and given free passage to a woman who carried a hidden keg of gunpowder to the defenders.

It was not long before the thousand immigrant families found farming untenable. The odds were stacked against them: inexperience, hostile neighbours, labour shortages, floods, droughts and crop diseases all played a role.

By 1823 nearly half the settlers had retreated to the towns to pursue the trades and businesses they had followed in England. Grahamstown developed into a trading and manufacturing centre, where axes, knives and blankets were exchanged for ivory and skins. Tradespeople among the settlers produced metal implements, wagons and clothes. Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred initially developed to service what had quickly become the second-largest city in the Cape Colony.

in England, which is not at all surprising considering it was built in 1832 in the centre of Settler Country and claims to be the country's oldest pub. It's a popular stopping point on the Port Alfred–Grahamstown road for good-value lunches and Thai food on Friday and Saturday evening. It can also help out with information about canoe and hiking trails in the area. Try to get a room in the main house if you're staying – they have much more character than the newer ones in the garden.

PORT ALFRED

☎ 046 / pop 32,500

Port Alfred is an odd little place that's one part unkmpt seaside town and the other part upmarket holiday resort, making it at once an exemplar of the province's lack of funds and an island of style and serenity. Which face it wears depends largely on the season: off-peak it's staid and quiet except on weekends, when students from Grahamstown come to lounge on the beach and drink in the pubs. In season (mid-December to January) the place bustles with life as people arrive from other parts of the province to soak up the holiday atmosphere, and prices surge.

Information

Palms Video (☎ 046-624 2182; Heritage Mall, Main St; per min R0.50; ☎ 9am-8pm) Internet access.

Tourism Port Alfred (☎ 046-624 1235; www.portalfred.net; Causeway Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) This office near the municipal offices on the western bank of the Kowie River has brochures detailing accommodation, walks and canoe trails.

Activities

Lovers of **horse riding** frequent the Port Alfred area. If you're into equestrian endeavours, contact **Fish River Horse Safaris** (☎ 046-675 1271; www.fishriverhorsesafaris.co.za; 2½ hr trails R180, 5hr trails R500), which offers daily horse rides on the beach or through bushland. Experienced riders can do the longer ride, which covers both terrains.

For **surfers**, there are good right- and left-hand breaks at the river mouth; for golfers, there is the beautiful **Royal Port Alfred Golf Course** (☎ 046-624 4796; St Andrews Rd; 18-hole round R200), one of the four 'Royals' in South Africa. There's also an 8km **walking trail** through the Kowie Nature Reserve –

maps (R6.50) are available from the tourist office. For the fit, **Rufanes River Trails** (☎ 041-624 1469) has mountain bike trails.

The two-day **Kowie Canoe Trail** (☎ 041-624 2230; per person R80) is a fairly easy 18km canoe trip upriver from Port Alfred, with an overnight stay in a hut at Horseshoe Bend Nature Reserve. Mattresses, water and wood are provided, but you'll need your own food and bedding.

Keryn's Dive School & Maximum Exposure (☎ 046-624 4432; keryn@compushop.co.za; NAUI scuba-diving course R1485, advanced diver course R1100) offers diving courses and various other adventure activities. Diving is between May and August. Visibility is not outstanding (5m to 8m) but there are plenty of big fish, soft corals and raggy sharks. The same company rents out sandboards (per two hours R50) and canoes with a map of the river route (per half day R70). Waterskiing costs R320 per hour per boat (three people). Keryn's is located in the small boat harbour of the Royal Alfred Marina.

Sleeping

Tourism Port Alfred lists the town's numerous B&Bs. Given the town's drastically different tourist seasons, most places bump their rates up during the busier times of the year, which are December to January and over Easter.

BUDGET

Willows Caravan Park (☎ /fax 046-624 5201; off Albany Rd; camp sites low/high season R30/100) Next to the river, the Willows has powered camp sites and an elderly clientele.

Station Backpackers (☎ 046-624 5869; off Pascoe Cres; dm/d R70/180) More care seems to have been placed in the adjoining sports bar than in the hostel, housed in the town's old train station. The result is you'll probably spend more time there than in the hostel's dark, musty rooms and grotty kitchen.

Medolino Caravan Park (☎ 046-624 1651; www.caravanparks.co.za/medolino; 23 Stewart Rd; camp sites R100, 2-/4-bedroom chalets R320/425) This park, in town off Princes Ave, is near both Kowie River and Kelly's Beach. The chalet rates double in high season.

Bretton Beach Crest (☎ 046-624 1606; www.brett.onbeach.co.za; Freshwater Rd; self-catering cottages from R235) A charming collection of self-contained beach cottages 3km from the Kowie River

mouth with wonderful sea views and neat rooms 100m from the beach. Prices rise sharply in high season.

MIDRANGE

Residency (☎ 046-624 5382; www.theresidency.co.za; 11 Vroom Rd; s/d with breakfast R260/460) The Residency is a gracious B&B in a magnificently restored Victorian house built in 1898. Its lovely rooms have freestanding enamel baths, wooden walls and sprigged cotton bedspreads. A big breakfast is served on the wide veranda every morning. Rates go up in high season.

Villa de Mer (☎ 046-624 2315; www.villademer.co.za; 22 West Beach Dr; s/d with breakfast from R295/590; ☎ ☎) A large, bright, ultramodern four-star B&B right on the beachfront. All of the smart rooms have their own fridge.

Royal St Andrews Lodge (☎ 046-624 1379; www.compushop.co.za/standrew; 19 St Andrews Rd; s/d with breakfast R320/550; ☎ ☎) This old-fashioned, mock-Scottish pub and inn opposite the golf course has some quaint Victorian-style rooms in the original building, plus more modern self-catering units in the garden.

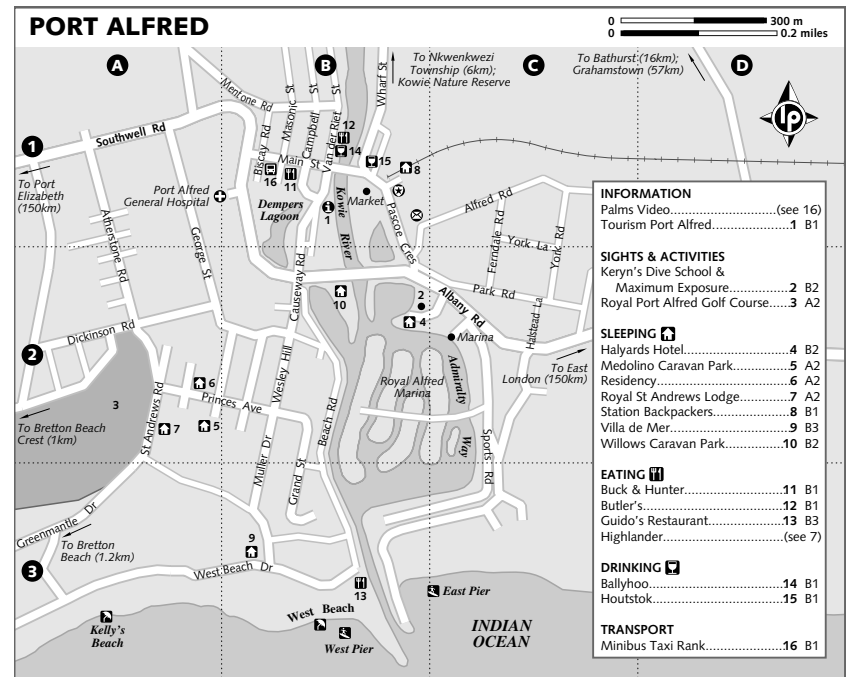
Its restaurant, Highlander (p264), rates a mention.

Halyards Hotel (☎ 046-604 3300; www.riverhotels.co.za; Royal Alfred Marina, Albany Rd; s/d with breakfast R515/655; ☎ ☎ ☎) This comfy waterfront hotel with attractive Cape Cod-style architecture has large well-equipped rooms overlooking the harbour. The interior is light and airy, with wicker furniture and black-and-white tiled floors.

Eating & Drinking

Butler's (☎ 046-624 3464; 25 Van der Riet St; mains R45-95; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) As one of the country's best restaurants, it's no surprise Butler's is Port Alfred's top dining experience. The imaginative, oft-changing menu always features a terrific fish and seafood selection (including the legendary Kowie African Dream, fish grilled in fruit sauce), but the food-loving chefs will whip up practically any dish you desire.

Guido's Restaurant (☎ 046-624 5264; West Beach Dr; mains R20-45; ☎ lunch & dinner) Guido's is a trendy pizza-and-pasta restaurant on the beach. It has got slow service but a lively



ambience, especially on Saturday and Sunday when it fills up with students visiting from Grahamstown.

Buck & Hunter (☎ 046-624 5960; Main St; mains R35-55; ☺ lunch & dinner, closed Sun Feb-Nov except Easter) The Buck & Hunter is a down-to-earth pub-restaurant serving game dishes such as kudu and ostrich to a macho clientele. It also offers no fewer than 35 pizzas, including six vegetarian options.

Highlander (☎ 046-624 1379; 19 St Andrews Rd; mains R40-65; ☺ lunch & dinner) The pub-restaurant at the Royal St Andrews Lodge has a cosy, British feel to it and serves good-quality food, including an excellent king prawn platter. There's live music on Thursday and Saturday nights.

Houtstok (☎ 073-143 7541; cnr Wharf & Main Sts) Its name is Afrikaans for 'Woodstock', but this is no hippy refuge. Upon entry, you are welcomed by one-armed bandits, a chalkboard declaring current unpaid bar tabs and a price list that promises drinking well into the night.

Ballyhoo (☎ 046-624 9062; 33 Van der Riet St) With outdoor seating by the Kowie River and live music on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, this is one of the more atmospheric drinking spots in town.

Getting There & Away

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops at Station Backpackers (p262) on its run from Port Elizabeth (1½ hours) to Durban (12 hours) on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

The **minibus taxi rank** (Biscay Rd) is outside the Heritage Mall. There are daily services to Port Elizabeth (R50), Grahamstown (R22) and East London (R65). Local daily services include Bathurst (R9).

EASTERN KAROO

Only the heartless or the naturally very thirsty will fail to be bewitched by the quiet beauty of the Karoo, the vast semidesert stretching across the great South African plateau inland from the Cape coast.

Its southeastern extension is in Eastern Cape and includes the exquisite town of Graaff-Reinet, the stunning scenery of Mountain Zebra National Park and the fascinating artistic community of Nieu

Bethesda. It's one of the region's most intriguing areas, with an overwhelming sense of space and peace that stands in sharp contrast to the cheery, sometimes overdeveloped coastline.

Between December and February, temperatures in Karoo towns can reach 45°C, and things barely cool down in March and April. June and July see the thermometer plummet to -5°C, with snow in the mountain passes and hard frosts. September to November are the best times to visit if you want to experience a moderate climate.

See p227 for more information about the central section of the Karoo, and p525 for more about the northern sections of the Karoo.

CRADOCK

☎ 048 / pop 40,000

A busy agricultural and commercial centre for the farming district along the Great Fish River, Cradock, established as a military outpost in 1813, appears rather shabby at first. But a closer look will reveal its fine collection of beautiful old buildings including the *tuishuise* (townhouses) and an 1867 church modelled on St Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

The helpful **Cradock Publicity Association** (☎ 048-881 2383; www.cradock.co.za; Stockenroom St) is located the town hall building opposite the Spar Centre, which has an ABSA Bank ATM. Other banks and ATMs are found mainly on Adderley St. At the time of writing, all Internet cafés in town had gone out of business. Ask at the tourism office if anyone has since been brave enough to open another.

Sights

Olive Schreiner House (☎ 048-881 5251; 9 Cross St; admission by donation; ☺ 8.30am-12.45pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is a good example of a typical Karoo house. Schreiner is best remembered for her provocative novel *Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883 but advocating views considered radical even by today's standards.

The **Great Fish River Museum** (☎ 048-881 4509; High St; admission by donation; ☺ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) was originally the parsonage of the Dutch Reformed Church. The house was built in 1825 and the displays depict pioneer life in the 19th century.

Sleeping

Aureyana B&B (☎ 048-881 3853; 59 Sprigg St; s/d with breakfast R140/280) Cradock's most inexpensive B&B offers a warm welcome and big, clean rooms, some with TV. We've received good reader feedback on this place, too.

Victoria Manor (☎ 048-881 1650; cnr Market & Voortrekker Sts; s/d R220/400) This very elegant 1840s inn feels like a Victorian museum, with heavy furniture and atmospheric wood-panelled rooms. Breakfast costs R45. Cheaper rooms in the annexe (single/double R120/220) are also available.

Heritage House B&B (☎ /fax 048-881 3210; 45 Bree St; s/d with breakfast R220/350; ☎) The homely Heritage House offers comfortable, rustic rooms and old-fashioned hospitality. Try to get the cottage in the pleasant garden, where you'll meet several zany dogs and a playful springbok named Bendy.

Tuishuise Guesthouses (☎ 048-881 1322; www.tuishuise.co.za; 36 Market St; cottages with breakfast per person R300) In one of Cradock's old streets, 18 cottages have been beautifully restored. The cottages have various numbers of bedrooms, but all have a sitting room with fireplace, self-catering kitchen and garden. There are also smaller and more modest one-bedroom garden cottages (R90 per person). Breakfast is served at Victoria Manor.

Eating & Drinking

Cradock eating tends towards fast food, so eating at your accommodation might be best. Following are some alternatives.

Buffalo Dan's (☎ 048-881 4321; Engen petrol station, Rte 61; mains R35; ☺ dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) It has a strange name and an even stranger location (next to a petrol station) but locals swear this modest steakhouse is Cradock's best restaurant. It's found on the way out of town towards Mountain Zebra National Park.

Kaffee en Kie (☎ 048-881 3779; Stockenroom St; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This café serves up delicious breakfasts and a solid cup of coffee.

Schreiner Tea Room (☎ 072-381 3422; 49 Market St; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, breakfast Sat) Just about the only other coffee fix in town, this charming spot near the *tuishuise* is a good place to escape the heat after checking out the local architecture.

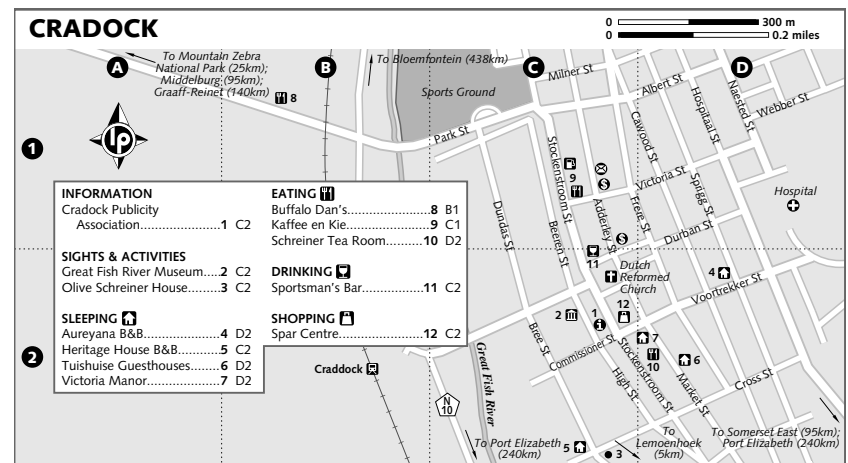
Sportsman's Bar (☎ 048-881 2431; cnr Stockenroom & Durban Sts) A great place to drink up the atmosphere with some of the more eccentric locals.

Getting There & Away

Translux (www.translux.co.za) runs daily to Cape Town (R225, 10 hours) via Graaff-Reinet (R100, two hours).

The **Shosholozu Meyl** (☎ 0860-008 888) train stops here en route between Port Elizabeth (six-/four-bed sleeper R90/115, 4½ hours) and Jo'burg (six-/four-bed sleeper R210/295, 16 hours).

Most minibus taxis leave from the nearby township; ask at the petrol stations in town.



MOUNTAIN ZEBRA NATIONAL PARK

This **national park** (☎ 048-881 2427; adult/child R60/30; 🕒 7am-7pm Oct-Apr, 7am-6pm May-Sep), 26km west of Cradock, is on the northern slopes of the Bankberg Range (2000m) and has superb views over the Karoo. The park protects one of the rarest animals in the world: the mountain zebra (*Equus zebra*). Mountain zebras are distinguished from other zebra species by their small stature, reddish-brown nose and dewlap (a loose fold of skin hanging beneath the throat).

Among the silence and wide-open spaces, thick patches of sweet thorn and wild olive are interspersed with rolling grasslands and succulents. The park also supports many antelope species. The largest predator is the caracal, and there are several species of small cats, genets, bat-eared foxes and black-backed jackals. Some 200 bird species have been recorded. The entrance gate is well signposted off Rte 61. It's quite feasible to get a taste of the park in a half-day excursion from Cradock. You'll find a shop and restaurant in the main camp. The park runs guided three-night **trails** within the park on Monday and Thursday only – four people are needed for the trail to run, and no children under 12 are accepted. There's also a guided four-hour trail (R50). Various self-guided trails are also possible – ask at parks reception for details. A sunset guided **wildlife drive** costs R100 per adult.

The park, largely comprised of unsealed roads, is also famed for its **mountain biking**, with trails from 15 minutes to five hours along 37km of gravel coursing through Eastern Midlands Nama Karoo vegetation. If you're coming from Cradock or Graaff-Reinet, ask at your hostel about bike hire. **Abseiling** (R200) can also be arranged at two sites within the park.

The park has a range of **accommodation** (bookings ☎ 048-881 2427; camp sites/4-bed family cottages/6-bed guesthouses R75/350/650; 🏠). The cottages at the park's rest camp are utilitarian but well-equipped, with their own bathrooms. The most interesting place to stay is at Doornhoek, a restored historic farmhouse, built in 1836 and hidden in a secluded valley. There is a 10% discount available from early June to mid-September, excluding school holidays.

The park headquarters has a restaurant called **Jabulani** (mains R40), with a decent se-

lection of pasta, salad, steaks and burgers. There's no public transport to the park so the only option is to bring your own car. One of the tour agencies in Graaff-Reinet (see p268) should be able to organise a day trip.

SOMERSET EAST

☎ 042 / pop 20,000

This attractive old town at the foot of the Bosberg Range (1600m) is sometimes referred to as the 'oasis of the Karoo', since the surrounding mountains mean that it receives a soaking 600mm of rainfall annually. After the dry country to the north and south, the rich forest on the mountain slopes is a surprise. There's no public transport to Somerset East, so you'll most likely only visit if you're passing in your own car and need a refresher.

The **Somerset East Tourist Office** (☎ 042-243 1333; Nojoli St; www.somerseteast.co.za; 🕒 7.45am-1pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) can help with local information.

Thirty-three kilometres from Somerset East is **Bosberg Nature Reserve**, covering 2000 hectares of thickly wooded ravines, dense grassland and Karoo shrubs. Most prominent of the larger animal species are mountain zebras and bushbucks. More than 83 bird species have been identified. There are several hiking trails in the park, including the circular 15km-long **Bosberg Hiking Trail** (bookings ☎ 042-243 1333; per person R35), which has a 10-bed rest hut with toilet facilities. Hikers must register, and those planning to stay overnight must book in advance.

GRAAFF-REINET

☎ 049 / pop 43,300

Town nicknames are often no more than marketing slogans, but that Graaff-Reinet is often referred to as the 'jewel of the Karoo' is no exaggeration – it's a safe, exquisite, fascinating town that should not be missed.

It's the fourth-oldest European town in South Africa, and it has a superb architectural heritage with more than 220 buildings designated as national monuments. These range from Cape Dutch houses, with their distinctive gables, to classic flat-roofed Karoo cottages and ornate Victorian villas. Added to all this beauty is a charming small-town quirkiness, some excellent-value

accommodation and a variety of eccentric local characters who add to the benignly surreal feel of the whole place.

The wild and beautiful Karoo Nature Reserve is within walking distance of Graaff-Reinet.

History

The interior of the Cape in the 18th century was a wild and dangerous place, with Boers clashing frequently with the Khoesaaan in the Sneeuberg and the Xhosa to the east around the Great Fish River. The settlement, named after former provincial Governor van der Graaff and his wife Reinet, became an outpost in a harsh countryside and was the fourth district in the Cape Colony to be granted a Drostdy, or seat of local government. This came about through an attempt by the British to establish a bit of law and order. The idea failed and the town's citizens promptly threw out the Landdrost (magistrate) and established an independent republic. The British regained a semblance of control soon afterwards, but were constantly harried by both disgruntled

Boers and a joint force of Khoesaaan and Xhosa warriors.

In the early to mid-19th century, Boers seeking to escape the control of the Cape Town administration began their legendary Great Trek, and Graaff-Reinet became an important stepping stone for Voortrekkers heading north.

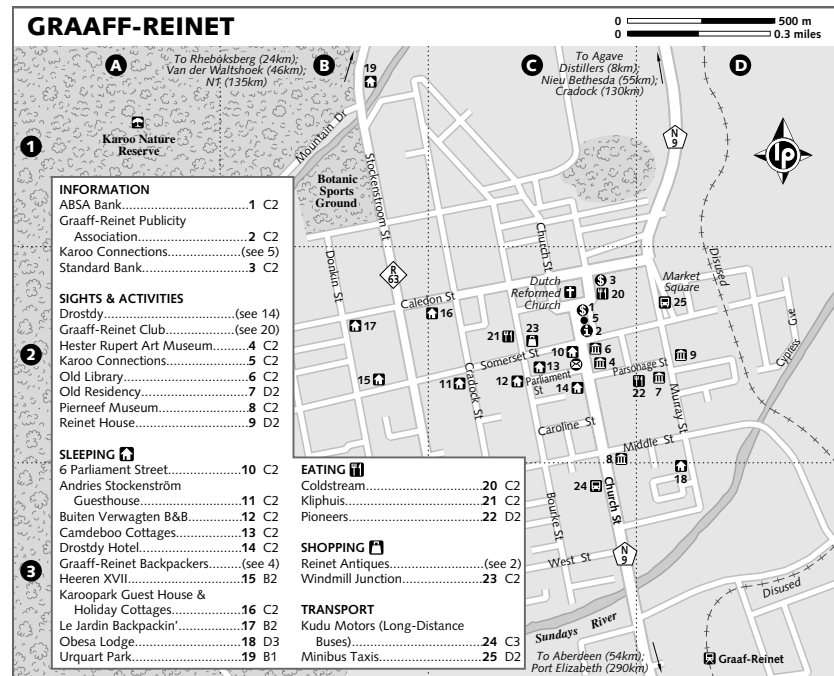
Orientation & Information

Graaff-Reinet is built in a cleft in the magnificent Sneeuberg Range on a bend of the Sundays River. The centre of town is compact and safe, so getting around on foot is not only possible but also highly recommended.

ABSA bank (Church St) Near the Dutch Reformed Church.
Graaff-Reinet Publicity Association (☎ 049-892 4248; www.graaffreinet.co.za; Church St; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) This helpful office has an abundance of maps and information about accommodation in the area.

Karoo Connections (☎ 049-892 3978; www.karoo tours.co.za; Church St) Internet access next to the publicity association.

Standard Bank (Caledon St)



Sights MUSEUMS

You can buy a combined **pass** (☎ 049-892 3801; pass R16) that gives access to any four of the town's museums. It's not valid on Sunday.

The **Hester Rupert Art Museum** (☎ 049-892 2121; Church St; adult/child R5/3; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) was originally a Dutch Reformed Mission church, consecrated in 1821. The beautiful interior space and permanent collection of paintings and sculptures are refreshingly contemporary after all the Victoriana at the town's other museums.

Pierneef Museum (☎ 049-892 6107; Middle St; admission free; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) is another very interesting contemporary art museum housing a set of panels by South African artist Jacob Hendrik Pierneef. Among the almost Japanese-looking paintings is one stunning rendition of the Valley of Desolation near Graaff-Reinet.

The **Old Library** (☎ 049-892 3801; cnr Church & Somerset Sts; adult/child R5/4; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) houses a collection of historical clothing, rock paintings and fossils from the Karoo (including some nasty-looking skulls of 'mammal-like, flesh-eating reptiles' from 230 million years ago) and an exhibition telling the life story of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, the pipe-smoking founder of the Pan Africanist Congress. There's also the impressive William Roe photographic collection.

Reinet House (☎ 049-892 3801; Murray St; adult/child R7/2; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun), the Dutch Reformed parsonage built between 1806 and 1812, is a beautiful example of Cape Dutch architecture. The cobblestone rear courtyard has a grapevine planted in 1870 that is now one of the largest in the world.

The **Old Residency** (☎ 049-892 3801; Parsonage St; adult/child R5/2; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is another well-preserved 19th-century house with creaking wooden floors, now displaying a large collection of firearms.

DROSTDY

The residence of a Landdrost was known as a *drostdy* and included his office and courtroom as well as his family's living quarters. The Graaff-Reinet **drostdy** (Church St) was built in 1806. Have a look at the old slave bell,

which was restored and then, in an awful piece of irony, unveiled by apartheid-era prime minister BJ Vorster. The *drostdy* is now a hotel (see opposite).

GRAAFF-REINET CLUB

For something a little different, go along to the **Graaff-Reinet Club** (Church St). This one-time 'men's only' club, the second oldest in South Africa, has walls and halls adorned with numerous hunting trophies, including a giant pair of elephant feet that, unbelievably, someone saw fit to turn into wine coolers! Terrence and Nita Gush from Le Jardin Backpackin' (see opposite) can get you an invitation.

AGAVE DISTILLERS

Some 8km north of town just off the N9 to Middelburg you'll notice an imposing building resembling a military facility, dotted with cactuslike *garinghorne*. It is in fact the world's only **agave spirit distillery** (☎ 049-891 8145; Middelburg Rd; tasting tours R20) outside of Mexico, open by appointment only. While the drink produced cannot legally be called tequila, it's identical to that famous drink and, unlike most tequilas, which contain cane spirit, the 100 per cent agave drink produced here is so pure you can actually sip it. Bottles (R70 to R85) can be purchased onsite.

Tours

Several readers have recommended the tours offered by Xolile Speelman, a lifelong township resident and owner of **Irhafu Tours** (☎ 082-844 2890). A three-hour township tour giving an insight into both Xhosa culture and history and modern township life costs R75. Xolile, who was brought up in the area, can also organise homestays and group meals.

Karoo Connections (☎ 049-892 3978; www.karoo-tours.co.za; Church St) operates tours to the Valley of Desolation at sunset (R180; sundowners on request – the preferred drop is gin and tonic), Nieu Bethesda and the Owl House (R225) and the Karoo Nature Reserve (R145). It can also arrange township walks, wildlife drives, microlighting, nature walks and city tours.

Sleeping

Graaff-Reinet is blessed with an overwhelming range of accommodation, most

of it seriously good value compared to other towns in the Eastern Cape. The Publicity Association can help with bookings.

BUDGET

Graaff-Reinet Backpackers (☎ 049-892 5334; cnr Church & Parsonage Sts; dm R85, d/tr/q with shared bathroom R200/270/340; ☎) This newer backpackers benefits from its location but is still second best in the budget stakes thanks to its relative inexperience and subdued atmosphere. The latter is helped by the fact that it is in the historical 'Colonial Trust Corporation' building, and rooms are airy and bright.

Le Jardin Backpackin' (☎ 049-892 5890, 082-644 4938; cnr Donkin & Caledon Sts; s/d with shared bathroom R90/180; ☎) A firm favourite with weary backpackers in need of a bit of pampering, Le Jardin provides homely rooms and a large garden for excellent prices. Hosts Terrence and Nita Gush go out of their way to make their guests welcome and are both mines of information about the area's attractions. Booking is highly advisable.

MIDRANGE

Urquart Park (☎ /fax 049-892 2136; Stockenroom St; camp sites/rondavels/bungalows/chalets R50/100/120/300) To the north of town near the Van Ryneveld Dam, Urquart has pretty views towards the Karoo National Park. The good-quality chalets have their own kitchens.

Obesa Lodge (☎ 082-588 5900; www.graaffreinet.co.za; 64 Murray St; s/d without breakfast R140/230, 2-bedroom cottages R350; ☎ ☎) Something very different from Graaff-Reinet's old-world accommodation options – Obesa is a whole street of psychedelically coloured cottages with names like Moody Blues and Bad Mama. All are cheerfully designed and have self-catering and braai facilities. Opposite the lodge is the owner's Cactus Garden, which features an enormous collection of cacti and succulents from all over the world. Some reportedly have hallucinogenic qualities.

Karoopark Guest House & Holiday Cottages (☎ 049-892 2557; www.karoopark.co.za; 81 Caledon St; s/d R180/250; ☎) The friendly Karoopark has adequate self-contained cottages as well as comfortable but very chintzy rooms in its guesthouse. There's an à la carte restaurant for dinner, and breakfast is R40.

6 Parliament Street (☎ 049-892 6059; 6 Parliament St; r R250) This very stylishly done up period

cottage is ideal for a group of six people – the three bedrooms share two bathrooms. The wooden floors and antique furniture give the interior the same kind of feel as Reinet House or the Old Residency, but the old-fashioned look is offset by some contemporary touches such as a satellite TV and a sound system. Booking (and breakfast if required) is through Pioneers on Parsonage St (see p270).

Buiten Verwagten B&B (☎ 049-892 4504; www.buitenverwagten.co.za; 58 Bourke St; s/d with breakfast from R340/480; ☎ ☎) The beautiful Buiten Verwagten, surrounded by a lovely garden, has charming rooms, some with self-catering facilities. Each is very different in décor and furnishings.

Camdeboo Cottages (☎ 049-892 3180; www.karoo-park.co.za; 16 Parliament St; 4-bed cottages R420; ☎) The modest but charming self-catering Camdeboo Cottages are restored Karoo cottages, some featuring reed ceilings and yellowwood floors. There's a pool and a braai area. *Camdeboo* is the Khoekhoen word for 'green valleys' and is used to describe the hills around Graaff-Reinet.

TOP END

Heeren XVII (☎ 049-891 0404; www.heerenxvii.co.za; 104 Somerset St; s/d with breakfast R325/650; ☎) With its centrepiece a house built in 1817 by Thomas Perry, the area's first district surgeon, Heeren XVII is a series of extremely elegant cottages set in a large garden. The luxurious cottages (which can sleep up to six) are not designed for self-catering, but with the sumptuous alfresco breakfasts served up you'll see no need to cook.

Drostdy Hotel (☎ 049-892 2161; www.drostdy.co.za; 30 Church St; s/d R410/640; ☎) The main part of this beautiful old hotel is in Graaff-Reinet's restored *drostdy*. The courtyard café is particularly enchanting, surrounded by fruit trees and the scent of flowers from the stunning gardens. The reception and the hotel restaurant are in the *drostdy*, while guests stay in restored mid-19th-century cottages, originally built for freed slaves along Stretch's Crt.

Andries Stockenström Guesthouse (☎ 049-892 4575; 100 Cradock St; s/d with breakfast R730/960; ☎ ☎) A very upmarket B&B with all the trimmings, famed in particular for its superb restaurant. The Karoo-style haute cuisine is available to guests only, so you'll have to

book in if you want to sample the award-winning menu. There are no dinners on Sundays.

Eating

Pioneers (☎ 049-892 6059; 3 Parsonage St; light meals R10-30, mains R60; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This café-restaurant serves so-so sandwiches but delicious cakes and big cooked breakfasts. There's streetside seating, tourist info, an Internet café and a small curio shop.

Kliphuis (☎ 049-892 2345; 46 Bourke St; mains R40-65; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch & dinner Sun) Kliphuis is one of Graaff-Reinet's most popular eating spots, with the Sunday carvery of Karoo lamb or venison a speciality. The rest of the menu is refreshingly grease-free, with dishes such as mous-saka and quiche. There's a good selection of wines, and some accommodation too if you pick a very drinkable one.

Coldstream (☎ 049-891 1181; 3 Church St; mains R45-60; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) An excellent restaurant in a converted family home near the Dutch Reformed Church specialising in local variations on old favourites, such as the blue cheese and biltong quiche, and the beloved 'trio' platter of beef, ostrich and kudu or springbok.

Shopping

Graaff-Reinet has a wonderful selection of shops selling everything from Karoo crafts to designer clothing.

Windmill Junction (☎ 049-892 4504; www.windmilljunction.co.za; Somerset St) Check out this store for local goods including artwork, deli foods and handmade soaps.

Reinet Antiques (☎ 049-892 4221; Church St) A massive collection of high-class antiques can be found here.

Getting There & Away

BUS
Long-distance buses stop at **Kudu Motors** (Church St). The Publicity Association office acts as the Translux agent. Translux stops here on the run from Cape Town (R250, 8½ hours) to Queenstown (R140, three hours) via Cradock (R120, 1½ hours) and on the way to Port Elizabeth (R200, three hours).

Intercape (www.intercape.co.za) passes through Graaff-Reinet daily on its run to Jo'burg (R310, 11 hours).

MINIBUS TAXIS

Minibus taxis leave from Market Sq. Major destinations are Port Elizabeth (R100), Cape Town (R220) and Jo'burg (R320).

AROUND GRAAFF-REINET

Farm Trails

Several farmers of the Camdeboo region have developed walks and activities on their beautiful properties.

The friendly **Rheboksberg** (☎ 049-891 8004; s/d with breakfast R110/220) farm, 24km northwest of Graaff-Reinet, is highly recommended. Dinner is available for an extra R40.

Some 46km northwest of Graaff-Reinet, **Van Der Waltshoek** (☎ 049-845 9007; s/d with breakfast R130/160) is a historical farm with great walking all around. Dinner is R50.

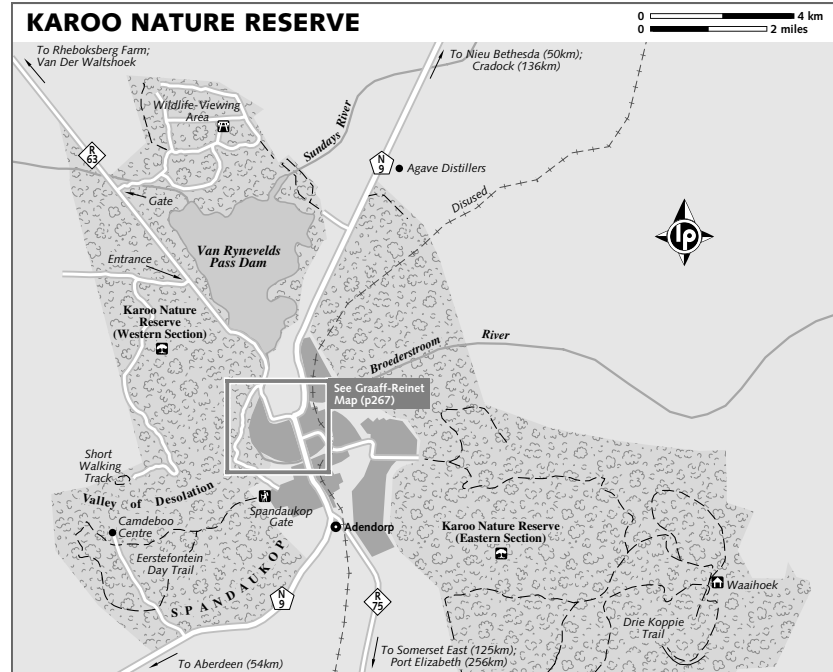
KAROO NATURE RESERVE

A donation in 2005 from the World Wildlife Fund has meant the Karoo Nature Reserve is to become a national park under the auspices of SAN Parks. This means the former reserve, which virtually surrounds Graaff-Reinet and protects 16,000 hectares of mountainous veld typical of the Karoo, will give the park access to the international marketing network of SAN Parks as well as Wild Card (see p85) eligibility. What it will be called, to avoid confusion with the Karoo National Park near Beaufort West, remains to be seen.

There are plenty of animals, but the real draw is the spectacular rock formations and great views overlooking the town of Graaff-Reinet and the plains. The park is subdivided into three main sections: the wildlife-viewing area to the north of the dam, the western section with the Valley of Desolation and the eastern section with the overnight hiking trail. Plans are to one day merge the park with Mountain Zebra National Park, creating a unique African Karoo experience.

In the **wildlife-viewing area** (admission free; ☹ 7am-dusk) there are buffaloes, elands, kudus, hartebeests, wildebeests, springboks, the rare Cape mountain zebra and a host of smaller mammals. Bird species include black eagles, blue cranes and kori bustards. Visitors must stay in their vehicles.

The **Valley of Desolation** (admission free; ☹ 24hr) is the nature reserve's most popular sight. It's a hauntingly beautiful valley with an



outstanding view – the rugged, piled dolomite columns of the valley are set against the backdrop of the endless Karoo plains. The town is also visible, nestled in a bend of the Sundays River. The valley can be reached by car on a steep but sealed road, and there's a 1.5km circuit walk. It's the sort of place that makes you wish you were an eagle. The best times to come are at sunrise or sunset.

The **Eerstefontein Day Trail** is also in the western section and has three trail options: 5km, 11km and 14km long. The information office supplies a map. Free permits are available from a self-help permit box at the Spandaukop gate. A longer, overnight trail in the eastern section, the **Drie Koppie Trail**, costs R15 per person and can be booked with the **Nature Reserve office** (☎ 049-892 3453) or by contacting Karoo Connections (p268) in Graaff-Reinet.

You'll need to have your own car to get around the reserve, or contact Karoo Connections in Graaff-Reinet for a tour. Accommodation (except on the overnight trail) is only available in Graaff-Reinet.

NIEU BETHESDA

☎ 049

The tiny, isolated village of Nieu Bethesda, once one of the most obscure places in South Africa, has achieved worldwide fame as the home of the extraordinary Owl House. These days Nieu Bethesda has become a minor artistic colony attracting scores of wealthy Europeans. With its dirt roads, brewery, fine accommodation, a couple of pretty cafés and endless stars, it's a great place to kick back for a few days and contemplate life.

Nieu Bethesda is 55km from Graaff-Reinet. The drive here is very scenic with the Sneeuwberg Range dominating the region as you approach; there are several turn-offs onto unsealed roads from the N9 between Graaff-Reinet and Middelburg. Note that petrol is not available in Nieu Bethesda.

Sights & Activities

It was the **Owl House** (☎ 049-841 1603; adult/child & student R15/8; ☹ 8am-6pm Nov-Apr, 9am-5pm May-Oct) that put Nieu Bethesda on the map, and it's easy to see why. This fascinating place was

the home, studio and life's work of Helen Martins (1898–1976) and her long-time assistant Koos Malgas.

Lying ill in bed one night, 'Miss Helen', considered an outcast by town residents, resolved to bring light and colour into her drab, isolated life by transforming her physical environment. Over the next 30 years she worked with a passion verging on obsession, first adorning the inside of the house with crushed glass and brightly coloured paint, then filling the yard outside with giant cement owls, camels, acrobats and mermaids, all created from everyday materials such as cement, broken bottles and wire. At the age of 78, worn down by arthritis and blindness, she committed suicide, leaving behind instructions that her house was to be preserved as a testament to her vision. Today she is considered a true 'Outsider Artist', one with no formal training who develops an artistic vision late in life and alters their surroundings.

The biggest peak in the region, **Compassberg** (2502m), can be climbed in 2½ hours – the start of the hike is 35km out of town, at Compassberg farm. There is also the **Canyon Hike**, a fairly flat 3km walk that includes a visit to sites of some Anglo-Boer War engravings. Ask in the village for directions to the trail.

Don't miss a visit to the **Sneeuwittje Creche** (☎ 049-841 1656, 072-449 0662; sneeuwittje@adsactive.com; Hudson St). A community initiative, this gives you the chance to see the other side of Nieu Bethesda life. Local women have formed an adopt-a-child programme involving interventions, education, guidance and meals. The creche relies largely on external support, and the best way to give this is by having a meal in the **restaurant** (mains R55; ☺ dinner). It's the only place in town that serves dinner every night, and creche supervisor Dorah Oliphant will make sure, like the kids under her charge, that no-one goes home hungry. Fresh karoo lamb with homemade bread and ginger beer is a common meal, but it does cater for vegetarians. Ask Dorah about meeting local township residents.

Sleeping

The **Accommodation Booking Agency** (☎ 049-841 1623; Main Rd) arranges accommodation in guesthouses in and around Nieu Bethesda.

Owl House Backpackers (☎ 049-841 1642; backpackers@owlhouse.info; Martin St; camp sites/dm/d R45/75/180) A spotless, tranquil, eco-friendly place with very funky interior spaces and a quaint, painted tower room in the garden (R250). The friendly owners can organise trips to Graaff-Reinet, visits to Khoesaa painting sites, and donkey cart rides. It also hires bikes (R30/50 per half/full day). Meals can be arranged.

Outsiders B&B (☎ 049-841 1642; accommodation@owlhouse.info; Martin St; d with breakfast R300) This stylish B&B has cool, spacious rooms decorated with artistic touches such as lamps made from reclaimed metal. There's also a restaurant (mains R45 to R70) and craft shop here.

Ganora Guest Farm (☎ 049-841 1302; www.ganora.co.za; 3-bedroom cottages R630, s/d with breakfast R220/440) If you'd rather be out of town under the soaring skies of the Karoo, this working sheep farm 7km out of the village is an excellent option, with a choice of well-decorated self-catering cottages and ensuite bed-and-breakfast doubles. Meals can be arranged (dinner R50, breakfast R35). Day tours are also available (book ahead). A visit to the fossil museum or rock-art sites costs R35 per person; a fossil walk is R55.

Eating

Egbert's Place (☎ 049-841 1716; Main Rd; ☺ breakfast & lunch) A restaurant and bookshop, both with a good selection. There's a great range of new and second-hand books, plus tasty, wholesome meals. The food menu has no prices, so customers simply put whatever payment they think fit into an old red kettle!

Village Inn Coffee Shop (☎ 049-841 1635; mains R50; ☺ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) This small coffee shop just down from the Owl House serves light lunches, sandwiches and cakes. There's also a small second-hand bookshop here. Dinner is available if you order in advance.

Two Goats Deli & Brewery (☎ 049-841 1602; Pienaar St; ☺ lunch Wed-Sun) Across a bridge from the main part of the village is this excellent place to buy goat's milk cheeses, have a cold meat lunch or simply quaff lots of homemade Two Goats beer! Dinner is available in high season, but generally opening times are irregular, so booking ahead is advised.

Another great dinner option is the creche (left).

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport to Nieu Bethesda. Owl House Backpackers (opposite) will organise a local to do a pick-up/drop off (one-way/return R30/50) to Graaff-Reinet. Le Jardin Backpackin' (p269) in Graaff-Reinet also organises transport.

AMATHOLE

The stretch of coast and hinterland known as Amathole (pronounced 'ama-tawl-eh', from Xhosa for 'calves') extends from the Great Fish River to the Great Kei River on the so-called Shipwreck Coast, and inland as far as Queenstown. It includes the surf-side city of East London, the enchanting mountain village of Hogsback, and the little-visited and wild government wildlife reserves of Mpofu, Double Drift and Tsolwana. Much of this area was the former Xhosa homeland of Ciskei.

KING WILLIAM'S TOWN

☎ 043

Established by the London Missionary Society in 1826, King William's Town (known as 'King') was a colonial capital and an important military base in the interminable struggle with the Xhosa. The main reason for a visit is the excellent **Amathole Museum** (☎ 043-642 4506; 3 Albert Rd; admission R5; ☺ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), one of the finest in the region, with an excellent **Xhosa Gallery** featuring in-depth explanations of Xhosa culture, mysticism and history. There are some wonderful examples of beadwork, plus wire cars made by local artists.

Pride of place in the natural history section is given to the stuffed corpse of Huberta, a hippo that became famous between 1928 and 1931 when she wandered down the coast from St Lucia in Natal – more than 1000km away – to the vicinity of King William's Town. The King of England declared she was to be left in peace, but she was shot by local farmers, causing a national outcry.

There are a limited number of sleeping options in King, and many are overpriced, so it's probably better to stay in East London and visit for the day. The town **library** (☎ 043-642 3391; Ayliff St; ☺ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) can provide a list of guesthouses and B&Bs.

Nearby King is **Steve Biko's grave** (see p274), and the beginning of the Amathole Trail (see below).

Getting There & Away

Bus arrive at and depart from the Engen petrol station on Cathcart St. **Intercape** (www.intercape.co.za) buses stop in King on their daily run between Cape Town (R220, eight hours) and East London (R90, one hour). **Translux** (www.translux.co.za) buses run to Cape Town (R360, 18 hours).

Greyhound (www.greyhound.co.za) also stops in town on its daily run between Jo'burg/Pretoria (R300, 12 hours) and East London (R95, one hour) via Bloemfontein (R215, six hours).

Minibus taxis run from King to Bhisho (R10, 20 minutes).

BHISHO

☎ 040 / pop 171,000

Bhisho, once capital of Ciskei, is now the administrative capital of Eastern Cape. The centre of Bhisho was built to house Ciskei's bureaucrats and politicians, so there is a compact bunch of suitably grandiose and ugly public buildings, which are now in the service of the new provincial bureaucracy.

Regular minibuses run from the King William's Town train station to Bhisho.

AMATHOLE & KATBERG MOUNTAINS

The area north and west of King William's Town is partly degraded grazing land and partly rugged mountains with remnant indigenous forest. There are some good walks. When the mists are down on the Amathole Mountains, the forests take on an eerie silence.

The easiest way into this area is via King William's Town or Queenstown. Daily **City to City** (☎ 011-773 2762) buses stop in Katberg, Seymour and Alice on the Jo'burg-King William's Town run. There are occasional minibus taxis too.

Amathole Trail

The 121km, six-day **Amathole Trail** (per person R180) begins at the Maden Dam, 23km north of King William's Town, and ends at the Tyumie River near Hogsback. Accommodation is in huts.

It ranks as one of South Africa's top mountain walks, but is pretty tough and

STEVE BIKO

Steve Biko (1946–77) is buried in the Ginsberg cemetery just outside King William's Town. His insistence that people must begin by changing their own attitudes and feelings of inferiority – a process he called Black Consciousness – created a movement that is credited with playing a huge part in the downfall of apartheid.

This former medical student from the University of Natal refused to be silenced by the persecution of the apartheid government, and was eventually put under house arrest and banned from speaking in public. In 1977 he was detained in Port Elizabeth for 26 days under the Terrorism Act. He died in police custody after a series of brutal assaults.

To reach Biko's grave, follow Cathcart St south of the town and turn left down a dirt track that is signposted to the cemetery.

should only be attempted if you are reasonably experienced and fit. Walkers are rewarded with great views, although about a third of the walk goes through dense forest and numerous streams with waterfalls and swimming holes. Shorter sections of the hike are available outside school holidays. Guides can also be arranged.

The trail must be booked with the **Department of Water Affairs & Forestry** (☎ 043-604 5433; www.dwaf.co.za; 9 Chamberlain St, King William's Town).

Alice & Around

☎ 040 / pop 9800

Alice is a busy little town with little for the tourist other than the **University of Fort Hare**, which was established in 1916 and has played an important role in the development of Southern Africa. Former students include Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela and, ahem, Robert Mugabe. Parts of the original Fort Hare are also preserved in the grounds.

Within the campus, the excellent **De Beers Century Art Gallery** (☎ 040-602 2277; admission free; ☎ 7.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) has some very important work by contemporary South African artists, plus archive material on Steve Biko, Black Consciousness and the African National Congress.

Frequent minibus taxis run from King William's Town to the main gates of the university and to Alice; they cost R15. From Alice to Fort Beaufort is R5. A minibus taxi to Hogsback will cost about R25, but you'll probably have to change taxis en route.

Fort Beaufort

☎ 046 / pop 26,400

In 1846 a Xhosa man called Tsili stole an axe from a shop in Fort Beaufort. In a mas-

terly display of overreaction, a British force invaded the Xhosa province of Queen Adelaide, beginning the Seventh Frontier War, known as the War of the Axe (1846–47). Today, Fort Beaufort has left such drama long behind and is a quiet, attractive and unassuming little town, but you can still learn about its past (and about its current attractions) at the **Historical Museum** (☎ 046-645 1555; fbmsm.eum@procomp.co.za; 44 Durban St; adult/child R2/0.50; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–12.45pm Sat) in the old officers' mess. It's bursting with memorabilia from firearms to fossils, and offers tourist advice.

If you're staying over, the fairly decent **Savoy Hotel** (☎ 046-645 1146; 53 Durban St; s/d R215/350; ☎) opposite the museum has uninspiring but clean rooms with TV. There's a pretty garden and an à la carte restaurant (mains R50). Look out for newspaper clippings in the lobby relating to a UFO sighting in the town in 1972!

The only public transport to Fort Beaufort is by minibus taxis, which leave several times a day from Alice (R7, 30 minutes).

Hogsback

☎ 045 / pop 1500

For years now South Africa's worst-kept secret, magical Hogsback is unlike any destination in the country. Located improbably 1300m up in the beautiful Amathole Mountains, about 100km northwest of Bhisho, the small village has enjoyed a recent renaissance and is supposedly a favourite getaway among politicians and celebrities. Yet with its English climate (four distinctive seasons), quietude, organic food, environmentally conscious population and mind-boggling views of mountains and forested valleys in all directions, this is an

eco-destination *par excellence*. Even a one-night stopover will feel like you're being transported to another time and place, particularly one reminiscent of *The Hobbit*. Locals make much of the fact that JRR Tolkien was inspired by Hogsback, but in reality he lived in Bloemfontein and remembered the place from childhood holidays. Still, it's certainly easy to imagine a scene from one of his books happening here.

The steepest slopes around Hogsback are still covered in beautiful rainforest: yellowwood, asagai and tree fuchsia are all present. There are also, sadly, extensive pine plantations on land that was once indigenous forest. The peaks of the hills are high and bare, with 'bristles' known in geological circles as a 'hogsback' – hence the town's name.

The hogs made of mud that you'll see being sold along the road (R10 to R15) are not fired; when they get wet they make a hell of a mess.

INFORMATION

There's an ATM in the Hogsback Inn, just off the main road.

Community Tourism Info Centre (☎ 045-962 1026; www.hogsbackinfo.co.za; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) On the main road.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

On one side of the village is the mystical **ecoshrine** (adult/child R10/free; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Wed, Sat & Sun), a cement sculpture and garden that celebrates the forces of nature. The town's climate and history of green-fingered Englishmen who settled here mean it is blessed with gorgeous (though seasonal) market garden estates. Flower lovers should definitely contact the **Garden Club** (☎ 045-962 1259; tours R15), whose aim is to turn Hogsback into a 'botanical paradise'.

There are some great walks, bike rides and drives in the area. Some of the best roads are unsealed, so check locally before trying anything ambitious, and definitely think twice if it's been snowing (snow falls in 11 months out of 12, but it is rare that falls are heavy). Be prepared for rain at any time, and in winter for temperatures that can drop to -1°C.

SLEEPING & EATING

Don't be fooled by excessive signposting on your way into town; there are only a few

genuinely worthy, well established places to stay, as listed below. In general, it's best to ask at the info centre for those establishments who've been around a long time.

Away with the Fairies (☎ 045-962 1031; hogsback1@iafrica.com; Hydrangea Lane; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R40/70/170; ☎) A wonderful backpackers, where care and attention to detail (along with terrific views) have paid dividends. The interiors are painted with fantastical designs featuring nubile fairies, and there's a log fire in the lounge that crackles cosily on cold evenings. The most popular spot for those deep and meaningful conversations is the tree house, perched in the forest among parrots and monkeys. The Hog & Hobbit bar is the spot to sink a few beers in the evenings. There are hearty meals (dinner R40), mountain bikes (R50 per day) for hire, lots of rock climbing, and horse trails (three-hour trails R150) on offer.

Edge (☎ 045-962 1159; info@theedge_hogsback.co.za; Bluff End; self-catering cottages from R350; ☎) This is a collection of 12 stunningly decorated self-catering cottages strung out along the mountain's edge. The cottages all have one big bedroom (there's one twin and one family unit) with a log fire and TV, plus separate bathroom and kitchen. The more expensive ones (up to R750) have heart-stopping views too. The vibe here is peace, quiet and relaxation rather than raucous partying. It's an unbeatable place for a healthy rest – or a romantic weekend. The star of the onsite restaurant, Tea Thyme (mains R40 to R75), has risen now that it is run by the Edge. Have a health breakfast here before visiting the mystical labyrinth reminiscent of the patterns formed by crop circles. To find the Edge, follow the signs from the main road (look for the pink triangle).

Granny Mouse House (☎ 045-962 1259; ingi@iafrica.com; 1 Nutwoods Dr; s/d with breakfast R250/500; ☎) This is a charming guesthouse with rooms in an old wattle and daub house, plus a self-catering cottage in the garden. Have a breakfast here and you'll lustily taste the difference between organic and mass-produced food. Guests can also include dinner (often including wild mushroom soup) in their booking for an extra R100. The very friendly owner speaks German.

Arminel Hotel (☎ 045-962 1005; www.katleisure.co.za; Main Rd; s/d with breakfast R475/1000; ☎) A fair

amount of tom has been splashed out to give this historic old place a new lease of life, and it's paid off. It's the only hotel in town (it's a three-star), but its neat thatched building, charming interior design and peaceful setting make it feel more like a very large guesthouse.

Nina's (☎ 045-962 1326; Main Rd; mains R25-40; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Next to the info centre is this popular restaurant and deli in a quaint A-frame house. Locals love the pizzas (try the FBR: fig, bacon and roquefort!) and visitors love the local produce on sale.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you can, try to arrive in Hogsback by day, as the road in can be frequented by itinerant livestock. Unless you have a 4WD, only come here via Rte 63 or Rte 67. Do not take the roads via Seymour or Cathcart. To be absolutely sure about road conditions, call ahead from Queenstown. The easiest way to get to Hogsback without a car is by shuttle bus from the Sugarshack Backpackers (p280) in East London, Buccaneer's Backpackers (p284) in Cintsá (Chintsa), or Old Gaol Backpackers (p259) in Grahamstown to Aways with the Fairies on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday (R45 one way). Beware of trying to come to Hogsback for a single night – you'll regret it!

EASTERN CAPE WILDLIFE RESERVES

☎ 040

With over a million hectares of malaria-free game viewing, the Eastern Cape's reserves are a major drawcard. There are three main wildlife reserves administered by the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 043-701 9600; www.ectourism.co.za; cnr Longfellow & Aquarium Rds, Quigney, East London). All reserves organise wildlife viewing, and many have multiday walking trails available. You'll need to be self-sufficient with food and water to visit the reserves.

Tsolwana Game Reserve (☎ 040-635 2115; adult/child R6/3, plus per car R20; ☺ 8am-6pm) is 57km southwest of Queenstown. The park is managed in conjunction with the local Tsolwana people, who benefit directly from the jobs and revenue produced. It protects some rugged Karoo landscape south of the spectacular **Tafelberg** (1965m) and adjoining the Swart Kei River. The reserve's rolling plains are interspersed with valleys, cliffs, waterfalls, caves and gullies. There is a di-

verse range of animals including large herds of antelopes, rhinos, giraffes and mountain zebras. Wildlife viewing is possible in the park's vehicle (up to four people R160).

Double Drift Game Reserve, 42km south of Fort Beaufort, has been combined with the Sam Knott Nature Reserve and the Andries Vosloo Kudu Reserve to form the **Great Fish River Reserve** (☎ 040-653 8010; ectbdd@icon.co.za; adult/child R6/3, plus per car R20; ☺ 8am-5pm). There is much large wildlife to be seen in this area of thick bushveld, which is sandwiched between the Great Fish and Keiskamma Rivers.

To the north of Fort Beaufort is **Mpofu Game Reserve** (☎ 040-864 9450; adult/child R6/3, plus per car R20; ☺ 8am-5pm), where you are likely to see *mpofu* (eland), a large antelope. The grassland and valley bushveld make the region ideal for wildlife viewing. The 60km, three-day **Katberg Trail** begins here and ends at the Katberg Forest Station, just below the Katberg Pass. When we visited, the trail was closed for revamping; call the **Department of Water Affairs & Forestry** (☎ 043-604 5433; www.dwaf.co.za; 9 Chamberlain St, King William's Town) to check on the status.

Sleeping

Tsolwana Game Reserve has three comfortable **farmhouses** (up to 4 people R650, extra person R170). There are also two trail huts here, Phumlani and Fundani. Double Drift and Mpofu Game Reserves have comfortable **lodge accommodation** (4-person r R650).

Getting There & Away

You'll need your own vehicle to visit all these reserves. Some are remote and hard to find – phone Eastern Cape Tourism or the lodges for directions and leave plenty of time to get there.

EAST LONDON

☎ 043 / pop 980,000

The country's only river port, with a good surf beach and a spectacular bay that curves round to huge sand hills. Few cities in the world with this many inhabitants are as dour as East London, yet a strange, inescapable malaise hangs over the town. Unless you're a surfer (or a shark), there isn't really much to keep you here, though it can be a good base for moving on to holiday spots along the Sunshine or Wild Coasts.

Its Khoesaaan name means 'Place of the Buffalos', and the whole area has been named 'Buffalo City' by the tourism authorities.

Orientation

The main street in the centre is Oxford St, with the city centre extending from about Argyle St south to Fleet St. Fleet St runs east, and eventually, after a few corners and name changes, meets the Esplanade, where all the beachfront hotels and restaurants are situated. To the west, around Buffalo St, is a run-down and slightly edgy area dominated by the minibus taxi ranks.

Orient Beach, which is east of the river mouth, is popular with families and has a tidal pool. Eastern Beach is the long main beach fronting the Esplanade, but Nahoon Reef on the northern headland is better for surfing.

The massive and sprawling township of Mdantsane, 15 km from town, is the second-largest township in South Africa (Soweto being the largest).

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Lounge (☎ 083-375 9040; 58 Beach Rd, Nahoon; per hour R40; ☺ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-6.30pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 3-6pm Sun)

Guido's (043-743 4441; Esplanade) Has a fairly slow connection.

MONEY

There are ATMs for all the major banks on Oxford St. For safety, only use ATMs during the day; better still, use one of the ATMs in the **Vincent Park shopping centre** (Devereux Ave) instead.

POST

Main post office (Oxford St) Halfway up Oxford St; with a row of Telkom telephone boxes nearby.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are two tourist offices in East London, both in **King's Tourist Centre** (cnr Longfellow & Aquarium Rds) on the beachfront and both seemingly down on their luck. Staff try their best but don't achieve it – you'll end up with a handful of colourful brochures and a few fairly useful maps.

Eastern Cape Tourism Board (☎ 043-701 9600; www.ectourism.co.za; ☺ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Covers the wider area.

Tourism Buffalo City (☎ 043-042-722 6015; www.visitbuffalocity.co.za; ☺ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Deals with matters relating to the city and neighbouring townships.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Wild Coast Holiday Reservations (☎ 043-743 6181; www.wildcoastholidays.co.za; King's Tourist Centre, cnr Longfellow & Aquarium Rds) Books accommodation and hiking trails on the Wild Coast.

Dangers & Annoyances

The eastern end of Eastern Beach and the area around Nahoon River mouth are not considered safe to walk on. Take care on the Esplanade and get a taxi home from anywhere in East London after dark. Watch out for pickpockets if you end up in the area around Buffalo St and the minibus taxi ranks.

Sights & Activities

The **East London Museum** (☎ 043-743 0686; Dawson Rd; admission R5; ☺ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) shot to fame in 1938 when the young curator, Marjorie Latimer, discovered a strange-looking fish on a vessel in East London harbour. It turned out to be a coelacanth, a type of fish thought to have become extinct over 50 million years ago. To find it still in existence was the marine equivalent of stumbling upon a living dinosaur. The fish was named *Latimeria chalumnae* in honour of its finder, and over 5000 people came to the museum on the first day it was exhibited. Coelacanths have since been discovered all over the world, but the stuffed original is still on display at the museum. Other exhibits at the museum include trace-fossil human footprints and a living beehive.

The **Ann Bryant Art Gallery** (☎ 043-722 4044; St Marks Rd; admission free; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat), south of the museum, is in an old mansion featuring an eclectic collection of paintings and sculptures, mostly by South African artists. There's also a small coffee shop here.

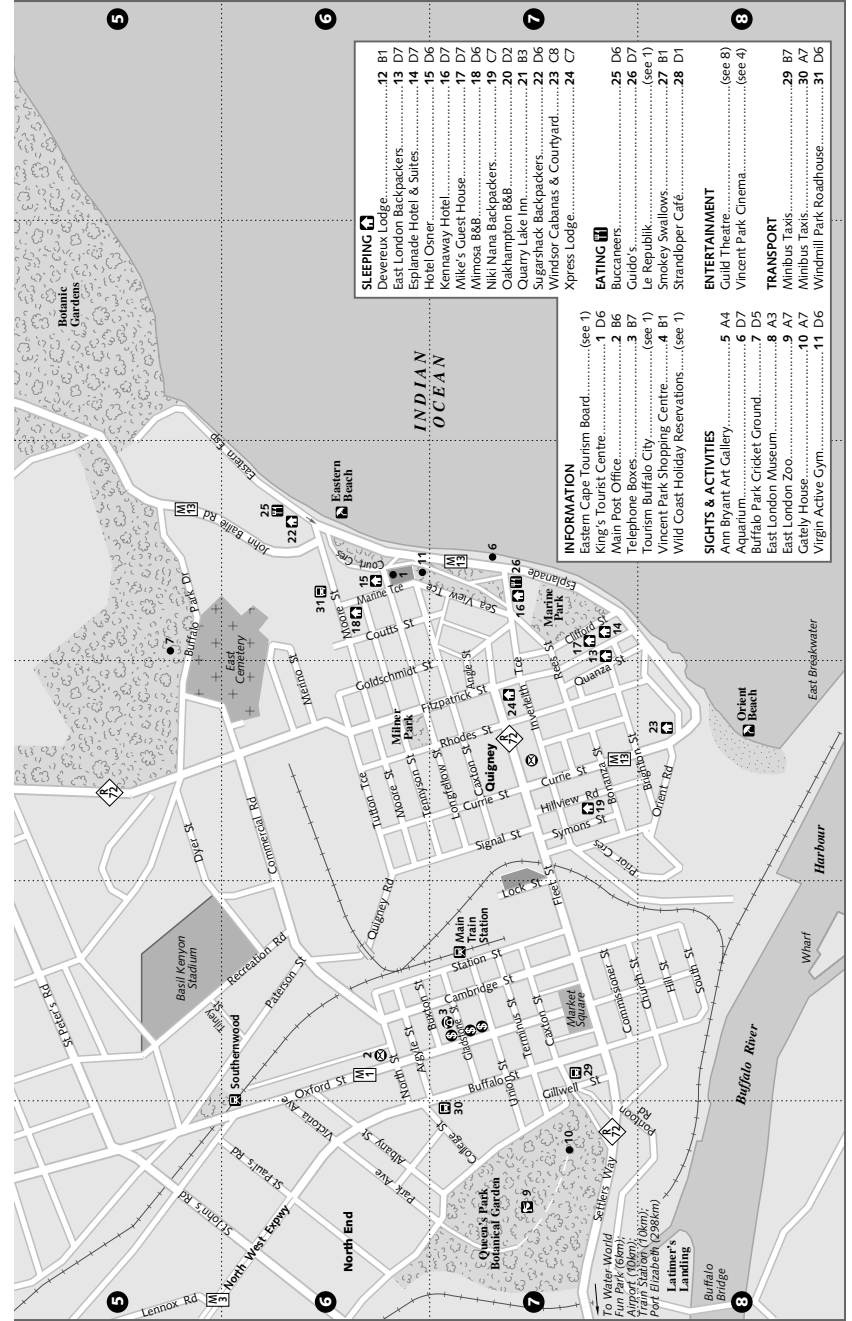
Gately House (☎ 043-722 2141; 1 Park Gates Rd; adult/child R1/free; ☺ 10am-1pm Tue-Thu, 2-5pm Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 3-5pm Sun) was the residence of the first mayor of East London, John Gately, and still contains all his original furniture. It's near the entrance to Queen's Park, but it's easiest to access the house by walking up from the zoo.



EAST LONDON

To N2 (1.5km):
White Horses (20km);
Gonsbie Caravan Park
(21km); Durban (66km)

To N2 (14km):
Human (14km);
Melborne (15km);
King William's Town (49km)



- SLEEPING**
- Devereux Lodge.....12 B1
 - East London Backpackers.....13 D7
 - Holiday Hotel & Suites.....15 D6
 - Kempsey Hotel.....16 D7
 - Mimosa B&B.....17 D7
 - Niki Nana Backpackers.....18 D6
 - Oakhampton B&B.....19 C7
 - Quarry Lake Inn.....20 D2
 - Sugashack Backpackers.....21 B3
 - Windsor Cabanas & Courtyard.....23 C8
 - Xpress Lodge.....24 C7

- EATING**
- Buccaneers.....25 D6
 - Guido's.....26 D7
 - Le Republic.....(see 1)
 - Vincent Park Shopping Centre.....4 B1
 - Strandloper Café.....27 B1

- INFORMATION**
- Eastern Cape Tourism Board.....(see 1)
 - King's Tourist Centre.....1 D6
 - Main Post Office.....2 B6
 - Telephone Boxes.....3 B7
 - Tourism Buffalo City.....(see 1)
 - Vincent Park Shopping Centre.....4 B1
 - Wild Coast Holiday Reservations.....(see 1)

- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Ann Bryant Art Gallery.....5 A4
 - Aquarium.....6 D7
 - East London Museum.....7 D5
 - East London Zoo.....8 A3
 - Gately House.....9 A7
 - Mimibus Taxis.....10 A7
 - Virgini Active Gym.....11 D6

- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Guild Theatre.....(see 8)
 - Vincent Park Cinema.....(see 4)

- TRANSPORT**
- Mimibus Taxis.....29 B7
 - Wimindim Park Roadhouse.....30 A7
 - Windmill Park Roadhouse.....31 D6

If you have children, there's the small **East London zoo** (☎ 043-722 1171; adult/child R15/9; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sun) at Queen's Park, and a small **aquarium** (☎ 043-705 2637; Esplanade; adult/child R15/9; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sun) on the beachfront. Otherwise try the **Water World Fun Park** (☎ 043-748 4265; admission R20; 🕒 9am-5pm Sep-Easter) in West Bank (near the racetrack), where kids can ride endlessly on the super-tube and speed slides.

The best **surfing** is at Nahoon Reef at the southern end of Nahoon Beach. If you'd like to do some lengths or pump some iron while you're in town, head for the **Virgin Active Gym** (☎ 043-743 3777; Esplanade; 🕒 5.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-12pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun). Day visitors pay R85.

Tours

Various half-day tours of the city and the surrounding area can be organised; contact the tourist office or **Off Road Adventures** (☎ 082-783 1288; 4wd@mweb.co.za), which provides cultural, 4WD and canoeing trails in the countryside surrounding East London. The canoe trips centre on the Fish or Breda Rivers and are suitable for beginners as well as experienced paddlers. Multiday trips to Dwesa Nature Reserve or even Lesotho can also be arranged.

Sleeping

As you might imagine, East London has a plethora of accommodation in all price ranges. Unless you're a surfer you might be better off opting for one of the uptown hotels and B&Bs rather than the pretty scruffy beachfront. There are really no top-end hotels in East London.

BUDGET

Sugarshack Backpackers (☎ 043-722 8240; www.sugarshack.co.za; Eastern Esplanade, Eastern Beach; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R35/65/160; 🗺️) With the beach just metres away, the surf's always up at this lively backpackers. Activities on offer include waterskiing (R160) and cliff jumping (R25). Surfboard hire (R50) and two-hour lessons (R75) are always available. After a day's hanging 10, you can have a drink at the Shack's bar or next door at Buccaneers pub, which rocks until dawn. This is a place to cut loose, not to sleep – the smallish dorms are pretty close to the party area – but the wooden garden cot-

tages are more private. If the thought of leaving is unbearable, the hostel can get you visa extension forms.

Niki Nana Backpackers (☎ 043-722 8509; www.nikinana.co.za; 4 Hillview Rd; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R45/65/160; 🗺️) This backpackers, easily recognisable by its striking zebra-striped frontage, is small but perfectly formed, with comfy inside spaces plus a private garden with a large swimming pool and braai area. Meals can be arranged on request.

East London Backpackers (☎ 043-781 1122, 084-782 7780; www.elbackpackers.co.za; 11 Quanza St; dm/s/d with shared bathroom R60/100/150, d R180; 🗺️) This well-maintained place is much quieter and less vibey than Sugarshack, but has spacious and clean chilling areas and dorms, a braai area and a plunge pool. There are also good-quality doubles with their own bathroom.

Mike's Guest House (☎ 043-743 3647; mikes@his.co.za; 22 Clifford St; s/d with shared bathroom & breakfast R120/180, s/d R200/270) Unfortunately up a rather dubious looking road near the beachfront, this spick and span guesthouse is terrific value for money, if a bit characterless.

MIDRANGE

Gonubie Caravan Park (☎ 043-705 9748; fax 740 5937; Beachfront, Gonubie; camp sites/2-bedroom chalets low season R65/320, high season R145/520) A great escape from the city, with log cabin-style chalets right on the beachfront of rustic outer suburb Gonubie, 2km from town.

Oakhampton B&B (☎ 043-726 9963; www.oakhampton.co.za; 8 Okehampton Rd; s/d with breakfast R250/380; 🗺️) Minimalists will swoon – this impossibly frilly B&B has a Victorian theme, with a plethora of red roses, china dolls and lacy doilies filling every conceivable nook and cranny. The bedrooms have brass bedstead, canopy and antique linen, while the lush garden holds not one but two swimming pools. Self-catering units are also available, and honeymooners get satin sheets.

Esplanade Hotel & Suites (☎ 043-722 2518; esp.hotel@iafrica.com; Clifford St; s/d R290/410) This clean and comfortable hotel, near the beach, has rooms with sea views.

White House (☎ 043-740 0344; www.thewhitehousebandb.co.za; 10 Whitthaus St, Gonubie; s/d with breakfast R295/395; 🗺️) A stylish guesthouse with glass windows for panoramic views of cliffs and sea – you can watch whales

and dolphins passing by while you're having breakfast! There's a helipad too, should you need one.

Devereux Lodge (☎ 043-726 9459; coastdev@iafrica.com; 7A Devereux Ave; s/d with breakfast R400/550; 🗺️) Another very comfortable and up-market guesthouse, mainly aimed at visiting businessmen, that lets you choose between Victorian and Tuscan surroundings. The huge rooms have TV and fridge.

Quarry Lake Inn (☎ 043-707 5400; www.quarrylakeinn.co.za; Quartzite Dr, Selbourne; s/d with breakfast R650/880; 🗺️) This is one of East London's most upmarket hotels, built next to a tranquil artificial lake. The rooms are elegant and comfortable with modern facilities, including a microwave, bar fridge and private balconies.

One organisation, **Kat Leisure** (☎ 0800-422 433; www.katleisure.co.za), which runs the following places to stay, has a virtual monopoly of the hotels and apartments in East London. Places that include breakfast provide a pre-packed airline-style continental affair.

Hotel Osner (Court Cres; s/d/family R360/420/700) Breezy rooms that are ideal for families.

Kennaway Hotel (Esplanade; d R520) Over-the-top colonial-style rooms, heavy on the velour furnishings but quite luxurious.

Mimosa B&B (Marine Tce; s/d with breakfast R270/380) Good-value units with kitchenette; often booked out.

Reef Hotel (18 Harewood Dr, Nahoon; s/d with breakfast R270/330) Near the river in Nahoon, this place has bright, comfortable rooms.

Windsor Cabanas & Courtyard (Marine Tce; s/d with breakfast R550/730) A fairly upmarket Mediterranean-style place with cheaper rooms (R305/400) in the courtyard.

Xpress Lodge (Fitzpatrick St; s/d R175/255) Rooms here include a kitchenette with fridge and microwave.

Eating

Most beachfront hotels have restaurants. You can also try the following midrange places.

Buccaneers (☎ 043-743 5171; Eastern Esplanade; mains R15-40; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Next to Sugarshack Backpackers, this down-to-earth pub serves steaks, toasted sandwiches and pizzas to soak up the alcohol.

Guido's (☎ 043-743 4441; Esplanade; mains R20-40; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This Italian chain, complete with faux-Grecian columns and a water feature, is a good standby for pizza and pasta.

Le Republik (☎ 043-722 0076; King's Tourist Centre, nr Longfellow & Aquarium Rds; mains R40-60; 🍷 break-

fast, lunch & dinner) This bright, noisy diner above the tourist office offers good hearty food and elevated seaside views. A central heater warms the place nicely on winter nights.

Strandloper Café (☎ 043-735 4570; 95 Old Transkei Rd; mains R60-90; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) This very elegant, simple and classy restaurant specialises in seafood, with dishes such as chilli and coriander prawns, paella and Cajun fish of the day. There's a good wine list and a couple of veggie options, too.

Smoky Swallows (☎ 043-727 1349; Devereux Ave; mains R60-100; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A perfect cross-section of East London life, frequented by everyone from the emerging black middle class to Jazz aficionados disappearing in a fog of pipe smoke, this is one of the city's trendiest venues. It's a lounge bar-restaurant (with a bistro menu including such delights as peppered ostrich fillet and hand-rolled sushi) with frequent live acts.

Entertainment

For bookings at general-release cinemas contact **Ster-Kinekor** (central bookings ☎ 082-16789; www.sterkinekor.co.za); for live shows including sporting events contact **Computicket** (☎ 011-915 8000; www.computicket.com).

Vincent Park Cinemas (☎ 043-726 8122; Vincent Park Shopping Centre, Devereux Ave; admission R15) Has six cinemas showing the latest movies.

Guild Theatre (☎ 043-743 0704; Dawson Rd) This is East London's main theatre. Everything from ballet performances to beauty contests take place here.

Hemingway's Casino (☎ 043-707 8000; Western Ave) Featuring gambling halls, restaurants and a cinema, this is the best place in town to squander your spondulicks.

Getting There & Away

AIR
The airport is 10km from the centre. **South African Airways** (SAA; ☎ 043-706 0203) has an office at the airport and flies from East London daily to Port Elizabeth (around R700), Durban (around R1100) and Cape Town (around R1650).

BUS

Translux, Greyhound and SA Connection stop at the **Windmill Park Roadhouse** (Moore St). Intercap buses stop at the **main train station** (Station St) and at the airport.

THE XHOSA

Travelling along the southwestern Wild Coast is an excellent way to get to know Xhosa culture. You may hear the term 'red people', which refers to the red clay and red clothes worn by many adults.

Clothing, colours and beaded jewellery all indicate a Xhosa's subgroup. The Tembu and Bomvana, for example, favour red and orange ochres in the dyeing of their clothing, while the Pondo and Mpondomise use light blue. The *isi-danga* – a long turquoise necklace that identifies the wearer to their ancestors – is also still seen today.

Belief in witches (male and female) among the Xhosa is strong, and witch burning is not unknown. Most witchcraft is considered evil, with possession by depraved spirits a major fear. A main source of evil are *tokoloshe*, mythical manlike creatures who live in water but are also kept by witches. One reason that many Xhosa keep their beds raised high off the ground is to avoid being caught in their sleep by the tiny *tokoloshe*.

The *igqirha* (spiritual healer) is empowered to deal with both the forces of nature and the trouble caused by witches, and so holds an important place in traditional society. The *ixhwele* (herbalist) performs some magic but is more concerned with health. Both of these healers are often referred to as *sangomas*.

Many Xhosa have the top of their left little finger removed during childhood to prevent misfortune. Puberty and marriage rituals also play a central role. Boys must not be seen by women during the three-month initiation period following circumcision; during this time the boys disguise themselves with white clay, or in intricate costumes made of dried palm leaves. In the female puberty ritual, a girl is confined in a darkened hut while her friends tour the area singing for gifts. Unmarried girls wear short skirts, which are worn longer as marriage approaches. Married women wear long skirts and cover their breasts. They often put white clay on their faces, wear large, turban-like cloth hats and may smoke long-stemmed pipes.

London. Cintsa comprises two small, pretty villages, Cintsa East and Cintsa West. It's definitely the best place on this part of the coast to hang out for a few days (or weeks). Also in the area is the private, upmarket **Inkenkwenzi Game Reserve** (☎ 043-734 3234; www.inkenkwenzi.com; morning/afternoon game drive R495/395; ☎ 8am-4pm), which contains four of the Big Five (only elephants are missing). The morning drive includes lunch. Any of the accommodation listed can help organise activities.

Imonti Tours (☎ 043-745 3884; 26 Venice Rd, Morningside) organises tours to the townships of Mdantsane and Zwelitsha, and to Bhisho and King William's Town. There are also full-day tours to Qunu on the Wild Coast, where Nelson Mandela spent his childhood.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cintsa offers several good accommodation options and an excellent restaurant.

Buccaneer's Backpackers (☎ 043-734 3012, 734 3749; www.cintsa.com; Cintsa West; camp sites/dm/d with bathroom R45/75/180; ☎ ☎) Something of a rarity, 'Bucks' is a sort of all-inclusive holiday resort for backpackers. Among the

many activities on offer are free canoes and surfboards, a surf school, horse riding, booze cruises and school visits (the nearby Belugha school is supported partially by donations from guests). There is also a volleyball court, climbing wall, and a 'beauty bungalow' where you can get a massage. Meals (breakfast R15 to R40, mains R30 R65) are available and on Sunday, the owners prepare a free breakfast for guests. Buccaneer's is also the base of the excellent African Heartland Tours (see p283), which offers single and multiday trips into the interior. Sleeping arrangements are in comfortable dorms and rooms, as well as safaris tents (R160) and cottages (R280) with their own bathrooms and private sun decks. To get to Buccaneer's, follow the Cintsa West turn-off for about 200m until you reach the entrance; the main buildings are a further 2km along the dirt road.

Crawfords Lodge & Cabins (☎ 043-738 5000; www.crawfordscabins.co.za; Cintsa East; s/d with breakfast R300/550, self-catering cottages R450; ☎ ☎) This midrange miniresort has 23 cottages plus three B&B apartments. It's close to the pool, has good beach access and tennis courts.

Dolphin View (☎ 738 5432; dabeat@mweb.co.za; 18 Dolphin Dr, Cintsa East; s/d with breakfast R195/390; ☎) Far more modest but very charming, this little B&B has just one guest room, with TV, microwave, radio and CD player.

Michaela's of Cintsa (☎ 043-738 5139; Steenbras Dr, Cintsa East; meals R49-69; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Michaela's offers fusion-style food with South African ingredients. Book early for Sunday lunches. Wooden stairs lead diners up through a mini rainforest to the restaurant; for the less fit there is always the air-conditioned funicular!

Country Bumpkin Restaurant (☎ 043-738 5226; Heron Loop Dr, Cintsa East; meals R30-40; ☎ 4pm-midnight Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Perched in the hills above Cintsa East, this flashy restaurant serves up panini, salads, pots of mussels, calamari and pasta among other delights.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To reach Cintsa from East London, take Exit 26 (East Coast Resorts) off the N2. Go over the overpass and follow the road for 1km to the Cintsa East turn-off. The Cintsa West turn-off is another 16km further on.

Morgan's Bay & Kei Mouth

☎ 043 / pop 2200

Along the coast from Cintsa, and reached by turning off the N2 onto Rte 349, is the village of Morgan's Bay, a good place for some peace and quiet and for beachcombing and surfing. Prices skyrocket and places get booked solid between mid-December and mid-January.

Just after Morgan's Bay and slightly more developed, **Kei Mouth** (www.keimouth.co.za) is the last resort before the beginning of the Wild Coast, which is reached by taking the **pont**

(vehicle ferry; per car R45; ☎ 7am-6pm) across the Great Kei River.

Yellowwood Park (☎ 043-841 1598, 043-841 1319; camp sites R45 plus R10 per person; hut shelters s/d R55/90), located about 1km from Morgan's Bay, is a very tranquil and eco-friendly camp site, surrounded by indigenous forest and frequented by birds and monkeys. Lifts can be arranged from East London or Mooiplaas on the N2.

Mitford Lodge (☎ 043-841 1510; 14 Beach Rd, Morgan's Bay; dm/d/tr R65/200/350) is a clean budget hotel with rustic décor and restaurant. Alternatively, the **Morgan Bay Hotel** (☎ 043-841 1062; www.morganbay.co.za; Beach Rd, Morgans Bay; r with breakfast & dinner R315-365; ☎ ☎) is a light and airy family hotel with a Mediterranean feel and a bar serving pub grub. It rents mountain bikes (R150 per half day) and canoes (R25 per hour) There's also a **camp site** (camp sites R60-215) next door.

Strandloper Trails

The 60km, five-day **Strandloper Hiking Trail** and the one-night **Strandloper Canoe Trail** (bookings ☎ 043-841 1046; www.strandlopertrails.org.za; trail R220) run between Kei Mouth and Gonubie, just outside East London. The hiking trail is fairly easy, but good fitness is required. The Strandlopers (meaning 'Beach Walkers') were a Khoesaan tribe who lived on the coast but disappeared as a distinct group after white settlement. You'll need a copy of the tide tables published in the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper in East London, as there are several estuaries to cross.

There are four overnight huts and the cost of staying in these is included in the booking fee. Camping on the beach is prohibited, but most of the coastal hotels have camp sites.

THE XHOSA CATTLE KILLING

In 1856 a young Xhosa girl named Nongqawuse went down to the banks of the Gxarha stream, just east of the Great Kei River, to help keep birds away from her uncle's fields. When she returned, she announced that she had met with the spirits of dead ancestors, who told her that the Xhosa must slaughter all their vast herds of cattle and cease to cultivate their fields. When this was done, all the ancestors would return from the dead, bringing with them herds of fat, glossy cattle, and drive the white men into the sea.

To the Xhosa, their cattle dying en masse from European diseases and their chiefs reeling in the wake of a succession of frontier wars with the land-hungry Boers, it was a vision of hope. In the aftermath of the prophecy, over 100,000 Xhosa slaughtered their own cattle and slowly starved to death. The British governor of the province, Sir George Grey, rounded up the survivors to be used as slave labour and gave their abandoned lands to white settlers.

GREAT KEI RIVER TO COFFEE BAY

There are a number of hotels and resorts along the stretch of coast from the Great Kei River to Coffee Bay. Most can be booked through **Wild Coast Holiday Reservations** (☎ 043-743 6181; www.wildcoastholidays.co.za; King's Tourist Centre, cnr Longfellow & Aquarium Rds, East London). Most places cater to fishermen and South African families; prices rise sharply around Christmas and Easter. Locals take share taxis to get around the area, but the best way to get around the area is with your own vehicle.

Following is just a selection of the sleeping options available, listed from south to north.

About 16km north of the pont (ferry), **Trennery's Hotel** (☎ 043-498 0004; www.trennerys.co.za; s/d with full board R350/700; 🏠) has attractive thatched bungalows, a bit run-down on the inside but still comfortable. There's a basic restaurant, a lovely beach, gardens and a pool.

The wooden deck at the smart **Wavecrest Resort Hotel** (☎ 047-498 0022; www.wavecrest.co.za; s/d with full board R390/780; 🏠) has some amazing views over sand dunes at the mouth of the Nxaxo River. There are plenty of activities to keep you occupied here, including fishing, boat rides and horse trips. It's reached from Butterworth via Kentani; turn left at Kentani.

This family **Kob Inn** (☎ 047-499 0011; www.kobinn.co.za; s/d with full board R360/720) can be reached by car from Idutywa via Willowvale. There are some good hiking trails in the area.

Haven (☎ 047-576 8904/8906; fax 047-576 8905; s/d with full board R265/530) is a good base for exploring Cwebe Nature Reserve, close to the mouth of the Mbashe River. Coming from the south, you can reach it via Elliotdale; turn off at the village of Qunu, 31km south of Mthatha. It is about 70km from Qunu to the hotel and the road is unsealed from Elliotdale. If you're coming from the north, turn off at Viedgesville, 20km south of Mthatha.

Bulungula Backpackers (☎ 047-577 8900, 083-391 5525; www.bulungula.com; camp sites per person/dm/d with shared bathroom R30/60/150; 🏠) has only been around a few years but has already gained legendary status on the Wild Coast for its stunning location, community-based activities and eco-friendly ethos. It's 40% owned by the local Xhosa community who

run all the tours including horse riding, hiking and canoeing trips. Guests are invited to help with community activities, including farming and teaching projects. At times the divide between the locals and guests is blurred – there are no fences or locked doors so local friends and neighbours are always stopping by for a chat. There's an overall mellow vibe about the place, but it does get raucous when a beach party is organised. (These are well away from the main camp so noise is not a problem for those who want to sleep.) Xhosa-style rondavels – painted in creative, sometimes psychedelic, colour schemes – serve as guest quarters. Ablution blocks include eco-friendly compost loos and 'rocket showers'.

The brain child behind Bulungula is Dave Martin, a South African who spent years searching the continent for the perfect place to set up a backpackers, and wound up right back in his own country.

Reaching this little slice of paradise requires some effort. (If you can get here on local transport you get to stay the first night free – there's a challenge!) Bulungula is 4km north of the Xora river mouth and around two hours drive from Coffee Bay. If you are coming in your own car it's essential to contact Bulungula in advance to get directions. Pick-ups can also be arranged.

Dwesa & Cwebe Nature Reserves

Nature lovers and ornithologists will appreciate both of these small reserves, which together take in about 6000 hectares of coastal land. Both have tracts of forest as well as good beaches and hiking trails. Some 290 species of birds have been identified. The reserves are separated by the Mbashe River. The only way to get to either reserve is with your own vehicle.

Dwesa Nature Reserve (bookings ☎ 047-499 0073; day visitors R10; 🕒 6am-6pm) is one of the most remote and beautiful reserves in South Africa, bounded by the Mbashe River in the north and the Nqabara River in the south. You may see the herd of eland come down to the beach near the Kobole estuary in the late afternoon. Other species present include buffalos and white rhinos. If you want to hike, you must take a ranger (R40 per day) with you.

To get to Dwesa, go to Willowvale and ask for directions there – the road has

many junctions, very few of which are signposted.

In **Cwebe Nature Reserve** (bookings ☎ 047-576 9443; day visitors R10; 🕒 6am-6pm), you can walk to the Mbanzana Falls or to the lagoon, where if you are lucky, you may see Cape clawless otters in the late afternoon. On the southern edge of the reserve near the Mbashe is a small cluster of white mangroves where crabs and mudskippers are found near the stems.

To get to Cwebe, take the Elliotdale (Xhora) turn-off from the N2 (about 40km southwest of Mthatha), then follow signs to the Haven hotel.

There is **self-catering accommodation** (2-bedroom bungalows R150) at Dwesa, and **camping** (camp sites R30) at both Cwebe and Dwesa.

COFFEE BAY

☎ 047 / pop 600

No one is sure how tiny Coffee Bay got its name, but there is a theory that a ship wrecked here in 1863 deposited its cargo of coffee beans on the beach. These days, this once remote hamlet is a backpacker's mecca, with two busy hostels and a couple of more upmarket hotels jostling for space in the village centre. In between, a few hopeful locals hover, trying to sell *dagga* (marijuana), curios and day trips.

Coffee Bay itself is a fairly scruffy place, but the surrounding scenery is dramatic, with a beautiful kilometre-long beach set in front of towering cliffs. The two backpacker hostels, Bomvu Paradise and the Coffee Shack, run all sorts of day trips, including **horse riding** (2hr treks about R150), **guided hikes** (from R50), **cultural visits** (from R60) and **surfing trips** (R60).

Sleeping & Eating

Competition is fierce for backpacker bucks in Coffee Bay. Since you've come all this way you might as well take a look at a couple of places before settling down. You can buy mussels, crayfish and other seafood from locals and there's a well-stocked grocery store.

Bomvu Paradise (☎ 047-575 2073; www.bomvubackpackers.com; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R30/65/160) This is the more hippified of the two backpackers in Coffee Bay. It's a soulful place, with yoga instruction, organic meals and drum sessions – it even has its own am-

phitheatre for locals and guests to convene for late-night jam sessions. If you don't have a drum, not to worry, the owner will show you how to make one. The dorms and rooms are rustic, comfortable and funky and the staff very efficient and friendly.

Coffee Shack (☎ 047-575 2048; www.coffeshack.co.za; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R40/70/200; 🏠) Just across the road from Bomvu, the Coffee Shack has a definite party vibe, with regular live local music in the evenings. This is an excellent place to learn to surf – owner David Malherbe was a surfing champion. There are dorms in the main block but the rondavels across the river offer a little more privacy. The ablutions on both sides are very good. Three-course dinners are available for R35, with free *potjiekos* on Sunday night. If you're coming from elsewhere on the Wild Coast, the hostel offers a shuttle service – the first pick-up is free.

Ocean View Hotel (☎ 047-575 2005; www.oceanview.co.za; s/d with half board R405/600, without sea views R351/520; 🏠) Ocean View has good-quality, bungalow-style rooms, with a deck overlooking the ocean. There is a restaurant (R80 set dinner) and seafood snacks are served in the bar in the evenings. Prices go up in high season.

Getting There & Away

If you're driving to Coffee Bay, take the sealed road that leaves the N2 at Viedgesville. When you reach Coffee Bay, you'll see the Coffee Bay Hotel on the right. A little further on is the backpackers' enclave. A minibus taxi from Mthatha to Coffee Bay costs R22 and takes one hour. The backpacker hostels meet the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) at the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mthatha.

AROUND COFFEE BAY

The walking around Coffee Bay is spectacular – one of the best walks is to the **Hole in the Wall**, a rock formation featuring an impressive natural hole that has been carved through the cliffs by the pounding of the ocean. The signposted turn-off to the Hole in the Wall is about 20km before Coffee Bay. There is also a direct unsealed road from Coffee Bay (about 8km).

Mdumbi Backpackers (☎ 047-575 0437, 073-810 7246; www.mdumbi.co.za; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R30/55/110) is a great place to get away

from it all. It's a rural backpackers in the grounds of a mission set in rolling hills next to a secluded beach. There are lots of water-based activities (the surf can be phenomenal here) and lots of opportunities to meet the local Xhosa people in a genuine setting. To get here, turn off the Coffee Bay road to Mdumbi and follow the signs.

About 8km south of Coffee Bay, the fenced-in **Hole in the Wall Hotel** (☎ 047-575 0009; <http://home.intekom.com/holeinthewall/>; s/d with half board R265/530; 🏠 🚿) has plain rooms and good-value, well-decorated self-catering cottages (R300 for a two-bedroom unit). The landmark after which the hotel is named is a 2km walk away. Prices go up sharply in the high season, when the hotel gets very busy with holidaying families. There's an unsealed road here from Coffee Bay.

The no-nonsense **Hole in the Wall Backpackers** (☎ 083-317 8786; holeitwh@iafrica.com; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R40/70/180; 🏠 🚿) is located in the Hole in the Wall Hotel complex, giving you access to all the amenities here. Facilities include use of the hotel's swimming pool and volleyball court, plus horse riding (R50 per hour). Meals are available at the hotel (breakfast R30, dinner R60).

COFFEE BAY TO PORT ST JOHNS

The route between Coffee Bay and Port St Johns takes in the **Hluleka and Silaka Nature Reserves** (☎ 043-742 4450; <http://reserves.wildcoast.org.za/rs/10.xml>), as well as Mpande village, home of the well-known Kraal Backpackers (below). It's a great route to walk, but there have been reports of ambushes and muggings along the way, so it may be best to take a local guide. See p283 for details.

Kraal Backpackers (☎ 082-871 4964; www.kraal-backpackers.co.za; camp sites/dm with shared bathroom R50/80) is a down-to-earth, eco-friendly backpackers that gets rave reviews from travellers. There is no electricity, no TV and no telephone – just peace, a friendly vibe and spectacular scenery on all sides. Nearby villagers look upon it as an extension of their community and come to sell fish and vegetables; visitors are welcome to go with them to their *shebeens* or visit the local *sangoma*. Hiking, horse riding, surfing and kayaking are all on offer. Meals (dinner R35 to R60) are available.

The turn-off to the Kraal is 70km from Mthatha and 20km from Port St Johns at

Tombo Stores. From here it's signposted all the way. It is a 30- to 40-minute drive on a rough road from the turn-off to Mpande, where the Kraal is situated. To get here by public transport, get to the Shell Ultra City in Mthatha, then take a minibus taxi (R30) from there – just say you want to go to the Kraal. It's best to ring ahead before turning up. The **Back 2 Back shuttle bus** (☎ 082-400 3335; back2back@absamail.co.za) from Port St Johns (p290) will also get you here.

Umgazi River Bungalows (☎ 047-564 1115; www.umgazi.co.za; s/d with full board R530/1060; 🏠 🚿) This very popular and relaxed resort is at the mouth of the Umgazi River, about 21km south of Port St Johns. Lots of activities are on offer, including canoeing through mangroves, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. There's no public transport to Umgazi. To get there in your own car from Port St Johns, take the Mthatha road for 10km to the Umgazi turn-off. Turn left, and travel 11km to the hotel.

Accommodation with locals is also possible at Mpande. Readers recommend **Mpande Huts** (per person R60), located about 300m past Kraal Backpackers. There is no sign outside, but they have accommodation in rondavels with separate toilet and shower block.

Accommodation in Hluleka Nature Reserve is in self-catering wooden chalets (R230) for up to six people. In Silaka, you can stay in thatched bungalows (R200). To book either, call the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 040-635 2115) in Bhisho. Bring all your own provisions. Silaka also has 15 comfortable huts (R316).

Hluleka Nature Reserve

The crashing of the ocean and the wind whipping through the evergreen forest make for soulful sounds in **Hluleka Nature Reserve** (☎ 047-575 0410; admission R10; 🕒 8am-5pm), located midway between Coffee Bay and Port St Johns. The reserve combines rocky seashore, lagoons, forestland and spectacular ocean views. Burchell's zebras, blesboks and blue wildebeests have all been introduced.

Accommodation in Hluleka Nature Reserve is in self-catering wooden chalets (R230) for up to six people. To book, call the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 040-635 2115) in Bhisho. Bring all your own provisions.

To get to the reserve, take the road from Mthatha to Port St Johns and turn right

at Libode, about 30km from Mthatha. The reserve is about 90km further on.

Silaka Nature Reserve

Silaka (☎ 047-564 1177; admission R5; 🕒 6am-6pm) shows off its grace with the subtle and sublime detail of its tide pools and rocky shoreline. This small reserve, 6.5km south of Port St Johns, runs from Second Beach to Sugarloaf Rock. Near the estuary, where the Gxwaleni flows into the sea, aloes grow down almost to the water. Clawless otters are often seen on the beach and white-breasted cormorants clamber up onto Bird Island. It's a magical place.

Accommodation in Silaka is in thatched bungalows (R200) or 15 comfortable huts (R316). As with Mthatha accommodation, call the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 040-635 2115) to book, and bring all your own provisions.

PORT ST JOHNS

☎ 047 / pop 2100

The deliciously laid-back Port St Johns is a magnet for hippy types both young and old. This idyllic little town on the coast at the mouth of the Umzimvubu River has tropical vegetation, dramatic cliffs, great beaches, no traffic jams and absolutely no stress. Many travellers, lulled by the clinking of wind chimes and the sound of the waves, succumb to the famous 'Pondo Fever' and stay for months.

Information

Island Backpackers Lodge (☎ 047-564 1958; www.theislandbackpackers.co.za; 4 Berea Rd; per min R1) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 047-564 1206; www.portstjohns.org.za/tourism.htm) Located at the top of the roundabout when you enter Port St Johns.

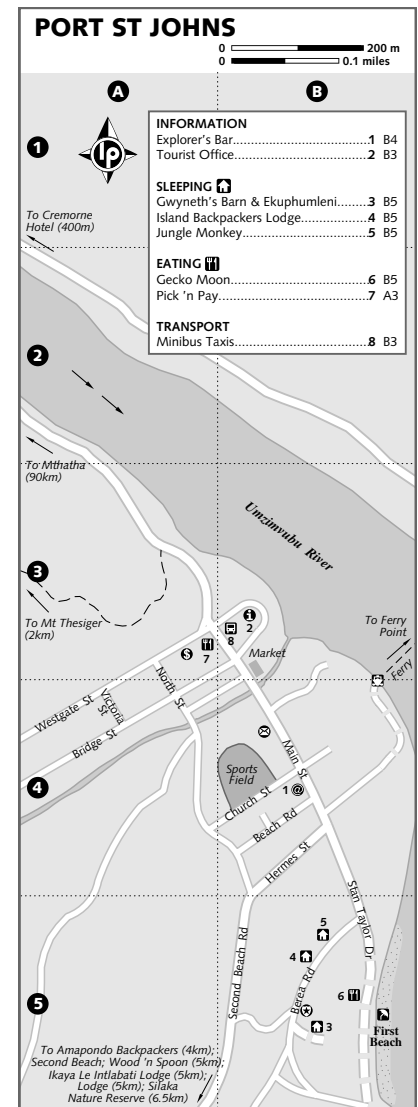
Sights

A favourite sunset spot is **Mt Thesiger**, a hill with one of the most spectacular views on the Wild Coast. On its top is a disused airstrip that nowadays makes a good place for a sundowner. It's on the banks of the Umzimvubu River, just west of the town centre.

Sleeping

The emphasis in Port St Johns is on backpackers' accommodation, but there are a few more upmarket options too.

Amapondo Backpackers (☎ 047-564 1344, 083-315 3103; www.amapondo.co.za; Second Beach Rd; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R45/75/180) Four kilometres from the town centre, this is a beautiful hostel with a great view of Port St Johns' idyllic Second Beach. The peaceful atmosphere is complemented by genuinely helpful staff, beautiful rooms and



holistic massage treatments. Activities at Amapondo include horse riding (R180 per day), boat trips, dive charters, canoeing and surfing – plus plenty of lying around in hammocks. Meals (breakfast R20 to R35, dinner R25 to R50) are available and the relaxed bar gets lively with locals and travellers at night.

Gwyneth's Barn & Ekuphumleni (☎/fax 047-564 1506; off Pussfoot Lane, First Beach; d with shared bathroom R220, 2-bedroom cottage R350-440) Ekuphumleni (meaning 'Place to Rest') is an adorable group of wooden self-catering rooms set among indigenous bushland. A raised walkway connects the cottages to a shared braai area, kitchenette and a dreamy outdoor shower. Each room is beautifully decorated, with scented candles and fluffy towels – the only drawback is that they're a bit close together. Accommodation is also available in the main house, Gwyneth's Barn, and in a two-bedroom cottage on the adjoining property. To get there follow the signs from Main St.

Island Backpackers Lodge (☎ 047-564 1958; www.theislandbackpackers.co.za; 4 Berea Rd; dm/d/tr with shared bathroom R70/180/225; 📶 🚿) During the day this hostel is an island in a sea of calm, but at night it comes alive as a popular Israeli restaurant (dishes R35 to R50) and night spot. There's an all-day deli selling Middle Eastern delights like hummus and falafels, prepared with organic ingredients. Island also has laundry service, movies, book swap and a splash pool.

Jungle Monkey (☎ 047-564 1517; junglemoney@iafrica.com; 2 Berea Rd; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R40/65/160; 📶 🚿) The sight of the swimming pool is enough to make most visitors drop their bags and move in straight away. It sports hippy-chic paintings on the walls, a garden full of hammocks and a bar with a billiards table in the garage. It offers hiking, horse riding (R150 per day) and special rates for long stays. There's a big camping area and a typically Port St Johns arty-crafty feel.

Ikaya Le Intlabati Lodge (☎ 047-569 1266; ikaya@telkomsa.net; Second Beach; s/d R140/180) A cute, somewhat neglected place just past the Wood 'n Spoon at Second Beach. It makes for a very quiet retreat and is good for animal lovers – the owner has a feisty crow named Jane, plus two boas and an iguana. Good quality crafts and clothing are also made here.

Lodge (☎ 564 1171, 076-134 7232; thelodge@ananzi.co.za; Second Beach; r with breakfast R400) Tucked behind Second Beach, the Lodge is a midrange option with well-appointed rooms and a very laid back atmosphere. You can order meals here, or eat at the nearby Wood 'n Spoon.

Cremorne Hotel (☎ 047-564 1113; www.cremorne.co.za; camp sites R50, cabins without bedding per person R90, s/d with breakfast R480/720; 📶 🚿) Clean, comfortable rooms and rustic fishermen's cabins are on offer at this friendly, family hotel, in a spectacular location over the ferry from town on the banks of the Umzimvubu River. There's a cosy pub and a restaurant. Four-bedroom self-catering cottages are also available (R480).

Eating

Most of the eating options are within the hostels and hotels themselves. For self-caterers there is a **Pick 'n Pay** (cnr Westgate & Main Sts), outside of which is a small street market where you might be able to buy fresh seafood – mussels, crayfish and fish – to cook your own meal.

Gecko Moon (☎ 047-564 8354; Stan Taylor Dr; mains R35-65; lunch & dinner) This snazzy and popular restaurant serves about 20 types of pizza, plus pan fried mussels, shrimp and grilled chicken. It also has a few rooms (s/d with breakfast R295/480) behind it. They're very funky decorated, but a little hot in summer. There's a craft studio here, too.

Wood 'n Spoon (☎ 047-564 8202; Second Beach; mains R35-80; 📶 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) This is a wonderfully rustic and laid-back restaurant in a fantastic location right by Second Beach, around 5km from town. The funky 'salvage' décor perfectly complements the friendly service and imaginative menu, which includes a few Swiss specialities such as alpe macaroni and cheese fondue, plus lots of fresh seafood.

Getting There & Away

Most backpacker places will pick you up from the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mthatha (where the Baz Bus stops) for around R45, but it's essential to book ahead (and turn up when you've booked). There are also regular minibus taxis to Port St Johns from here (R30, two hours) that drop you at the roundabout.

The **Back 2 Back Shuttle** (☎ 082-400 3335; thisandthat@telkomsa.net) is a private transportation

service catering primarily to hikers who need drop-offs and pick-ups. They also have a handy airport shuttle that makes runs to the airports in Mthatha and East London. Back 2 Back also has guided tours around the Port St Johns area; these include horse rides, canoe trips, village tours and meals with local families.

If you're driving from Port Edward, there is a good sealed road to Lusikisiki and then 17km of dirt road; watch out for maniacal drivers on blind corners. The road from Mthatha to Port St Johns is sealed.

PONDOLAND

On the 110km stretch of coast between Port St Johns and the Umtamvuna River lies some of the biologically richest landscape in the whole region. It's the future site of the Wild Coast National Park and possible mining interests (see below).

North of the Kokstad corridor is an isolated tract of Eastern Cape created by apart-

heid area land policies, with Umzimkulu as its main centre.

Mkambati Nature Reserve (☎ 039-306 9000; http://reserves.wildcoast.org.za/rs; admission R10; 📶 6am-6pm) encompasses expanses of grassland, dotted with forest and flanked by the Msikaba and Mtentu River Gorges. In future years, environmentalists hope that it will be the centrepiece of the 'Wild Coast National Park', if that project gets off the ground.

Mkambati's great scenery is a haven for a spectacular variety of birds, including trumpeter hornbills and African fish eagles. Animal species include elands and red hartebeests.

There are canoe and walking trails, or you can hire the park's own open vehicle and guide for a wildlife drive. A shop sells basic food. **Self-catering units** (☎ 039-727 3124; 10-bed lodges R550, cottages per person R70) are available. You get there from Flagstaff, which is 65km south of the N2. Take the turn-off just north of Flagstaff to Holy Cross Hospital.

THE BATTLE FOR PONDOLAND

In September 2005 the government of South Africa approved long-standing plans to create a national park in Pondoland. If and when the park opens it will save rainforest, sensitive animal habitat and important archaeology sites. The heart of the 'Wild Coast National Park' will rest on what is currently the Mkambati Nature Reserve. The decision, however, is not without controversy.

While environmentalists can claim a victory over the establishment of a new national park, many allege that the government is merely trying to throw them a bone while it allows investors to swarm around the park boundaries, laying toll roads and mining the coastal sand dunes. Even when the decision to create the park was announced, government officials could not reply when asked about the boundaries of the park, leading many to believe that the 'Wild Coast National Park' is merely a smokescreen and that the best parts of Pondoland will be sold off piecemeal.

The major attraction for investors is the mineral-heavy sand-dune mine at Xolobeni, eyed by Australian mining company Mineral Commodities (MRC). Of course, MRC would also need a road to haul out the sand to its proposed smelter in Coega.

With or without the mine, the government still wants a road built through Pondoland. The proposed highway is part of a major scheme to upgrade and change the course of the N2. The new N2 toll road between Durban and East London will shave 80km off the route, but carries a R6 billion price tag, offset by tolls topping R150 per vehicle.

The future of the road is still under heavy debate between local assemblies and interest groups, but if the government wins approval the N2 will alter the face of the Wild Coast. The section most affected would be Pondoland, which would need a new highway cutting through virgin landscape. Three huge suspension bridges are planned to span the breathtaking gorges – the one across the Mtetu gorge will be the longest in the world.

Environmentalists warn that the road will lead to high impact tourism that will destroy the last tract of untouched wilderness on South Africa's Indian Ocean coast. Instead they propose a 'biosphere' around the new national park that will be available for low-intensity agriculture.

For now, Pondoland sits undisturbed, its rushing waterfalls still flowing towards the sea and its wildlife still roaming without hindrance. But if you have any plans to visit the area, better make it sooner rather than later.

There are also buses running from Port St Johns to Msikaba, on the southern edge of the reserve.

The only hotel in this area is the glitzy and over-the-top **Wild Coast Sun Casino & Country Club** (☎ 039-305 9111; www.casinocity.com/za/wildcoast/sawild; r from R1400; 📶). It's reached from the Kokstad region via Bizana on Rte 61. If coming from Durban, turn off the N2 at Port Shepstone and follow Rte 61 (there are numerous signs along the way).

If this isn't really your style, you could opt for a tented camp or a village homestay on one of the trips operated by Wild Coast Trails (see p283).

MTHATHA

☎ 047 / pop 79,000

After dulling your senses on some idyllic stretch of the Wild Coast, chaotic Mthatha might come as a shock to the system. It's a scruffy, lively place with a fearsome but probably exaggerated reputation for crime. Commonsense precautions apply – don't carry your valuables in obvious places, and stay out of the city centre after dark.

The town was originally founded in 1871, when Europeans settled on the Mthatha River at the request of the Thembu tribe to act as a buffer against Pondo raiders. During the apartheid era it became the capital of the Transkei, the largest of the black 'homelands'.

The area around Mthatha is now famed as the early childhood home of Nelson Mandela. The first president of free South Africa was born in the village of **Mveso** on the Mbashe River, but he spent most of his childhood at **Qunu**, 31km south of Mthatha. A museum that incorporates both these areas has been built to commemorate the man who became the symbol of freedom and reconciliation for the new South Africa (see opposite).

Information

Dot Com Solutions (☎ 5047-32 2572; 45 Nelson Mandela Dr; per hr R25; 🕒 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Eastern Cape Tourism (☎ 047-531 5290/2; www.ectourism.co.za; 64 Owen St; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Provides maps and basic travel info.

MANDELA'S LEGACY

The Nelson Mandela Museum project, located in the heart of the Transkei where he grew up, was opened officially 10 years to the day after he was released from prison in February 1990. With characteristic humility, Mandela insisted that the museum not simply be a celebration of his own achievements but that it serve the whole community. The museum thus has three components – the Mandela Museum in Mthatha, a cultural and youth centre in Qunu, the village where he grew up, and a memorial near the remains of his family homestead in Mveso. It's the first museum ever to be built to a living person.

The **Nelson Mandela Museum** (☎ 047-532 5110; www.mandelamuseum.org.za; Bunga Bldg, Owen St, Mthatha; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) contains the honours and gifts given to the former president, from schoolchildren's artwork to presents from world leaders and celebrities. There's also a multimedia exhibition that encapsulates Mandela's role in the liberation of South Africa.

The **Nelson Mandela Youth Heritage Centre** is in Qunu, 34km away, close to the ex-president's own house (modelled on the bungalow in Victor Verster prison in which he spent his last few weeks of imprisonment). Cultural displays and workshops are held at this venue – ask at the museum in Mthatha for the latest events.

The **Nelson Mandela Monument**, the final component of the museum, is well off the beaten track in the small village of Mveso. It's a simple concrete structure adorned with photographs of Mandela. Follow the signposted route off the N2 between East London and Mthatha.

For more information about Nelson Mandela and his part in the reconciliation of the South African nation, see p46.

First National Bank (cnr Sutherland St & York Rd) Has an ATM.

Sights

The highlight of any trip to Mthatha is the **Nelson Mandela Museum** (☎ 047-532 5110; www.mandelamuseum.org.za; Bunga Bldg, Owen St; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat), which charts the inspirational life of South Africa's former president.

Nduli Nature Reserve (☎ 047-531 1191) is in a valley 3km south of Mthatha, while **Luchaba Nature Reserve** (☎ 047-531 1191) is on the Mthatha Dam, next to the water-sports area. Both reserves have zebras, wildebeest and antelope species, as well as many species of wetland birds.

Sleeping

There's a complete dearth of decent budget accommodation in Mthatha, so if you find yourself needing to stay the night here, be prepared to fork out.

Blues Ally (☎ 047-531 5047, 073-496 8496; stellah@telkomsa.net; 80 Stanford Terrace; r per person R350; 📶) This new kid on the block offers immaculate rooms with TV, an attached bathroom and a nice backyard with a swimming pool and braai. It's near the junction of Stanford Tce and Nelson Mandela Dr.

Herrington House (☎ 047-532 5692; herrington@telkomsa.net; 46 Vukutu St; s/d with half board R390/420) This is a good option 2km from the centre – a smart B&B with a big restaurant and bar, and satellite TV in every room. Ring ahead and staff will pick you up from the bus at Ultra City.

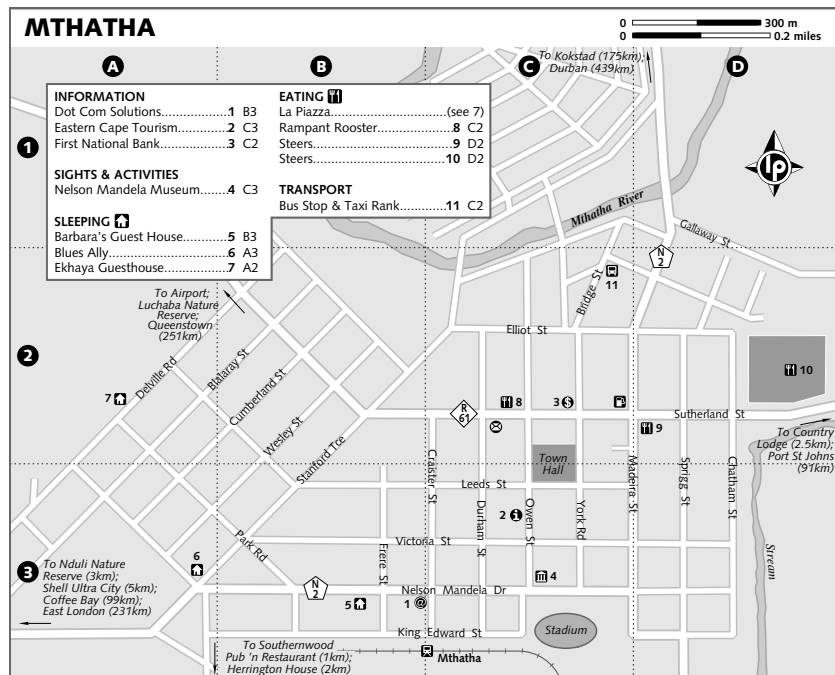
Ekhaya Guesthouse (☎ 072-432 7244; fax 532 4007; 36 Delville Rd; s/d with breakfast R475/627) This is a smart new place on the edge of the golf course. There's a pretty garden with a braai area and modern rooms with TV.

Barbara's Guest House (☎ 047-531 1751; barbp@cybertrade.co.za; 55 Nelson Mandela Dr; s/d with half board R400/570) This motel style place is faded and fairly depressing-looking, but it's conveniently easy to find and the meals are surprisingly good.

Country Lodge (☎ 047-532 5730, 047-501 2812; cldodge@wildcoast.co.biz; Port St Johns Rd; s/d R332/504) Situated just 2.5km out of town on the Port St Johns road, this lodge is a great relief after Mthatha's urban hustle, with chickens and guinea fowl pecking peacefully around in the shady garden. Breakfast (R40) and dinner (à la carte) are available.

Eating

La Piazza (☎ 5047-31 0795; 36 Delville Rd; mains R22-32; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This no-nonsense



restaurant in the Mthatha Country Club serves a decent range of pizza, pasta, salads and chops. It does room service for the Ek-haya Guesthouse.

Southernwood Pub 'n Restaurant (☎ 047-532 6336; Pick 'n Pay Complex, Southernwood; mains R20-60; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Another reasonable option is this straightforward pizza and seafood joint. It is just outside the town centre.

Rampant Rooster (☎ 047-531 0311; 92 Sutherland St; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Downtown choices are limited but you could try a plate of chicken at this place, located on the western end of Sutherland St.

There are two branches of Steers on Sutherland St.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Mthatha's Mantanzima airport is 17km from the city. **SA Airlink** (☎ 047-536 0024) has daily services to Jo'burg (R1600).

BUS

Translux (www.translux.co.za) offers a daily service from Cape Town (R350, 17 hours) to Mthatha.

Greyhound (☎ 047-531 0603; www.greyhound.co.za) stops in Mthatha on its daily run between Durban (R210, six hours) and Cape Town (R410, 20 hours). Local bus company DMJ Transport is reputedly much faster and cheaper than either of the above (Mthatha to Cape Town R220, 13 hours) – inquire at the downtown bus stop and taxi rank.

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) passes through Mthatha on its Port Elizabeth–Durban run Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; it runs in the other direction Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday.

Translux, Greyhound and the Baz Bus stop at the Shell Ultra City, which is the pick-up point for backpacker shuttles heading to the coast.

MINIBUS TAXI

Minibus taxis in Mthatha depart from both Shell Ultra City and the main bus stop and taxi rank near Bridge St. Destinations include Port St Johns or the Kraal backpackers (R35), Coffee Bay (R30) and East London (R80).

NORTH-EASTERN HIGHLANDS

Roughly comprising the out-of-the-way area that stretches from the lush valleys of the Wild Coast to the sharply ascending peaks of Lesotho, the North-Eastern Highlands area enjoys the best of both worlds: stunning scenery and tourist scarcity. Summer brings excellent hiking and fishing, while snowfalls in winter provide the opportunity to ski (albeit on mostly artificial pistes). Watch out for harsh weather conditions in the high passes at all times of the year. In the more remote parts, you'll need your own vehicle.

QUEENSTOWN

☎ 045 / pop 80,000

Queenstown acts largely as a commercial centre and base for exploring the surrounding area. The town itself, nondescript and rather dull, was established in 1847 and laid out in the shape of a hexagon for defence purposes. This pattern enabled defenders to shoot down the streets from a central point.

The **Chris Hani Area Regional Tourism Office** (☎ 045-839 2265; sarto@eci.co.za; Shop 14, the Mall; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12pm Sat) is in the Pick 'n Pay complex.

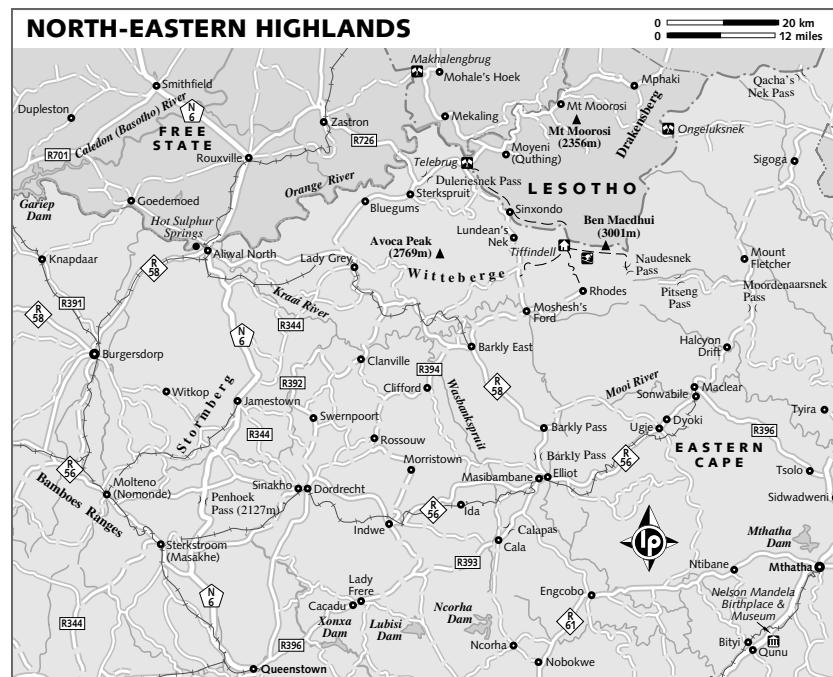
Sleeping & Eating

Alisa Cottage (☎ /fax 045-839 2761; 37 Haig Ave; s/d with breakfast R140/220; 🍴) The best place to stay in town is the extremely good-value Alisa Cottage. Each room is a flat, with a sitting area, small kitchen and TV.

Conifer Place (☎ 082-926 6584; 42 Livingston Rd; s/d with breakfast R220/310) This relatively new guesthouse offers five neat en-suite rooms, all with separate entrances.

De Oude Werf (☎ 045-838 5702; 65 Berry St; s/d R265/350) A charming old-style Karoo cottage is the setting for this quiet and cosy guesthouse. There's a hearty optional country breakfast for R35.

Black Swan (☎ 045-839 7475; cnr Grey St & Ebdon Sts; mains R30-50; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Still one of the best eating spots in town, this restaurant has a nicely decorated interior and a good menu featuring fish, pasta and a few vegetarian dishes.



Getting There & Away

Queenstown is the hub for all transport in and out of the Highlands.

Greyhound (www.greyhound.co.za) passes through Queenstown on the Jo'burg/Pretoria to Port Elizabeth run (Port Elizabeth R150, 5½ hours; Jo'burg R260, 9½ hours). All buses stop at the Shell Ultra City (Cathcart St) petrol station. Greyhound buses also run from Queenstown to Aliwal North (R110, two hours). **Translux** (www.translux.co.za) runs daily to Cape Town (R230, 13 hours).

City to City (☎ 011-773 2762) buses have daily services to Jo'burg/Pretoria (R100). Another daily City to City bus runs from Jo'burg to Idutywa via Queenstown (R90).

From the **minibus taxi rank** (cnr Victoria & Komani Sts) you can travel to Cathcart (R15), Stutterheim (R20), King William's Town (R40) and East London (R80).

ELLIOT

☎ 045 / pop 17,500

Elliot marks the start of the Maloti Route, which takes in a particularly scenic region southeast of Barkly East. Otherwise, the

town is rather derelict so there's nothing to keep you hanging around, particularly at night.

On Denorbin farm, near Barkly Pass between Barkly East and Elliot, are some well-preserved examples of **San rock art**. At 32m in length, this is the longest gallery of San paintings in South Africa. It depicts shamans entering a trancelike state while dancing. The rock paintings can be viewed by prior arrangement. Call **Gavin Small** (☎ 045-971 9052).

If you arrive late and need to overnight it, head to the **Merino Hotel** (☎ 045-931 2987; greg@imagineit.co.za; Maclear Rd; s/d with breakfast R200/320). It looks forbidding from the outside, but the managers are friendly and will either check you in or recommend other accommodation.

RHODES

☎ 045

Grassy, gorgeous Rhodes began life as a *namaal* (communion) town, where churchgoers from the surrounding area would regularly convene. Their original homes,

along with ancient farm machinery, survive in what is a heavenly place: the top (in all senses of the world) place to visit in the Highlands and what locals jokingly refer to as 'the centre of the universe'.

There's an ATM (small amounts only) at the Rhodes Hotel shop, and Walkerbouts Inn accepts credit cards, but try to arrive with sufficient cash.

Tiffindell (2800m), about 23km up a mountain pass (4WD only) from Rhodes, is a purpose-built winter sports resort. Its snow-making facilities mean that a season of 95 days (late May to mid-August) is possible here. With only 1.5km of piste on a good day, this is perfect for beginners or those flexing their muscles for European slopes. It is of course very popular with those who prefer to spend their time enjoying an après-ski or two in South Africa's highest pub, Ice Station 2720 (elevation: 2720m).

The **Ben Macdhui Hiking Trail** (☎ 045-974 9305; 3-night trail with accommodation per person R200) is not too steep for the Drakensberg range, but parts of the route run over rough terrain; it's a three-day hike including accommodation in a cottage, on a guest farm and in a hiker's hut. There is also the option of staying a fourth night and going to Tiffindell.

This is considered one of South Africa's best hikes (especially at these prices), climbing all the way to the Ben Macdhui peak – at 3001m it's the highest point in the Western and Eastern Cape. Inquire at the Rhodes Hotel for more details. Mountain bikers arrive every October for the 84km **Rhodes Mountain Bike Challenge** (☎ 045-974 9290), while crazy joggers converge in July for the **Rhodes Ultra Marathon**, 52km of scenic torture up Naude's Nek. If you're into fishing, visit the **Linecasters Flyshop** (☎ 045-974 9298), where expert fly fisherman Fred Steynberg will set you up with equipment for fishing in summer and hunting in winter.

Sleeping & Eating

Rhodes Campsite & Caravan Park (☎ 045-974 9290; camp sites R40) The village camp site is in a great spot under shady trees right in the middle of the village. Inquire at Walkerbouts Inn for the key.

Rhodes Hotel (☎ 045-974 9305; www.rhodesvillage.co.za; s/d with full board R330/660, self-catering cottages per person from R105) Rhodes' only hotel is a charming establishment that looks

very much as it would have a century ago. Rooms are comfy, with wooden floors and antique furniture. The hotel, built in the 1880s, also has a couple of self-catering cottages to rent and there's a restaurant (mains R50). Horse riding, tennis and volleyball are on offer here, too.

Walkerbouts Inn (☎ 9045-74 9290; www.walkerbouts.co.za; per person with full board R350) Walkerbouts is a cosy guesthouse with a convivial bar and hearty country breakfasts. Try the moreish home-brewed beer, or the infamous 'Fall About Stout'. Genial host Dave Walker is a mine of information on everything and anything in the area. Meals are available in the evenings; nonresidents will need to book.

Tiffindell Ski Resort (☎ 011-787 9090, 045-974 9005/4/8; www.snow.co.za; 4-bed chalets in summer R350, 3-night winter ski packages per person from R2000) The resort's winter package price includes ski-lift charges, equipment hire, emergency medical facilities and meals in the restaurant. Summer activities include mountain biking, horse riding, grass skiing and rock climbing.

There are numerous self-catering cottages (www.highlandinfo.co.za; per person without/with electricity R120/150) in the village centre, which can be rented through the Walkerbouts Inn. Book early in high season, and wrap up warm in winter – some of the cottages have only gas stoves. There are three brief high seasons throughout the year: from 1 December to 15 January; 15 March to 30 April; and 25 May to 31 August.

Getting There & Away

The road to Rhodes from Barkly East, through the exquisite Mosheshes Ford, is rough but fine for 2WD cars (60km, 1½ hours), but don't attempt the route from Maclear unless you have a 4WD, and ring ahead to check weather conditions. The road to Tiffindell is now 2WD friendly, but Walkerbouts Inn does organise a shuttle (R115 return) – call for details.

BARKLY EAST

☎ 045 / pop 7500

On Rte 58, this town with its scenic and mountainous location bills itself as the 'Switzerland of South Africa'. In reality, however, it has little magic in comparison with Rhodes, a tiring but worthwhile 60km

away. The **Magic Moments** (☎ 082-499 2388; 5 Molteno St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) craft shop can help with tourist information and occasionally has Internet access. For more information on activities in the area, visit www.wartrail.co.za.

The **trout fishing** near Barkly East is reputedly some of the best in the country. Anglers should contact the **Wild Trout Association** (☎ 045-974 9290; www.wildtrout.co.za).

Barkly East Caravan Park (☎ 045-971 0123/0299; Victoria Park; camp sites per tent R40) has clean toilets and pleasant sites. Follow the signs from Cole St, the main street running through town.

On the edge of the town near the road to Lady Grey, the olde-worlde **Old Mill Inn** (☎ 045-971 0277; fax 045-971 0972; cnr White & De Smidt Sts; s/d R190/350) has charming, good-value Victorian-style rooms, a bar and a restaurant (mains R30 to R80). It can also help with tourist info.

LADY GREY

☎ 051

A tree-lined road leads you into the village of Lady Grey, a sleepy town whose setup is nondescript but whose setting, the dramatic Witteberge mountain range, is anything but. Stop for a waffle and discover what the town has to offer at the **At Home Coffee Shop** (☎ 051-603 0176; Martin St; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat), which provides tourist information.

There's excellent fishing, bird-watching and hiking in the area, and each Easter local thespians put on a three-day **Passion Play**, the largest of its kind in Africa.

Late November sees the annual **Sky Run**, an extreme mountain-top run all the way to Tiffindell. The run starts at the friendly **Mountain View Country Inn** (☎ 051-603 0421; mountainview@ladygrey.co.za; 36 Botha St; s/d with breakfast R250/460); call for entry details.

The private nature reserve **ammergeier Adventure Trails** (☎ 051-603 1114; www.adventuretrails.co.za; cottages per person R155, with full board R400), halfway between Lady Grey and Barkly East, features spectacular scenery and a range of ways to enjoy it, from quad biking to 4WD safaris to fly-fishing. There are also several multiday circular hiking trails to choose from.

Baggers & Packers (☎ 051-603 0346; 35 Heut St; joh andp@telkomsa.net; camp sites/dm/d with shared bathroom R45/60/140) is a hikers' guesthouse in a

former mission church. It's charmingly crumbling and a bit eccentric, with higgledy-piggledy rooms in various outhouses in the garden.

The very pretty and well-kept **Comfrey Cottage** (☎ 051-603 0407; www.comfreycottage.co.za; 51-59 Stephenson St; s/d R195/380, with half board R320/640) is actually a set of cottages situated around a parklike garden right at the foot of the mountains. Ask here about the geological and botanical tours of the area conducted by local expert George Freeme.

City to City (☎ 011-773 2762) buses leave Jo'burg travelling to Lady Grey (R80) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8am; there is also a Friday service at 7pm.

ALIWAL NORTH

☎ 051 / pop 28,500

Aliwal North, on the border between the Free State and Eastern Cape, was in the early 20th century a major tourist drawcard, as visitors flocked here to enjoy its thermal spa. Evidence of this heyday remains somewhat circumstantial, and Aliwal North is today an obscure and somewhat tatty (if rather friendly) town. The original **spa complex** (admission R15; ☎ 6am-10pm) has dwindled to a few grubby swimming pools, but the countryside around the town is still ravishing. Contact the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 051-633 3567; www.ectourism.co.za; 97 Somerset St) for information.

At the southern end of town is a **Boer Concentration Camp Memorial** dedicated to the 700-plus Afrikaners who died in the British-run camp.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of places to stay near the spa, but the best options are outside the (poorly signposted) town centre.

Conville (☎ 051-633 2203; www.conville-farm.com; s/d with breakfast R180/320) This exquisite, stately 1906 farmhouse designed by famed architect Sir Herbert Baker is like a living museum. It sits in stunning gardens overlooking a lake just outside town, and inside it's all rather grand, with brass beds and antique furniture.

Toll Inn (☎ 051-634 1541; tolherberg@xsinet.co.za; Rte 58, off Lady Grey St; s/d with breakfast R305/480, self-catering units s/d R260/390) A shame it's so near the road, but this former government toll station still makes a charming B&B, with smart

rooms with TV and kitchenette in converted stables. Self-catering units are also available. Look out for signposting off Rte 58; the entrance is via the historic Sauer Bridge.

Queen's Terrace (☎ 082-262 0131; nff@xsinet.co.za; cnr Smith St & Queen's Tce; s/d with breakfast R300/400) One of the town centre's best B&B options, with stylishly appointed rooms each with its own theme. Try to get a room off the main road. There is also a family room that sleeps four (R600).

Riverside Pub 'n Grill (☎ 051-633 3282; 1 Aliwal St; mains R40-50; ☎ lunch & dinner) Located on the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River; the terrace at this restaurant is a good place for evening drinks.

Welgemoed Chalets (☎ 051-633 2692; cnr Dun-can & Dirkie Uys Sts; 4-/6-person chalets R220/260) This

place is the best of the options near the spa, with self-catering chalets and a communal braai area.

Pink Lady Steakhouse (☎ 051-684 2189; 14 Dan Pienaar Ave; mains R45-55; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) A local favourite, offering no-nonsense meals.

Getting There & Away

A daily **City to City** (☎ 011-773 2762) bus stops here on the Jo'burg–Idutywa (via Queens-town) run.

Translux (www.translux.co.za), **Greyhound** (www.greyhound.co.za) and **Intercape** (www.intercape.co.za) services stop at Nobby's Restaurant (on the N6), near the junction with the Rte 58. City to City buses stop at the Balmoral Hotel.

The **minibus taxi rank** (Grey St) is near the corner of Somerset St.