

# New South Wales



Brassy, bold, stately and old, New South Wales (NSW) hogs the lion's share of Australia's population, and it's where the country's modern society was birthed. It's the most eclectic state and one of great contrasts; from the glitz of Sydney's uberstyle bars and heart-breaking harbour, to the lunar landscapes in the south's big empty. History echoes in the sandstone edifices and gracious old pubs speckled throughout small country towns, and alternative lifestyles lure New Age neophytes in the beguiling hinterland of the far north coast. Ski bunnies hit the slopes in the Snowy Mountains and surfers carve up the shoreline.

Mighty rivers quench the state's dusty pockets and mighty mountains touch the sky. At the top of the Great Dividing Range, the misty rainforests of Washpool National Park are World Heritage listed. Gastronomes conquer appetites and vineyards in the Hunter Valley (although the latter is sometimes the victor). For every traveller, the journey is easy; family road trips are an institution on NSW highways, couples lose themselves in romantic hiding spots, backpackers do the coastal hop, and retirees tack caravans to their nether regions and take the slow route to wherever.

Naturally, with such a geographical playground to explore, NSW is ideal for mainlining adrenaline – take your pick from canyoning, skiing, surfing, bushwalking, cycling, whale watching and even goanna pulling (not what it seems). And beneath all of this majestic landscape and its smorgasbord of activities is a bite-you-on-the-bum cockiness tempered by larrikin smiles and warm hospitality.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the glitz, glamour and geography of **Sydney** (p91)
- Chart a slow and scenic drive along New England's **Waterfall Way** (p210)
- Taste the New Age surf culture and organic lifestyle of **Byron Bay** (p194)
- Experience the big empty and Aboriginal culture in **Mungo National Park** (p262)
- Play with fur seals and little penguins on **Montague Island** (p236) and dive at **Jervis Bay** (p233)
- Ski, horse ride and bushwalk the summits of **Kosciuszko National Park** (p241)
- Treat the eyes and senses to a holiday in the dramatic **Blue Mountains** (p145)
- Scoot yer boots and enjoy country hospitality in **Tamworth** (p206)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

■ POPULATION: 6.817 MILLION

■ AREA: 809,444

## HISTORY

When Lieutenant (later Captain) James Cook stumbled across Australia he sailed up the east coast, landed at Botany Bay and named the area New South Wales (it's actually a mystery as to why Cook chose this appellation, although the general assumption is that the area must have reminded him of Wales, despite the lack of leeks and male-voice choirs). Cook was met warily by the local people when he went ashore; as he noted in his journal, 'All they seemed to want was for us to be gone'.

But in 1788 the English were back to stay. Under the command of naval Captain Arthur Phillip, the motley 'First Fleet' numbered 751 ragtag convicts and children, and around 250 soldiers, officials and their wives. The date of the landing was 26 January, an occasion that is celebrated each year as a public holiday, known as Australia Day. The fact that a national holiday commemorates the arrival of a party of prisoners may seem inglorious – but it helps explain both the egalitarianism and the sense of irony that sometimes accompany expressions of nationalism in Australia.

By the early 1800s Sydney was a bustling port. A space in the bush had been cleared for vegetable gardens, new houses, warehouses and streets – and windmills seemed to occupy the top of every hill. In 1809 the British government dispatched Governor Macquarie to enforce the rule of law, and he transformed Sydney into a well-planned colony, graced by fine civic architecture.

By the 1830s the general layout of NSW was understood, and the Blue Mountains had been

penetrated. In addition the Lachlan, Macquarie, Murrumbidgee and Darling Rivers had been explored.

Over the next 60 or so years, the rapid expansion of the NSW economy resulted in good wages, social mobility and increasingly strong unions; all of which fed the belief that Australia might become 'the working man's paradise'. But employers were anxious to keep wage costs low, and the appeal of cheap Asian or Islander labour was irresistible. Immigration was encouraged, and against this background, popular Sydney magazine the *Bulletin* (founded in 1880) began to champion a version of Australian nationalism which was working class, male, white and republican, a laconic, unintellectual but resourceful bushman who was independent, contemptuous of authority and loyal to his mates.

On 1 January 1901, NSW and the other colonies federated to form the nation of Australia, which remained part of the British Empire. In 1914, as citizens of the Empire, thousands of Australian men volunteered to fight in the Australian Imperial Force when WWI broke out. They did the same again during WWII, after which the Australian government embarked on a massive immigration program, attracting migrants from Britain and mainland Europe. These 'new Australians' had a huge impact on NSW, especially in the irrigation farms of the Riverina, in the building of the great Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme, in the large industrial centres and in Sydney itself. By the 1970s Australia had abolished its old policies of racial

### NSW FACTS

**Eat** Seafood, seafood, seafood – from Sydney rock oysters to Yamba king prawns. Plus organic goodies from the North Coast

**Drink** Shiraz and unwooded Semillons from the Hunter Valley, James Squire amber ale and Blue Tongue Spring Cream Ale

**Read** *Cooking with Sky Prawns* by Edward Joshua and Chris Carr, a cookbook that aims to ease NSW's locust plague via consumption (it claims the insects are more nutritious than beef)

**Listen to** 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 by Midnight Oil, *Chisel* by Cold Chisel, *Highly Evolved* by the Vines and *Young Modern* by Silverchair

**Watch** *Puberty Blues* (1981), *Two Hands* (1999), *Lantana* (2001), *Little Fish* (2005)

**Avoid** Funnel-web spiders

**Locals' nickname** Sin City (Sydney, p91)

**Swim at** Palm Beach (p112) for quiet, and cheeky views; Byron Bay (p194) for the surf and space

**Strangest festival** The Australian Goanna Pulling Championships (p190)

**Tackiest tourist attractions** The Big Prawn (p193)

### ABORIGINAL NSW

On the beaches and rocky outcrops of Sydney Harbour, the Eora people and their neighbours hunted and fished for thousands of years. A person travelling around the harbour in Aboriginal times would have encountered several different peoples. Each group maintained their own distinct beliefs or 'Dreaming'. And each spoke their own language – including Dharug, Tharawal, Gundungurra and Kuring-gai. That linguistic diversity was found across NSW – indeed across the entire continent.

The Aborigines' world was challenged on 19 April 1770, when Lieutenant James Cook of the British Navy sailed into Botany Bay. The story goes that he passed four Aboriginal men spearing fish from a canoe who took no notice of the alien ship. Cook, his head filled with notions of 'noble savages', was respectful towards the indigenous population and later reported back on their peaceable nature.

However, when Captain Phillip's penal settlement came to town, kidnappings and punishment became the norm, with the explicit aim of terrifying Aborigines into submission. Smallpox, introduced by the invaders, also decimated the local population, who had no resistance to such a disease. But there was resistance in other forms: Aboriginal freedom-fighting groups began to spring up, led by storied indigenous figures including Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Mosquito, a warrior from a Broken Bay people. The freedom fighters were eventually crushed, as the settlers resorted to ever more barbaric methods to achieve total domination.

There were somewhere between 500,000 and one million Aboriginal peoples in Australia before the British arrived, and more than 250 regional languages. Sydney Cove had an indigenous population of around 3000, using three main languages encompassing several dialects and subgroups. Kuring-gai (derived from the nomenclature 'Koori') was generally spoken on the northern shore, Tharawal along the coast south of Botany Bay, and Dharug and its dialects near the Blue Mountains.

Quite a few words from NSW Aboriginal language are still in common usage in Australian English, including galah, kookaburra, dingo, koala, wallaby and billabong.

Today there are an estimated 135,400 Aboriginal people in NSW, and the Sydney region is estimated to have over 30,000 indigenous inhabitants, mostly descended from migratory inland peoples.

NSW is littered with opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of indigenous culture and heritage.

Aboriginal rock art and engravings can be seen in Bondi (p110), Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park (p142), the Blue Mountains (p147) and in Brisbane Water National Park (p155), near Gosford.

The NSW outback has many sites of Aboriginal heritage, including Mt Gunderbooka (p255), and the wonderful Mt Grenfell Historic Site (p257).

There are many acclaimed galleries focussing on Aboriginal art in Sydney (p134) and Broken Hill (p259).

But the best way to experience indigenous culture is at a cultural centre. Trips to the Muru Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural Centre (p148) in Penrith, the Aboriginal Cultural Centre & Keeping Place (p209) in Armidale, and the Umbarra Cultural Centre (p236) near Bermagui will provide a deeper appreciation of the way the traditional custodians of those areas used the land, and of their life and heritage.

There are also highly recommended Aboriginal tours throughout the state listed under individual towns and parks in this chapter.

For more information, go to [www.visitsw.com.au](http://www.visitsw.com.au) and follow the links to Aboriginal Culture under Activities and Attractions.

discrimination and declared itself to be a multicultural country.

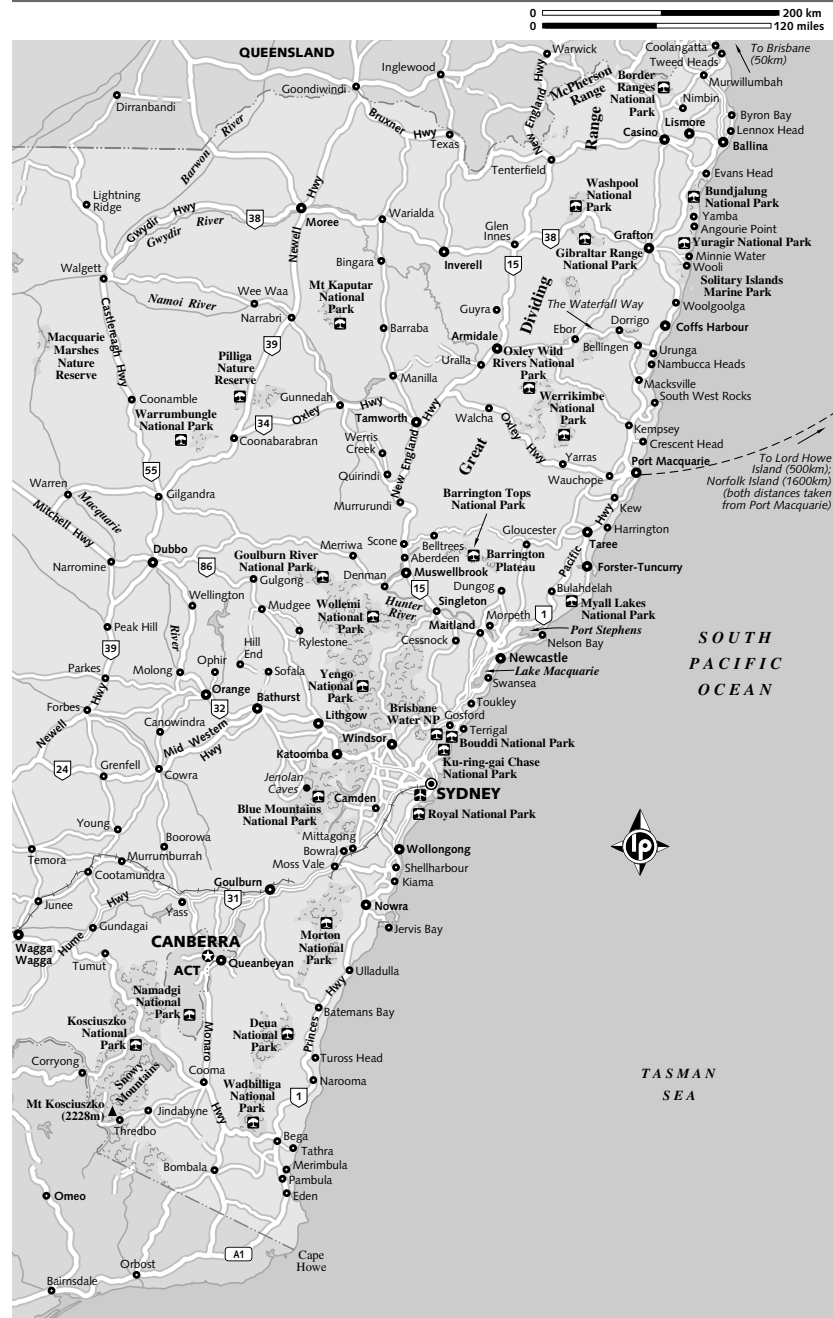
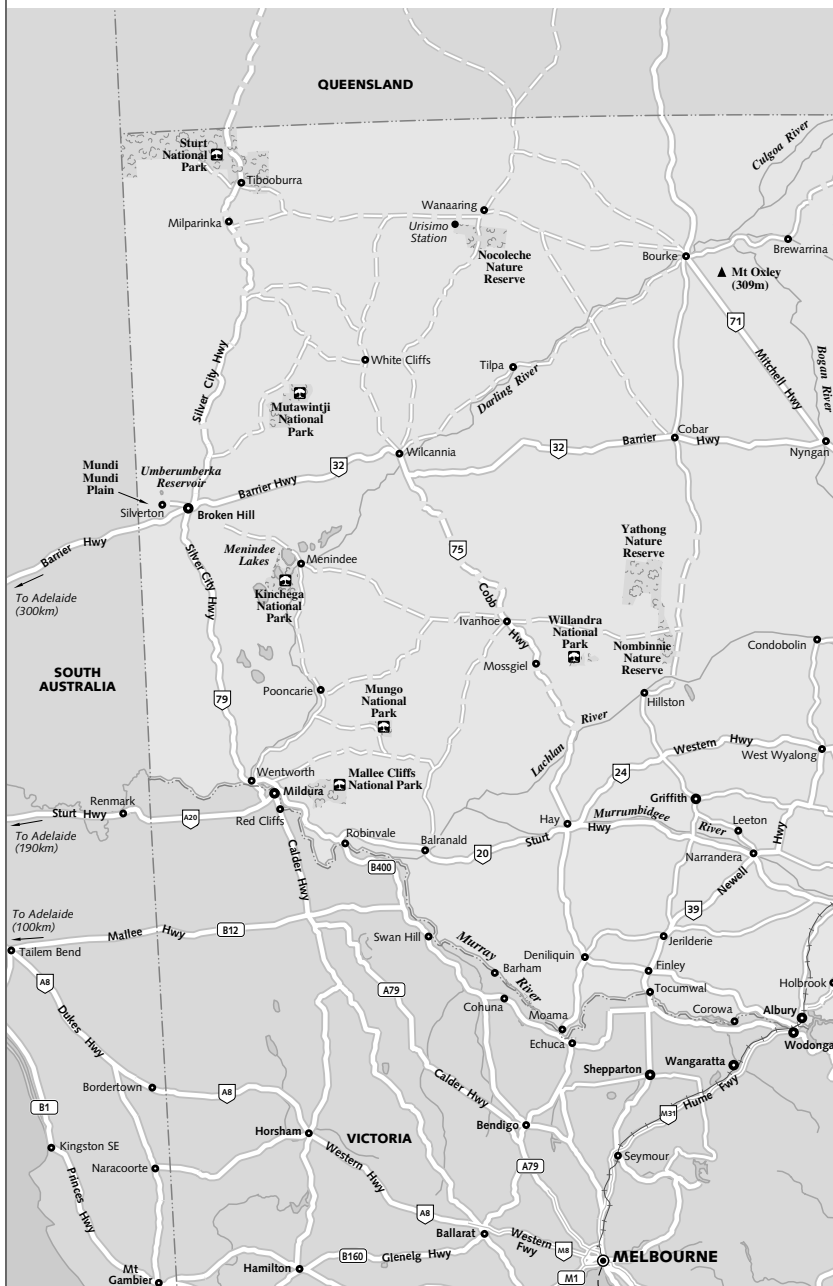
Sydney is now a confident world city. In 2000 it welcomed the new millennium by hosting a spectacularly successful Olympic Games. But ugly race riots on Sydney's

Cronulla Beach in 2005 laid bare tensions between some old and new Australians. Overwhelmingly, however, the people of NSW are unerringly warm and open to travellers, and they maintain a profound and enduring culture of goodwill and good sense.

NEW SOUTH WALES

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## GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

NSW can be roughly divided into the following four regions: the coastal strip; the Great Dividing Range, about 100km inland from the coast; the Blue Mountains west of Sydney; and the Snowy Mountains in the south.

West of the Great Dividing Range is farming country: dry western plains that cover two-thirds of the state. The plains fade into the barren outback in the far west, where summer temperatures can soar to over 40°C. The major rivers are the Murray and the Darling, which meander westward across the plains. As a general rule, it gets hotter the further north you go and drier the further west. In winter, the Snowy Mountains live up to their name.

Sydney has a temperate climate, rarely dropping below 10°C at night. Summer temperatures can hit 40°C, but the average summer maximum is 25°C.

## INFORMATION

**Tourism New South Wales** (☎ 13 20 77; [www.visitnsw.com.au](http://www.visitnsw.com.au)) is the state's tourism body and offers no end of information, touring ideas and contacts.

Lonely Planet's *New South Wales* guide is an excellent resource for getting the most out of your time.

Some helpful websites:

**[www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)** Information about national park access (including access for mobility-impaired visitors), camping, conservation, Aboriginal heritage and children's activities.

**[www.nrma.com.au](http://www.nrma.com.au)** Find out about car insurance; purchase road maps and guides; book accommodation, tours and event tickets online.

**[www.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nsw.gov.au)** Portal to the NSW government with lots of boring parliamentary information, but great leads to festivals, markets, galleries, Aboriginal heritage and much more.

## NATIONAL PARKS

The **NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service** (NPWS; [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)) controls the state's 600-odd national parks and reserves; most can be reached with conventional vehicles in reasonable weather. With the exception of those surrounding Sydney, public transport into most parks is scarce.

Some of the must-sees include Barrington Tops National Park (p168), where you can dabble in mountain biking, horse riding, canoeing and fishing, and Mt Warning National

Park (p205) for the challenging trek to the summit of Mt Warning.

Wildlife lovers will appreciate the platypuses and gliders in New England National Park (p210), and the 120 bird species in Dorrigo National Park (p211). The Border Ranges National Park (p205) is a twitcher's utopia, and home to a quarter of all of Australia's bird species.

Richmond Range National Park (p215) and Willandra National Park (p253) are both World Heritage listed, the former encompassing ancient rainforests and the latter temperate wetlands and wildlife.

Kosciuszko National Park (p241) has white-capped mountains, glassy lakes and dramatic scenery. In stark contrast, Sturt National Park (p256), Mutawintji National Park (p257) and the hauntingly beautiful Mungo National Park (p262) are preserved pockets of the state's sunburnt outback.

Many parks charge daily entry fees for vehicles, generally \$7 per car (less for motorcycles and pedestrians). Entry to more remote parks is often free.

Consider purchasing the annual pass, which gives unlimited entry to all the state's parks; prices start at \$22.

Many parks have camp sites with facilities; some are free, others generally cost between \$5 and \$10 a night per person. Popular camp sites are often booked out during holidays. Bush camping is allowed in some parks; contact the NPWS office for regulations.

## ACTIVITIES Australiana Activities

The town of Woolli (p190) has revived the traditional sport of goanna pulling, where you can watch grown men wearing leather harnesses try to pull each other's heads off, with nary a goanna in sight.

Blokes and sheilas are on an even footing at Deniliquin's Ute Muster (p254) and Lightning Ridge's annual goat racing (p223) unites locals and tourists alike in their endeavour to catch a goat and, well, race it.

## Bushwalking

NSW offers many standards, lengths and terrains for walking, and almost every national park has marked trails or wilderness walking.

In Sydney, you can try the beautiful 5km Bondi to Coogee Clifftop Trail (p110) or

the wonderful 9km Manly Scenic Walkway (p113). The wilderness areas of Wollemi National Park are near Sydney, as are the dramatic cliff-top walks in the Royal National Park (p139), where you can tackle the 28km coastal walking trail. There are smaller bushwalks around the inlets of Broken Bay in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (p142). If you're up for a lengthy trek, tackle the Great North Walk (p155) between Sydney and Newcastle.

West of Sydney, the sandstone bluffs, eucalyptus forests and wildflowers of the Blue Mountains (p146) make for a thrilling experience, as does Barrington Tops National Park (p168) to the north. Kosciuszko National Park (p241), in the Snowy Mountains, has excellent alpine walks in summer, and you can walk to the summit of Australia's highest peak, Mt Kosciuszko (2228m).

In the state's northwest, Warrumbungle National Park (p222), with its volcanic peaks, has over 30km of trails to keep you hale and strong.

Nightcap National Park (p203) in the far north coast hinterland has challenging but rewarding treks lasting an hour to a couple of days.

If you're out for a strenuous trek, try the 15km Syndicate Ridge Walking Trail near Bellingen (p213), the 30km Wiradjuri Walking Track near Wagga Wagga (p250), or the 42km Six Foot Track (p153) to the Jenolan Caves.

Outdoor stockists are good sources of bushwalking information. Also try the **NPWS** ([www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)) and the **Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW** ([www.bushwalking.org.au](http://www.bushwalking.org.au)).

Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* has further information.

## Canyoning

This sport has been described as a mixture of rock climbing, abseiling, swimming and bushwalking. If negotiating narrow clefts filled with water is your bag, then consider the Blue Mountains (p148), with crevices around 90m deep but only a few metres wide. With designations like Cut-Throat Canyon, Crikey Canyon and Heart Attack Canyon, this terrain is probably not for the faint-hearted.

There's also great abseiling to be found in the Snowy Mountains, particularly around Jindabyne (p240).

## Cycling

Sydney has good bike-paths, but the best cycling is done off-road on a mountain bike. The national parks around Sydney (p139) and the Blue Mountains (p145) offer stunning challenges. In the southeast, mountain biking is a warm-weather favourite in Thredbo (p242).

**Bicycle NSW** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 02-9281 5400; [www.bicydensw.org.au](http://www.bicydensw.org.au); Level 5, 822 George St, Sydney) provides information and guides for cycling routes throughout the state.

The **Bicycles Network Australia** ([www.bicycles.net.au](http://www.bicycles.net.au)) website is also worth a look, as is Lonely Planet's *Cycling Australia*.

## Diving & Snorkelling

See p111 for a list of Sydney's best shore and boat dives.

Elsewhere, try Port Stephens (p166) and Port Macquarie (p170). Further north, Fish Rock Cave off South West Rocks (p184) is renowned for excellent diving. Good schools can be found at Coffs Harbour (p188) and Byron Bay (p195).

On the South Coast popular diving spots include Jervis Bay (p233), pretty Montague Island (p236) and Merimbula (p237).

Diving outfits typically offer four-day **PADI courses** (Professional Association of Diving Instructors; [www.padi.com](http://www.padi.com)).

## Skiing & Snowboarding

Snowfields straddle the NSW-Victoria border. The season is relatively short, mid-June to early September, and snowfalls can be unpredictable. Cross-country skiing is popular and most resorts offer lessons and equipment.

The Snowy Mountains (p242) feature hugely popular resorts including Charlotte Pass, Perisher Blue, Selwyn and Thredbo.

**Skiing Australia** ([www.skiingaustralia.org.au](http://www.skiingaustralia.org.au)) details the major resorts and race clubs.

## Surfing & Swimming

For info on Sydney's top surfing and swimming spots, see p113 and p113.

You can also fine-tune your surfing skills (or indeed learn some) at Newcastle (p156), Port Macquarie (p172) and Coffs Harbour (p188). Crescent Head (p183) is the longboarding capital of Australia, and the killer swells at Angourie Point (p192) is for seasoned surfers and/or nutcases only. Further north, Lennox Head (p194) and Byron Bay (p197) are also popular stomping grounds for surfers.



The South Coast is literally awash with great surf beaches, particularly around Wollongong (p227), Ulladulla (p233), Merimbula (p229) and Pambula (p229).

Useful websites include [www.realsurf.com](http://www.realsurf.com) and [www.coastalwatch.com](http://www.coastalwatch.com).

NSW has some 2137km of coastline. It goes without saying that practically any NSW coastal town can sate the needs of swimmers. There are also multitudes of lakes and rivers where you can cool off. Most towns have an Olympic-sized pool.

### Whale & Dolphin Watching

Migrating southern right and humpback whales pass near Australia's southern coast between the Antarctic and warmer waters, and whale-watching cruises allow you to get close to these magnificent creatures. Good spots are Eden (p238) in southern NSW and along the mid-north coast of NSW at Coffs Harbour (p186) and Port Stephens (p165).

Dolphins can be seen year-round at many places along the NSW coast, such as Jervis Bay (p233), Port Stephens (p165) and Byron Bay (p194).

### White-Water Rafting, Kayaking & Canoeing

For rafting, try the upper Murray near Jindabyne (p240) and Coffs Harbour (p186).

There is stunning sea kayaking to be done at Byron Bay (p195), Newcastle (p156), and Lord Howe Island (p224).

For canoeing, head to Barrington Tops National Park (p168) and Myall Lakes National Park (p169). Contact the **New South Wales Canoeing Association** (☎ 02-8116 9730; [www.nswcanoe.org.au](http://www.nswcanoe.org.au)) for info on courses and hire in Sydney, or to buy *The Canoeing Guide to NSW*.

### TOURS

NSW offers a bewildering variety of tours to suit all tastes: wineries, outback, whale watching, skiing, bushwalking, Aboriginal heritage and surfing.

In Sydney, take your pick from bus, walking or harbour tours (p115) to make the most of the city. Various companies operate tours to popular destinations such as the Blue Mountains (p150) and the Hunter Valley (p162); at the latter, you can choose from riding around wineries in a horse carriage or three-wheeled trike, ballooning over them or even skydiving into their midst.

From Newcastle (p158) you can jump on an ocean cruise or take a tour to Barrington Tops National Park or the dramatic Stockton Bight. Further north there are dolphin- and whale-watching tours aplenty in Port Stephens (p166), Port Macquarie (p181) and Coffs Harbour (p188).

Eco-tours and mountain-bike tours of the far north hinterland are the speciality from Byron Bay (p197).

Award-winning tours from Broken Hill (p260) are the best way for time-strapped travellers to experience the haunting and dramatic NSW outback.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Sydney's **Kingsford Smith Airport** (☎ 02-9667 9111; [www.sydneyairport.com.au](http://www.sydneyairport.com.au)) is the obvious point of arrival for most international visitors to Australia. By car and motorcycle, you'll probably reach NSW via the Hume Hwy if you're coming from the south or via the Pacific Hwy if you're coming from the north. The Princes Hwy heads south from the capital along the state's southern coast.

#### Air

**Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; [www.virginblue.com.au](http://www.virginblue.com.au)), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 13 38; [www.jetstar.com.au](http://www.jetstar.com.au)) and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)) fly all over Australia; fares are cheaper if booked online.

**Regional Express** (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13; [www.regional.express.com.au](http://www.regional.express.com.au)) flies to rural destinations throughout NSW.

It's easy to fly between NSW's main cities, including Sydney, Newcastle, Ballina, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Tamworth.

#### Bus

More towns in NSW are serviced by bus than any other public transport. If you want to make stops on the way from A to B, look for cheap stopover deals rather than buying separate tickets. In remote areas, school buses may be the only option. The drivers will usually pick you up, but they're not obliged to.

The two main companies servicing the NSW coast are **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; [www.greyhound.com.au](http://www.greyhound.com.au)) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; [www.premierms.com.au](http://www.premierms.com.au)). Fares and stops for both companies are interchangeable, although Greyhound is often ever so slightly more expensive. Greyhound fares can be purchased online and are roughly 5% cheaper than over-the-counter tickets.

CountryLink (see below) replaced many of its trains with buses after closing numerous train lines in recent years.

Smaller regional operators running key routes or covering a lot of ground:

**Busways** (☎ 02-4368 2277; [www.131500.com.au](http://www.131500.com.au))

**Murrays Coaches** (☎ 13 22 51; [www.murrays.com.au](http://www.murrays.com.au))  
Runs between Sydney and Canberra.

**Port Stephens Coaches** (☎ 02-4982 2940; [www.psoaches.com.au](http://www.psoaches.com.au))  
Runs between Sydney and Port Stephens and Newcastle.

**Transborder** (☎ 02-6241 0033; [www.transborder.com.au](http://www.transborder.com.au))

#### Train

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; [www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au](http://www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au)), the state rail service, will take you to many sizable towns in NSW, in conjunction with connecting buses. You need to book in advance, either by phone, online, or in person at one of Sydney's CountryLink Travel Centres – Central Station (Map pp94–5), Circular Quay (Wharf 6), Wynyard Station or Town Hall Station. CountryLink offers 1st- and economy-class tickets, as well as a quota of discount tickets; return fares are double the single fare. Australian students travel for about half the economy fare.

**CityRail** (p139; ☎ 13 15 00; [www.cityrail.info](http://www.cityrail.info)), the Sydney metropolitan service, runs frequent commuter-style trains south through Wollongong to Bomaderry; west through the Blue Mountains to Katoomba and Lithgow; north to Newcastle; and southwest through the Southern Highlands to Goulburn.

## SYDNEY

☎ 02 / pop 4,444,500

Australia's oldest, largest and most diverse city is outrageously good looking. Like a psychedelic supermodel, she curves her way around glamorous Sydney Harbour, a maze of sandstone headlands, lazy bays and legendary beaches. Her divine limbs stretch so far that a drive to her city limits feels like a full-day excursion. For travellers she is archetypal Australia; stunning surf and sea, glorious weather, iconic landmarks and larrikin charm.

Most non-Sydneysiders would have you believe that the Sydney experience is essentially physical: you dunk yourself in the Bondi surf, sail under the Harbour Bridge, and gape at the beautiful people. True enough, everybody does seem to be outside, but there's far more

to this city than sunshine, sunglasses, soy lattes and blonde dye in Bondi. Sydney's edgy multiculturalism ignites a complex food and art scene, nocturnal life is heady and diverse, and urban galleries celebrate indigenous culture. The genetic legacy of the British and Irish convicts who built Sydney is more evident in defiant self-belief than anything mirror-worthy. Inner-city suburbs are a fusion of glitz and guts, where outrageously fashionable bars sidle up to working-class pubs. The truth is that a genuine Sydney experience is active and engaging, indulgent and intense.

### HISTORY

The Sydney region is the ancestral home of the Eora people (the Kuring-gai, Birrabiragal and Cadi peoples) who possessed an intimate understanding of environmental sustainability, spoke three distinct languages, and maintained sophisticated sacred and artistic cultures. In 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip established Australia's first European settlement, and the Eora were soon stripped of legal rights to their land, systematically incarcerated, killed or driven away by force.

Early Sydney bumbled through near-starvation and rum-fuelled political turmoil, but things didn't boom until the 1850s gold rush, when Sydney's population doubled in a decade.

In the 20th century, post-WWII immigrants from the UK, Ireland and the Mediterranean brought spirit and prosperity to Sydney. Hosting the 2000 Olympic Games thrust Sydney into the global limelight for celebratory reasons, and simmering racial tensions that exploded into mob violence on the southern beaches in late 2005 did the same for horrific ones.

### ORIENTATION

The harbour divides Sydney into north and south, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Harbour Tunnel joining the two shores. The city centre is roughly from Circular Quay to Central Station. To the west is Darling Harbour, while to the east lie Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Paddington.

Three kilometres further southeast, along the coast, are the ocean-beach suburbs of Bondi and Coogee. Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport is 10km south of the city centre. West of the centre are the gentrified suburbs of

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 Canadian Consulate.....5 C3  
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 Circular Quay Exchange Bureau...7 D3  
 City Host Information Kiosk (Circular Quay).....8 D3  
 City Host Information Kiosk (Martin Place).....9 D4  
 City Host Information Kiosk (Town Hall).....10 C5  
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 Dymocks.....12 C5  
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 Global Gossip.....16 C7  
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Bondi Open Air Cinema	33 C2
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Pyrmont, Glebe and Balmain. The inner west includes Newtown and Leichhardt. Suburbs stretch 20km north and south of the centre, their extent limited by national parks. The suburbs north of the bridge are known collectively as the North Shore. The western suburbs sprawl for 50km to reach the foothills of the Blue Mountains.

**Maps**

Lonely Planet's *Sydney City Map* has detailed coverage of central Sydney and the Blue Mountains. If you're driving around the city, a *Sydney UBD* street directory (around \$35) is invaluable.

**Department of Lands** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9236 7720; www.lands.nsw.gov.au; 1 Prince Albert Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Topographic map heaven.

**Map World** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9261 3601; www.mapworld.com.au; 280 Pitt St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3.45pm Sat) Maps, atlases, GPS and travel guides.

**INFORMATION**

**Bookshops**

**Ariel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9332 4581; www.arielbooks.com.au; 42 Oxford St, Paddington; ☎ 9am-midnight) Art, film, fashion, design and travel guides.

**Dymocks** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9235 0155; www.dymocks.com.au; 424-28 George St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Mainstream titles, stationery and a café.

**Gleebooks** (Map p100; ☎ 9660 2333; www.gleebooks.com.au; 49 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe; ☎ 9am-9pm) Politics, arts and fiction... just about everything.

**Kinokuniya** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9262 7996; www.kinokuniya.com; Level 2, TGV, 500 George St, Sydney; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Over 300,000 titles - Sydney's biggest bookshop.

**Travel Bookshop** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9261 8200; www.travelbooks.com.au; 175 Liverpool St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Yep - travel books, and lots of them.

**Emergency**

**Lifeline** (☎ 13 11 14; www.lifeline.com.au) Over-the-phone counselling services, including suicide prevention.

**National Roads & Motorists Association** (NRMA; Map pp94-5; ☎ 13 21 32; www.nrma.com.au; 74-6 King St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Car insurance and roadside service.

**Police** (☎ 000) Stations at 192 Day St, Sydney, 132 George St, Sydney (Map pp94-5) and 1-15 Elizabeth Bay Rd, Kings Cross (Map p98).

**Rape Crisis Centre** (☎ 9515 6111, 1800 424 017)

**Internet Access**

Internet cafés are common in Sydney, especially in Kings Cross, Chinatown and Bondi. Rates are around \$3 an hour. Plenty of hostels and hotels offer internet access to their guests.

**Global Gossip** (Map p98; ☎ 9326 9777; 61 Darlinghurst Rd, Kings Cross; per hr \$2; ☎ 9am-midnight) Traveller-friendly chain; also at 760 George St, Sydney, 415 Pitt St, Sydney, and 37 Hall St, Bondi (Map p99).

**Internet World** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9262 9700; 369 Pitt St, Sydney; per hr \$2; ☎ 24hr) Fast servers and commercial FM beneath medicinal fluoro light.

**Internet Resources**

For more information on Sydney, check out the following websites:

**www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au** City news and politics.

**www.sydney.citysearch.com.au** What's happening in Sydney.

**www.viewsydney.com.au** Live images from around the city.

**www.visitnsw.com.au** Info on Sydney and NSW, including events.

**Medical Services**

**Kings Cross Travellers Clinic** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 3066; www.travellersclinic.com.au; 13 Springfield Ave, Kings Cross; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) General medical, dive medicals and morning-after pill scripts; bookings advised.

**St Vincent's Hospital** (Map p98; ☎ 8382 7111; www.svh.vincent.com.au; cnr Victoria & Burton Sts, Darlinghurst; ☎ 24hr emergency)

**Sydney Hospital & Sydney Eye Hospital** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9382 7111; www.sesahs.nsw.gov.au/sydhosp; 8 Macquarie St, Sydney; ☎ 24hr emergency)

**Travel Doctor** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9221 7133; www.traveldoctor.com.au; Level 7, 428 George St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, to 12.30pm Sat) Travel shots and medical advice.

**Money**

There are plenty of ATMs throughout Sydney; both **American Express** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 1300 139 060; 105 Pitt St, Sydney; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) and **Travelx** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9231 2523; 175 Pitt St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) have city branches. Seven-day exchange bureaus:

**Central Station** (Map pp94-5; Coach Terminal; ☎ 9am-4pm)

**Circular Quay** (Map pp94-5; Wharf 6; ☎ 8am-9.30pm)

**Kings Cross** (Map p98; cnr Springfield Ave & Darlinghurst Rd; ☎ 8am-midnight)



## Post

Stamps are sold at post offices, Australia Post retail outlets in most suburbs and most newsagencies.

**General Post Office** (GPO; Map pp94-5; ☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com.au; 1 Martin Pl, Sydney; 🕒 8.15am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

**Poste Restante Service** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 13 13 18; www.auspost.com.au; 310 George St, Sydney; 🕒 8.15am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Bring identification to collect mail.

## Tourist Information

**City Host Information Kiosks** (🕒 9am-5pm winter, 10am-6pm summer) Circular Quay (Map pp94-5; cnr Pitt & Alfred Sts); Martin Place (Map pp94-5; between Elizabeth & Castlereagh Sts); Town Hall (Map pp94-5; cnr Druiitt & George Sts)

**Sydney visitor centres** The Rocks (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 8788; www.sydneyvisitorcentre.com; cnr Argyle & Playfair Sts; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm); Darling Harbour (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 8788; www.sydneyvisitorcentre.com; 33 Wheat Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm) Super comprehensive; also acts as an accommodation agency.

**Tourism New South Wales** Sydney (☎ 13 20 77; www.visitnsw.com.au; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri); airport (☎ 9667 6050; International Arrivals, Terminal 1; 🕒 5am-11pm) State-wide accommodation and travel advice.

**Tourist Information Service** (☎ 9669 5111; 🕒 7am-10pm) Information and accommodation.

**Travellers' Information Service** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 9366; sydneycoach@optusnet.com.au; Sydney Coach Terminal, Eddy Ave; 🕒 6am-10.30pm) Helpful and busy; accommodation bookings, coach tickets, public-transport information and maps.

## Travel Agencies

**Travellers Contact Point** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9221 8744, 1800 647 640; www.travellers.com.au; Level 7, 428 George St; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Backpacker agency that holds mail and has a good bulletin board.

**YHA Membership & Travel Centre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9261 1111; www.yha.com.au; 422 Kent St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 6pm Thu, to 2pm Sat) Offers travel packages and YHA bookings worldwide; also try the travel agent in the Sydney Central YHA (see p117).

## SIGHTS

Sydney's chock-full of things to see and do. Much of it doesn't cost a cent, but if you plan on seeing an exceptional number of museums, attractions and tours, check out the **Smartvisit card** (☎ 1300 661 711; www.seesydneycard.com).

The vast majority of sights and museums in Sydney have good disabled access.

## Sydney Harbour

Stretching 20km inland to the mouth of the Parramatta River, Sydney Harbour (aka **Port Jackson**) is Sydney's shimmering soul, its beaches, coves, bays, islands and waterside parks providing crucial relief from the ordeals of urban life.

Forming the gateway to the harbour are **North Head** (Map pp92-3) and **South Head** (Map pp92-3). **Watsons Bay** (Map pp92-3) nestles on South Head's harbour side, fostering a salty cottage atmosphere. The harbour beaches are generally sheltered, calm coves with little of the frenzied foam of the ocean beaches. On the south shore is **Camp Cove** (Map pp92-3), a photogenic swimming beach where Arthur Phillip first landed, and the shark-netted **Shark Bay** (Map pp92-3). On the North Shore try **Manly Cove**, **Reef Beach**, **Clontarf Beach**, **Chinamans Beach** and **Balmoral Beach** (all Map pp92-3).

## SYDNEY HARBOUR NATIONAL PARK

This park (Map pp92-3) protects scattered pockets of harbourside bushland with magical walking tracks, lookouts, Aboriginal engravings and historic sites. Its southern side incorporates South Head and **Nielsen Park**; on the North Shore it includes **North Head**, **Dobroyd Head**, **Middle Head** and **Ashton Park**.

Five harbour islands are also part of the park: **Clark Island** off Darling Point, **Shark Island** off Rose Bay, **Rodd Island** in Iron Cove, **Goat Island** (Map pp94-5), once a hellish convict gulag, and the small fortified **Fort Denison** (Map pp92-3) off Mrs Macquaries Point.

Except for Goat Island, which is currently off-limits, the harbour islands are open to visitors. The NPWS runs 2½-hour Fort Denison **tours** (adult/concession/family \$22/18/72; 🕒 11.45am Mon-Fri, 11.30am & 2.30pm Sat & Sun) – book at the Sydney Harbour National Park Information Centre (Map pp94-5). You can catch a water taxi (p137) to Rodd and Clark islands; they incur a \$5 landing fee, also payable at Cadman's Cottage.

More tours:

**Harbour Trust** (☎ 8969 2199; adult/concession/family \$25/15/75; 🕒 10.30am & 1.30pm Sat, 10am & 2pm Sun) Tours of Cockatoo Island (Map pp92-3).

**Matilda Rocket Express** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9264 7377; www.matilda.com.au; adult/concession/family \$16/15/53; 🕒 10.30am, 11.45am, 1.45pm & 3.30pm) Shark Island tours.

## SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

The **opera house** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9250 7111; www.sydneyoperahouse.com; Bennelong Pt, Circular Quay E), designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon, is Australia's most recognisable icon and essential sight. It's said to have drawn inspiration from orange segments, snails, palm fronds and Mayan temples, and it's been poetically likened to a 'nun's scrum' and the sexual congress of turtles. It's architecturally orgasmic from any angle (the 67m-high roof features 27,230 tonnes of Swedish tiles – 1,056,000 of them), but the ferry view approaching Circular Quay is hard to beat.

There are four main auditoriums for dance, concerts, opera and theatre events, plus the left-of-centre Studio for emerging artists. The acoustics are superb, the internal aesthetics like the belly of a whale. Two thousand four hundred annual events cost over \$40 million to run and keep the Concert Hall organ's 10,500 pipes humming; get your tickets at the **box office** (☎ 9250 7777; 🕒 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 2hr pre-show Sun).

Opera house **tours** (☎ 9250 7250; adult/concession \$23/16; 🕒 1hr tours 9am-5pm) take you from 'front of house' to backstage, excluding theatres in rehearsal use. Let them know in advance if you require wheelchair access. Public transport to Circular Quay is the best way to get here, but if you're driving there's a **car park** (☎ 9247 7599; nightly rate \$25; 🕒 6.30am-1am) under the building (enter via Macquarie St).

## SYDNEY IN...

### Three Days

On day one get the fundamentals sorted with jaw-dropping views on a **Bridge Climb** (p115) and then potter through glitzy **Darling Harbour** (p107) and ramble through **the Rocks** (above). Snake around to the **Sydney Opera House** (above), the **Royal Botanic Gardens** (p106) and the **Art Gallery of NSW** (p106) for a culture shift. Hightail it to **Bondi** (p110) for dinner overlooking the beach and beautiful bods.

On day two get the first latte of the day in feisty **Glebe** (p110) and continue to **Balmain** (p110) for market and window shopping. Fill up on fab fish at the **Sydney Fish Market** (p107) and finish up at **Oxford Street** (p108) for art-house flicks and naughty nightcaps.

On day three head north and make a day of it at **Taronga Zoo** (p111) or **Luna Park** (p111), followed by a picnic on the beach.

### One Week

It's easy to fill in another four days in Sydney – lunch, beaches, swimming and views in **Manly** (p111) alone will take up one. Make sure you get a ferry to Watson's Bay for fish and chips at **Doyles on the Beach** (p126), and take in the **Sydney Aquarium** (p107) and the **Australian Museum** (p106). Ogle the **Queen Victoria Building** (p136), the **Strand Arcade** (p136) and the **State Library of NSW** (p106). Catch a gig at the **Basement** (p133) or a performance by the **Sydney Theatre Company** (p132) and sample the thriving **live music** scene (p132).

## SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE

Whether they're driving over it, climbing up it, rollerblading across it or sailing under it, Sydneysiders adore their **bridge** (Map pp94-5). Dubbed the 'old coat hanger', it's a spookily big object – moving around Sydney you'll catch sight of it in the corner of your eye and get a fright! The bridge links the CBD with the North Sydney business district, spanning the harbour at one of its narrowest points. Completed in 1932 at a cost of \$20 million, the city took 60 years to pay it off.

The best way to experience the bridge is on foot – don't expect much of a view crossing by car or train. Staircases climb up to the bridge from both shores, leading to a footpath running the length of the eastern side. A cycle way wheels along the western side. You can climb the southeastern pylon to the **Pylon Lookout** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 1100; www.pylonlookout.com.au; adult/child/concession \$9/4/6.50; 🕒 10am-5pm), or ascend the great arc on a **bridge climb** (see p115).

## The Rocks

The Rocks – the site of Sydney's first European settlement – has evolved unrecognisably from its squalid, overcrowded origins. Residents once sloshed through open sewers and alleyways festering with disease, prostitution and drunken lawlessness. Sailors, whalers and rapsallions boozed and brawled shamelessly in countless harbourside pubs.



The Rocks remained a commercial and maritime hub until shipping services left Circular Quay in the late 1800s. A bubonic plague outbreak in 1900 continued the decline. Construction of the Harbour Bridge in the '20s brought further demolition, entire streets disappearing under the bridge's southern approach.

It wasn't until the 1970s that the Rocks' cultural and architectural heritage was recognised. The ensuing redevelopment has saved a lot of old buildings but has turned the area into a sanitised, 'olde worlde' tourist trap. Kitsch cafés and tourist shops hocking stuffed koalas and Opera House key rings now prevail.

**Cadman's Cottage** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 5033; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; 110 George St; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun), built on a buried beach, is Sydney's oldest house (1816). Its namesake, John Cadman, was Government Coxswain. Water police detained criminals here in the 1840s; it was later converted into a home for retired sea captains. Further along George St is the weekend **Rocks Market** (see p136).

The excellent **Rocks Discovery Museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 1800 067 676; www.rocksdiscoverymuseum.com; 2-8 Kendall Lane, The Rocks; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) digs deep into artefact-soaked Rocks history and provides a sensitive insight into the lives of the Cadi people, the Rocks' original inhabitants.

Beyond the **Argyle Cut** (Map pp94-5), an impressive tunnel excavated by convicts, is **Millers Point**, a relaxed district of early colonial homes. **Argyle Place** (Map pp94-5) is an English-style village green on which any Australian has the legal right to graze livestock. Overlooking it is **Garrison Church** (Map pp94-5), Australia's oldest church (1848).

The 1850s, copper-domed, Italianate **Sydney Observatory** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9217 0485; www.sydneyobservatory.com.au; Watson Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) sits atop Observatory Park. Inside there's a 3-D **Space Theatre** (adult/child/family \$6/4/16; ☎ 2.30 & 3.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am, noon, 2.30pm & 3.30pm Sat & Sun) and an interactive Australian Astronomy exhibition. Squint at galaxies far, far away during Night Viewings (adult/child/family tickets cost \$15/12/40); bookings are required.

In the old military hospital building nearby, the **SH Ervin Gallery** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9258 0173; www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au/erwin.html; Watson Rd; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) exhibits Australian art,

including the annual Salon des Refusés collection of alternative Archibald Prize entries.

The wharves around Dawes Point are rapidly emerging from prolonged decay. Walsh Bay's Pier 4 houses the renowned **Sydney Theatre Company** (p132), the **Bangarra Dance Theatre** (Map pp94-5), the **Australian Theatre for Young People** or ATYP (Map pp94-5) and the **Sydney Dance Company** (Map pp94-5). The impressive **Sydney Theatre** (p132) is across the road.

### CIRCULAR QUAY

Built around Sydney Cove, Circular Quay is Sydney's public-transport hub, with ferry quays, bus stops, a train station and the **Overseas Passenger Terminal** (Map pp94-5). European settlement grew around the Tank Stream, which now trickles underground into the harbour near Wharf 6. For many years Circular Quay was also Sydney's port, but these days it's more of a recreational space, with harbour walkways, grassy verges, outstanding restaurants, fisher folk, and buskers of unpredictable merit.

Emerging phoenix-like from extensive renovations, the cavernous 1885 **Customs House** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9242 8555; www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/library; 31 Alfred St; admission free; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, noon-5pm Sun, library 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) houses the Customs House Library. Under the glass floor of the foyer is a geeky (but undeniably impressive) 1:500 model of Sydney.

### MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Always challenging, the **MCA** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9245 2400; www.mca.com.au; 140 George St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) fronts Circular Quay West in a stately Art Deco building and has been raising even the most unshockable Sydney eyebrows since 1991. Its constantly changing, controversial exhibitions from Australia and overseas range from incredibly hip to in-your-face, sexually explicit and profoundly disturbing.

### Central Sydney

Central Sydney stretches from Circular Quay in the north to Central Station in the south. The business hub is towards the northern end, but the southern end is being redeveloped, gradually shifting the city's focus. For a lofty city view, take a trip up **Sydney Tower** (Map pp94-5).

Sydney lacks a true civic centre, but **Martin Place** (Map pp94-5) comes close. This grand pedestrian mall extends from Macquarie St to George St, lined with monumental financial buildings and the Victorian colonnaded General Post Office. There's a cenotaph commemorating Australia's war dead, an amphitheatre for lunchtime entertainment and plenty of places to sit and watch the crowds. Security guards fight a losing battle against the skateboarders at weekends.

Sydney's 1874 **Town Hall** (Map pp94-5) is a few blocks south of here on the corner of George and Druiett Sts. The elaborate chamber room and concert hall inside match the fabulously ornate exterior. Next door, the Anglican **St Andrew's Cathedral** (Map pp94-5), built around the same time, is Australia's oldest cathedral. Next to St Andrew's, taking up an entire city block, the **Queen Victoria Building** (p136) is Sydney's most sumptuous shopping complex. Running a close second is the entirely over-the-top **Strand Arcade** (p136) between Pitt St Mall and George St.

There are 45-minute group and self-guided tours of the lavish **State Theatre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9373 6862; www.statetheatre.com.au; 49 Market St; adult/child \$12/8; ☎ 11.30am-3pm Mon-Fri), built in 1929. Even a quick peek at the glittering foyer is worthwhile.

Breathing life into the city's lacklustre southwestern zone are Sydney's teensy **Spanish Quarter** (Map pp94-5) and thriving **Chinatown** (Map pp94-5), a tight nest of restaurants, shops and aroma-filled alleyways around Dixon St. Chinatown goes berserk during Chinese New Year in late January/early February – streets throng with sideshows, digitally accompanied musicians and stalls selling everything from good-luck tokens to black-sesame ice-cream burgers (seeing jaunty, fire-breathing paper dragons after eating these is not a hallucinogenic effect).

On the eastern edge of the city centre is the formal **Hyde Park** (Map pp94-5), which has a grand avenue of trees, delightful fountains, and a giant public chessboard. Wander into the dignified **Anzac Memorial** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9267 7668; www.rslnsw.com.au; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) here, with an interior dome studded with one star for each of the 120,000 NSW citizens who served in WWI. The pines near the entrance grew from seeds gathered at Gallipoli. **St Mary's Cathedral** (Map pp94-5), with its new copper spires, overlooks the park

from the east, while the 1878 **Great Synagogue** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9267 2477; www.greatsynagogue.org.au; 187a Elizabeth St; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ tours noon Tue & Thu) stands to the west.

### Macquarie Place & Around

Narrow lanes lead south from Circular Quay towards the city centre. At the corner of Loftus and Bridge Sts is **Macquarie Place** (Map pp94-5), a leafy public square proudly displaying a cannon and an anchor from the First Fleet flagship, HMS *Sirius*, and an 1818 obelisk etched with road distances to various points in the nascent colony.

Inside the old Water Police Station (1858) nearby, the **Justice & Police Museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9252 1144; www.hht.net.au; cnr Albert & Phillip Sts; adult/child/family \$8/4/17; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, daily Jan) zooms in on disreputable activities, with exhibits of confiscated weapons, buttugly mugshots and forensic evidence from Sydney's most heinous crimes. The drug and addiction exhibition (with its creative bongos) is especially interesting. Wheelchair access is to the ground floor only, but Braille and audio guides are available.

### MUSEUM OF SYDNEY

This thoroughly engaging **museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 5988; www.hht.net.au; cnr Bridge & Phillip Sts; adult/child/family \$10/5/20; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) is east of Macquarie Pl, on the site of Sydney's first (and infamously pungent) Government House (1788). The city's early history (including pre-1788) comes to life here through whispers, arguments, gossip, artefacts and state-of-the-art installations. There's also a damn fine café on site.

### MACQUARIE STREET

A crop of early public buildings grace Macquarie St, defining the city's edge from Hyde Park to the Opera House. Many of these buildings were commissioned by Lachlan Macquarie, the first NSW governor with a vision of Sydney beyond its convict origins. He enlisted convict architect Francis Greenway to help realise his plans.

Two Greenway gems front onto Queens Square at Hyde Park's northern end: **St James Church** (Map pp94-5), Sydney's oldest church, having been built in 1819, and the **Hyde Park Barracks Museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8239 2311; www.hht.net.au; adult/child/family \$10/5/20; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), also built in 1819. The barracks functioned

as convict quarters for Anglo-Irish sinners (1819–48), an immigrant depot (1848–86) and government courts (1887–1979) before its current incarceration – a window into everyday convict life.

Further down Macquarie St are the deep verandas, formal colonnades and ochre tones of the twin 1816 **Mint** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8239 2288; www.hht.net.au; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) and **Parliament House** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9230 2111; www.parliament.nsw.gov.au; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) buildings, originally wings of the infamous Rum Hospital, which was built by two Sydney merchants in 1816 in return for a monopoly on the rum trade. You can watch the elected representatives outdo each other when parliament sits, or take a guided tour (call for bookings and times). Wheelchair access is available by prior arrangement.

Next to Parliament House, the **State Library of NSW** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9273 1414; www.sl.nsw.gov.au; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) holds over five million tomes, the smallest being a tablet-sized Lord's Prayer, and hosts innovative exhibitions in its **galleries** (☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun). Disabled access is excellent.

At the top of Bridge St, the **Sydney Conservatorium of Music** (see p133 for musical recital details) was the Greenway-designed stables and servants' quarters for Macquarie's planned Government House. Macquarie was usurped as governor before the house could be finished, partly because of the project's extravagance.

Built between 1837 and 1845, the Gothic Revival **Government House** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9931 5222; www.hht.net.au; admission free; ☞ 10am-3pm Fri-Sun, grounds to 4pm daily, 45min tours from 10.30am) is just off Macquarie St in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Unless there's an official event happening, you can tour through the fussy furnishings.

The **Domain** (Map pp94-5) is a pleasant grassy area east of Macquarie St that was set aside by Governor Phillip for public recreation. The unfailingly eccentric **Speakers' Corner** (☞ noon-4pm Sun) convenes in front of the Art Gallery – religious zealots, nutters, political extremists, homophobes, hippies and academics express their earnest opinions.

#### AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

Not far from Macquarie St, this natural history **museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9320 6000; www.amonline.net.au; 6-8 College St; adult/child/family \$10/5/20, additional costs

for special exhibits; ☞ 9.30am-5pm) was established just 40 years after the First Fleet dropped anchor. There are excellent Aboriginal and native-wildlife exhibitions, self-guided tours and indigenous performances on Sunday (call for times). Kids get busy in the Skeleton and Search & Discover galleries. There's excellent wheelchair access.

#### ART GALLERY OF NSW

This **gallery** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9225 1744; www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au; Art Gallery Rd, The Domain; admission free, varied costs for touring exhibitions; ☞ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue, to 9pm Wed, free guided tours 1pm) plays a prominent and gregarious role in Sydney society. Highlights include outstanding permanent displays of 19th- and 20th-century Australian art, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, 15th- to 19th-century European and Asian art, and blockbuster international touring exhibitions. The controversial, much-discussed Archibald Prize exhibits here annually, with portraits of the famous and not-so-famous bringing out the art critic in everyone.

Kids swarm to GalleryKids Sunday program (workshops, performances and guided tours with costumed actors). There are also concerts, screenings, courses, celebrity talks, and programs for the deaf and visually impaired. Wheelchair access is good.

#### ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS

The **gardens** (RBG; Map pp94-5; ☎ 9231 8111; www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au; Mrs Macquaries Rd; admission free; ☞ 7am-sunset) were established in 1816 as the colony's vegetable patch. The attitude here is relaxed – signs say, 'Please walk on the grass. We also invite you to smell the roses, hug the trees, talk to the birds and picnic on the lawns'. Take a free **guided walk** (☞ 10.30am daily & 1pm Mon-Fri), or an **Aboriginal Heritage Tour** (☎ 9231 8134; per person \$20; ☞ 2pm Fri), both departing the Gardens Shop. A trackless train does a circuit if you've outdone yourself.

Highlights include the rose garden, the South Pacific plant collection, the prickly arid garden, the glass pyramid at the **Tropical Centre** (adult/child \$4.20/2.20; ☞ 10am-4pm) and a sinister, swooping bat colony (a murder of bats?). Management periodically tries to oust the bats (they destroy the vegetation), but they just keep hanging around. Actually, calling them bats is a misnomer – they're grey-headed flying foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*).

Most RBG paths are wheelchair accessible.

#### Darling Harbour

This rambling, purpose-built, waterfront tourist park lining Cockle Bay on the city's western edge was once industrial docklands with factories, warehouses and shipyards. These days, the official spiel promotes more leisurely industry: 'Darling Harbour – Play It Your Way!'

Dotted between an architectural spoil of flyovers, fountains, sculptures and sailcloth are some great museums and sights, a plethora of harbour-cruise outlets and the overrated Harbourside Shopping Centre. The snazzy **Cockle Bay Wharf** (Map pp94-5) and **King St Wharf** (Map pp94-5) precincts contain a dangerous array of cafés, bars and restaurants for when you're all museumed out. Don't forget the harbour itself – below the flocks of tourists and belligerent ibises, it remains unflappably calm.

A stroll across **Pymont Bridge** (Map pp94-5), the world's first electric swing bridge, leads you into Pymont, home of the **Sydney Fish Market** (right) and the playground of bigger fish, **Star City Casino** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9657 8694; www.starcity.com.au; 80 Pymont St, Pymont; ☞ 24hr).

Darling Harbour and Pymont are serviced by ferry, monorail, Metro Light Rail (MLR) and the Sydney Explorer bus. A dinky people-mover **train** (adult/child \$3.50/2.50; ☞ 10am-6pm) connects the sights; the **Sydney visitor centre** (Map pp94-5) is underneath the highway, next to the Imax cinema. The free Darling Harbour Jazz Festival happens in June.

#### SYDNEY AQUARIUM

Visitors wander goggle-eyed through underwater glass tubes at this ever-popular **aquarium** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8251 7800; www.sydneyaquarium.com.au; Aquarium Pier; adult/child/family \$27/14/65; ☞ 9am-10pm; last admission 9pm), celebrating the richness of Australian marine life and the incessant sound of piped indigestive whale music. Three 'oceanariums' are moored in the harbour: sharks, rays and humungous fish in one; Sydney Harbour marine life and seals in the other two. Don't miss the kaleidoscopic colours of the Great Barrier Reef exhibit, platypuses and crocodiles at the Southern and Northern Rivers exhibits, and the little penguins in the Southern Oceans section.

#### AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Beneath an Utzon-like roof, this thematic **museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9298 3777; www.anmm.gov.au; 2

Murray St; admission free, special exhibits adult/child/family from \$10/6/20; ☞ 9.30am-5pm) examines Australia's inextricable relationship with the sea. Exhibitions range from Aboriginal canoes to surf culture and the Navy. There's good disabled access to the museum, but not to the boats moored out the front. Regular guided tours are available.

#### POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

This hip and progressive **museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9217 0100; www.powerhousemuseum.com; 500 Harris St, Ultimo; adult/child/family \$10/5/25, additional costs for special exhibits; ☞ 10am-5pm) whirs away inside the former power station for Sydney's defunct tram network. High-voltage interactive demonstrations wow school groups with the low-down on how lightning strikes, magnets grab and engines growl. Decorative arts, social history and eclectic exhibitions also get the hands-on treatment.

#### CHINESE GARDEN OF FRIENDSHIP

Built according to the balanced principles of Yin and Yang, these **gardens** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 6863; www.chinesegarden.com.au; adult/child/family \$6/3/15; ☞ 9.30am-5pm) are an oasis of tranquillity in the otherwise hectic Darling Harbour. Designed by architects from Guangzhou (Sydney's sister city) for Australia's 1988 bicentenary, the garden interweaves pavilions, waterfalls, lakes and paths. Savour some tea and cake at the Chinese Teahouse by the lotus pond.

#### SYDNEY FISH MARKET

With over 15 million kilograms of seafood shipped through here annually, this cavernous **market** (Map p100; ☎ 9004 1122; www.sydneyfishmarket.com.au; cnr Pymont Bridge Rd & Bank St, Pymont; ☞ 7am-4pm) is the place to introduce yourself to a bewildering array of mud crabs, Balmain bugs, lobsters, oysters, mullet, rain-bow trout, fat slabs of salmon and more. There are plenty of fishy restaurants, a deli, a wine centre, a sushi bar and an oyster bar. Arrive early to check out the early-morning auctions or take a behind-the-scenes **action tour** (per person \$20; ☞ 7-8.30am Thu) – reservations aren't required, but wear closed-toe shoes. You can also book yourself in for regular seafood cooking classes at the **Sydney Seafood School** (☎ 9004 1111; classes from \$75). It's west of Darling Harbour on Blackwattle Bay; the MLR stops outside.



### DISCOUNT SYDNEY SIGHTSEEING

The Historic Houses Trust's **Ticket Through Time** (☎ 8239 2288; www.hht.net.au/visit/admission\_prices; adult/child/family \$30/15/60) gets you into all 11 of the HHT's houses and museums in the Sydney area, including Vaucluse House (p110), Government House (p106), Elizabeth Bay House (below), the Justice & Police Museum (p105), the Museum of Sydney (p105) and the Hyde Park Barracks Museum (p105). Visit four or more of these and you'll save yourself some hard-earned cash.

Alternatively, the **See Sydney & Beyond Card** (☎ 1300 661 711; www.seesydneycard.com) offers admission to a wide range of Sydney's attractions, including sightseeing tours, harbour cruises, museums, historic buildings and wildlife parks. Prices for one-/two-/three-/seven-day cards are \$65/119/149/209 for adults and \$45/65/79/139 for children. The two-/three-/seven-day cards are also available with public transport included for \$159/205/275 for adults and \$85/109/175 for children. Cards are available online or at the Sydney visitor centres (p102).

### Kings Cross

Riding high above the CBD under the big **Coca-Cola sign** (Map p98; as much a Sydney icon as LA's Hollywood sign), 'the Cross' is a bizarre, densely populated dichotomy of good and evil. Strip joints, tacky tourist shops and backpacker hostels bang heads with classy restaurants, funky bars and gorgeous guesthouses. The Cross retains a sleazy, cannibalistic aura, but the vague sense of menace is more imaginary than real. Sometimes the razzle-dazzle has a sideshow appeal; sometimes walking up Darlinghurst Rd promotes pity. Either way, it's never boring.

In the early 19th century Kings Cross was mostly grand estates. Terrace houses sprung up in the 1840s; a wine-stained bohemian element moved in during the 1930s. The suburb's reputation for vice congealed during the Vietnam War, when American sailors flooded the Cross with a tide of bawdy debauchery.

The gracious tree-lined streets of neighbouring **Potts Point** (Map p98) and **Elizabeth Bay** (Map p98) feature well-preserved Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco houses and flats. Built between 1835 and 1839, the neoclassical **Elizabeth Bay House** (Map p98; ☎ 9356 3022; www.hht.net.au; 7 Onslow Ave, Elizabeth Bay; adult/child/family \$8/4/17; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) was the finest house in the colony. Horrendous 20th-century apartments encircle it, but the exquisite oval salon and stairwell are timeless architectural delights.

Possibly the only word in the world with eight 'o's, **Woolloomooloo** (Map p98), down **McElhone Stairs** (Map p98) from the Cross, was once a slum full of drunks, sailors and drunk sailors. Things are begrudgingly less pugilistic these days – the pubs are relaxed

and **Woolloomooloo Wharf** (Map p98) contains some brilliant restaurants. The infamously lowbrow and exceedingly popular **Harry's Café de Wheels** (p125) remains. Gulp down a late-night pie and mash.

It's a 15-minute walk to the Cross from the city, or you could jump on a train. The buses 323-7, 324-5 and 333 from the city also pass through here.

### Inner East

The spirited backbone of the Inner East is **Oxford Street** (Map pp94-5), a long string of shops, cafés, bars and clubs that exudes a flamboyance largely attributable to Sydney's gay community. The **Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras** (p115) gyrates through here every February. **Taylor Square** (Map pp94-5) is gay Sydney's decadent nucleus.

Oxford St runs all the way from Hyde Park to Centennial Park, continuing to Bondi Junction. Confusingly, street numbers recommence east of South Dowling St, the Darlinghurst-Paddington border. Bus 378 from Railway Sq and buses 380, 389 and L82 from Circular Quay run the length of Oxford St.

Wedged between Oxford and William Sts, Darlinghurst is home to the **Sydney Jewish Museum** (Map p98; ☎ 9360 7999; www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au; 148 Darlinghurst Rd; adult/child/family \$10/7/22; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Thu, to 2pm Fri, closed Jewish holidays), with evocative, powerful exhibits on Australian Jewish history and the Holocaust.

South of Darlinghurst is **Surry Hills**, home to a raffish mishmash of inner-city style cats and a swag of good pubs. It was once the undisputed centre of Sydney's rag trade and print media, and many of its warehouses have been converted to slick apartments.

Preserved as a temple to rock and roll artistry, the **Brett Whiteley Studio** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9225 1881; www.brettwhiteley.org; 2 Raper St; adult/concession \$7/5; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) exhibits some of Whiteley's most raucous paintings. Get in early for weekend discussions, performances, readings and workshops. Surry Hills is a short walk east of Central Station or south from Oxford St. Catch buses 301, 302 or 303 from Circular Quay.

Next door to Surry Hills, **Paddington** (Map pp94-5), aka 'Paddo', is an elegant suburb of restored terrace houses on steep leafy streets. Paddington was built for aspiring Victorian artisans, but the lemming-like rush to the outer suburbs after WWII turned it into Australia's worst slum. Renewed passion for Victorian architecture (and the realisation that the outer suburbs were unspeakably boring) fuelled Paddington's 1960s resurgence. By the '90s, real estate was out of reach for all but the lucky and the loaded.

**Victoria Barracks** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9339 3170; cnr Oxford St & Greens Rd; tour free, museum adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am Thu, museum 10am-4pm Thu & Sun, closed Dec-Feb) is a tightly managed malarial vision from the peak of the British Empire. Thursday's tours of the Georgian buildings take in a flag-

raising ceremony, a marching band (subject to availability) and the paraphernalia-packed war museum.

The best time to explore Paddington's streets and hibiscus-lined laneways is on Saturday when the **Paddington Market** (p135) is pumping. Join the meandering throngs for a foot massage, a tarot reading or a funky shirt to wear clubbing that night.

Just southeast of Paddington is Sydney's biggest park, the 220-hectare **Centennial Park** (Map pp92-3), which has running, cycling, skating and horse-riding tracks, duck ponds, BBQ sites, and sports pitches.

Near Moore Park, much of the former Sydney Showgrounds has been converted into the private **Fox Studios** (Map pp92-3) and the **Entertainment Quarter** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9383 4333; www.entertainmentquarter.com.au; ☎ 10am-late), which some claim is only a 'quarter entertaining'. Jokes aside, the cinemas, bowling alley, bars, restaurants, Aussie Stadium and Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) aren't a bad way to spend an afternoon. **Sportspace Tours** (☎ 1300 724 737; www.sydneycricketground.com.au; adult/child/family \$25/15/60; ☎ 10am & 1pm Mon-Fri, 10am Sat) runs 1½-hour behind-the-scenes SCG and Aussie Stadium tours.

### CRONULLA RIOTS – THE SILVER LINING

In December 2005 Cronulla Beach became the backdrop of ugly race riots that shocked the country. What began as a protest to 'reclaim the beach' by an alcohol-fuelled, mostly white crowd soon degenerated into several days of violence that left businesses destroyed, streets deserted and people afraid of their own community. Middle Eastern youths from elsewhere in Sydney descended on Cronulla and surrounding suburbs to stage retaliation attacks, and police were forced to lock down beaches throughout Sydney and as far away as Wollongong and Newcastle. The impact on the wider Australian community was significant; people were left stunned and devastated at the potency of hate and the speed with which it escalated.

Many Sydneysiders believe the situation had been brewing for years, a result of tension between the Middle Eastern and white communities that had never been adequately addressed. Locals used the aftermath as a wake-up call and immediately set about establishing the ties, respect and harmony they had thought were in place. In so doing they sought to defy the actions of an aggressive minority.

One of the most successful outcomes was the collaboration between the Surf Life Saving (SLS) movement – an iconic Australian institution – and the Middle Eastern community. Tagged 'On the Same Wave', the initiative saw a group of Muslim school children trained as surf life-savers in Cronulla. It was tangible confirmation that the vast majority of Australians embrace and nurture their multiculturalism. The symbolism was also significant; the beach is a core of Australian culture and should be accessible to all, regardless of ethnic or religious background. One of the new recruits was female, and she debuted the 'burkini', a full-body swimsuit designed to adhere to traditional Islamic dress. 'On the Same Wave' was so successful that SLS Australia has rolled it out as a national campaign to attract members of the country's culturally and linguistically diverse communities into the SLS movement.



## Eastern Suburbs

Handsome **Rushcutters Bay** (Map pp92–3) is a five-minute walk east of Kings Cross; its harbourside park is a great spot for cooped-up travellers to stretch their legs. The eastern suburbs extend east from here – a shimmering, conservative conglomeration of Range Rovers, skinny models and mortgage madness. The harbour-hugging New South Head Rd passes through **Double Bay** (Map pp92–3) and **Rose Bay** (Map pp92–3), and then climbs east into **Vaucluse** (Map pp92–3).

An imposing, turreted specimen of Gothic Australiana, **Vaucluse House** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 9388 7922; www.hht.net.au; Wentworth Rd, Vaucluse; adult/child/family \$8/4/17; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Tue–Sun) is Sydney's last remaining 19th-century harbourside estate. Explorer and political sabre-rattler William Charles Wentworth lived here from 1828 to 1862. The Bondi Explorer bus (p115) stops outside.

At the entrance to the harbour is **Watsons Bay** (Map pp92–3), a snug community with restored fisherman's cottages, a palm-lined park and a couple of nautical churches. Nearby **Camp Cove** (Map pp92–3) is one of Sydney's best harbour beaches, and there's a nude beach (mostly male) near South Head at **Lady Bay**. **South Head** (Map pp92–3) has great views across the harbour entrance to North Head and Middle Head. The **Gap** (Map pp92–3) is an epic cliff-top lookout where sunrises, sunsets, canoodling and suicide leaps transpire with similar frequency.

Buses 324 and 325 from Circular Quay service the eastern suburbs via Kings Cross. Grab a seat on the left heading east to snare the best views.

## Eastern & Southern Beaches

**Bondi** (Map p99) lords it over every other beach in the city, despite not being the best one for a swim, a surf or, damn it, a place to park. Still, the crashing waves, flashy cafés, rocky scenic points, grassy picnic lawns and strutting boardwalks aren't shabby at all. The suburb itself has a unique atmosphere due to its mix of old Jewish and other European communities, dyed-in-the-wool Aussies, New Zealanders who never went home, working travellers, and good-looking beach bums.

The beautiful, 5km **Bondi to Coogee Clifftop Trail** leads south from Bondi Beach along the cliff tops to Coogee via Tamarama, Bronte and

Clovelly Beaches, interweaving panoramic views, swimming spots and foodie delights.

Most of the pubs, bars and restaurants are set back from the beach along Campbell Pde and Hall St. Nearby are Sunday's **Bondi Markets** (Map p99), and some Eora **Aboriginal rock engravings** (Map p99) north of the beach near the cliffs at the Bondi Golf Club – the name 'Bondi' derives from an Aboriginal word for the sound of the surf.

Catch bus 380, 389 or L82 from the city or bus 381 from Bondi Junction to get to the beach.

## Inner West

West of the centre is the higgledy-piggledy peninsula suburb of **Balmain** (Map pp92–3). It was once a notoriously rough neighbourhood of dockyard workers but has been transformed into an artsy, middle-class area of restored Victoriana flush with pubs, cafés and trendy shops. Don't miss the **Saturday market** (p135). Catch a ferry from Circular Quay, buses 432/4 from Railway Sq or 441/2 from the QVB.

Cosy, Bohemian **Glebe** (Map p100) lies just southwest of the centre, boasting a large student population, a café-lined main street, a tranquil Buddhist temple, yuppies galore and several decent places to stay. Saturday's **Glebe markets** (Map p100) overrun Glebe Public School. Glebe is a smoggy 10-minute walk from Central Station along Broadway. Buses 431/4 from Millers Point run via George St along Glebe Point Rd. The MLR also services Glebe.

South of Sydney Uni is **Newtown** (Map p100), a melting pot of social and sexual subcultures, students, and home renovators. King St, its relentlessly urban main drag, is full of funky clothes stores, bookshops and cafés. Slowly moving upmarket, Newtown retains an irrepressible dose of grunge and a rockin' live-music scene. Take the train, or bus 422/3, 426 or 428 from Circular Quay to King St.

Southwest of Glebe is predominantly Italian **Leichhardt** (Map pp92–3), increasingly popular with students and yuppies. Norton St is the place for pizza, pasta and slick Mediterranean style. Bus 413 from Wynyard, and buses 435/8 and 440 from Circular Quay service Leichhardt.

## North Shore

On the northern side of the Harbour Bridge is **North Sydney** (Map pp92–3), a high-rise office centre with little to tempt the traveller.

## SYDNEY'S BEST BEACHES

Sydneysiders swim before, after or instead of going to work. Most beaches are clean, easily accessible and patrolled by surf life-savers. Shark patrols operate during summer. Many beaches are topless; a couple are nude – do as locals do! Here's the low-down; see also Bondi (opposite), Manly (below) and Northern Beaches (p112):

- **Avalon** (Map p141) Caught in a sandy '70s time warp, Avalon has consistent surf and relaxed back streets lined with sleepy cafés and secondhand bookshops. To get here, catch bus L88, 190 or L90 from Wynyard.
- **Balmoral** (Map pp92–3) Split in two by an unfeasibly picturesque rocky outcrop, Balmoral is a popular North Sydney haunt. Swimmers, kayakers and windsurfers migrate to the shark-netted southern end. Catch bus 175 from Wynyard, then bus 275 from Spit Junction.
- **Bronte** (Map p99) Norfolk Island pines and sandstone headlands encircle the bowl-shaped park behind Bronte, a small family-oriented beach that can get wild and seaweedy. The rock pool is perfect, as are the beachy cafés along the once exceedingly uncool shopping strip. Catch bus 378 from Railway Sq.
- **Clovelly** (Map p99) The concrete terrace skirting skinny Clovelly bay makes it more pool than beach, but the swell still surges in. Bring your snorkel to see groupers underwater here. Catch bus 339.

**McMahons Point** is a low-key, forgotten suburb below the western side of the bridge. There's a row of cheery alfresco cafés on Blues Point Rd, running down to Blues Point Reserve on Lavender Bay.

At the end of Kirribilli Point, just east of the bridge, are **Admiralty House** (Map pp92–3) and **Kirribilli House** (Map pp92–3), the Sydney residences of the Governor General and Prime Minister respectively.

On the eastern shore of Lavender Bay is **Luna Park** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 9922 6644; www.lunapark.com.au; 1 Olympic Pl, Milsons Point; admission free, multiride passes from \$18; ☎ 10am–10pm Sun–Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat), with its sinister chip-toothed clown entry. It has been periodically closed by noise police in recent decades, but for the moment the Ferris Wheel, Rotor, Flying Saucer and Tumble Bug still offer varying degrees of nerve-rack and nausea.

East of here are the upmarket suburbs **Neutral Bay**, **Cremona** and **Mosman**, all with coves and harbourside parks perfect for picnics. Ferries from Circular Quay service these suburbs. On the northern side of Mosman is improbably pretty **Balmoral**, facing Manly across Middle Harbour.

In a superb harbourside setting, **Taronga Zoo** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 9969 2777; www.zoo.nsw.gov.au; Bradleys Head Rd, Mosman; adult/child/family \$30/16.50/79; ☎ 9am–5pm) has some 4000 critters (from seals to tigers, koalas to giraffes, echidnas to platypuses), all in decent habitats and well

cared for. Twilight concerts take place in the zoo during February and March. Zoo ferries depart Circular Quay's Wharf 2 half-hourly from 7.15am on weekdays and from 8.45am on Saturday and Sunday.

The zoo is really steep, so if you arrive by ferry, take the **Sky Safari cable car** (included in admission) or bus 238 to the top entrance and work your way downhill. A **ZooPass** (per person \$33.50), sold at Circular Quay and elsewhere, includes return ferry rides and zoo admission. The nightly **Roar & Snore** (☎ 9978 4791; adult/child \$156/105) is an overnight family experience with a night-time safari, a BBQ dinner and tents under the stars. Breakfast and behind-the-scenes tours arrive with the dawn.

## Manly

Laid-back Manly clings to a narrow isthmus between ocean and harbour beaches near North Head. Surrounded by stuffy harbour enclaves, Manly's shaggy surfers, dusty labourers and relaxed locals are refreshing company. The **Manly visitor centre** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 1430; www.manlytourism.com; Manly Wharf; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun), just outside the ferry wharf, has free pamphlets along with information on the 10km Manly Scenic Walkway.

The **Corso** connects Manly's ocean and harbour beaches – surf shops, burger joints, juice bars and lousy cappuccino cafés proliferate. A footpath follows the ocean shoreline around a small headland to tiny **Fairy Bower Beach** and

the picturesque **Shelly Beach**. On the harbour side, the refurbished **Manly Wharf** offers cafés, pubs and restaurants. West of here is **Oceanworld** (Map p97; ☎ 8251 7879; www.oceanworld.com.au; W Esplanade; adult/child/family \$18/10/44; ☎ 10am-5.30pm), a daggy-looking '80s aquarium with underwater transparent tubes through which you become alarmingly intimate with 10ft sharks. Next door, the beachy **Manly Art Gallery & Museum** (Map p97; ☎ 9949 1776; www.manly.nsw.gov.au; adult/child \$3.60/1.20; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) focuses on Manly's relationship with the beach.

Behind the gallery is the wonderful 9km-long **Manly Scenic Walkway** (opposite), which has a 2km-long wheelchair-accessible path. Bring water and snacks as there are no shops along the way.

North Head Scenic Dr (Map pp92-3) provides stunning ocean, harbour and city views. Along this route you'll find the **Manly Quarantine Station** (☎ 9247 5033; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; adult/child \$11/7.70; ☎ 1.15pm Thu & Sun, bookings essential), where isolated epidemic-disease carriers dwelt between 1832 and 1984. Ghosts of the dead linger; take the adults-only **Ghost Tour** (adult \$27.50; ☎ 7.30pm Wed & Fri-Sun) or **Kids' Ghost Walk** (child \$13.30; ☎ 6pm Fri).

To get to Manly, catch the ferry or JetCat, bus 169 or E69 from Wynyard, or bus 151 from the QVB.

## Northern Beaches

Sydney's northern beaches (Map p141) make a low-key, sandy day trip. Extending north from Manly, they form a continuous 30km stretch of laid-back 'burbs, craggy headlands, fish-and-chip shops and over 20 beaches, finishing at **Palm Beach**. Along the way are **Freshwater**, **Curl Curl**, **Dee Why**, **Collaroy**, **Narrabeen** and **Warriewood** beaches. More spectacular are **Whale**, **Avalon** and **Bilgola** beaches, all with dramatic, plummeting headlands. Buses 136 and 139 run from Manly to Dee Why and Curl Curl respectively. Bus L90 runs from Wynyard to Palm Beach. See also the boxed text, p111.

## ACTIVITIES

### Canoeing & Kayaking

Contact the **New South Wales Canoeing Association** (☎ 02-8116 9730; www.nswcanoe.org.au) for information on canoeing.

Alternatively, **Natural Wanders** (☎ 9899 1001; www.kayaksydney.com; per person incl brunch \$110; ☎ 9am-1pm) has exhilarating half-day bridge and island paddling tours.

## Cycling

Sydney is a big city and thus full of bike-unfriendly traffic; the best spot to get some spoke action is Centennial Park. **Bicycle NSW** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 4099; www.bicyclenw.org.au; L5, 822 George St) publishes *Cycling Around Sydney*, which details city routes and paths.

Many cycle-hire shops require a hefty deposit on a credit card.

**Cheeky Monkey** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9212 4460; www.cheekymonkey.com.au; 456 Pitt St; \$35/day; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

**Inner City Cycles** (Map p100; ☎ 9660 6605; 151 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe; per day/week \$33; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 7pm Thu, to 4pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun)

**Wooly's Wheels** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 2671; 82 Oxford St, Paddington; per day \$39; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, to 4pm Sat & Sun) Across from Victoria Barracks – handy to Centennial Park.

## Diving

Sydney's best shore dives are at Gordons Bay, north of Coogee (Map p99); Shark Point, Clovelly (Map p99); and Ship Rock, Cronulla (Map p141). Popular boat-dive sites are Wedding Cake Island off Coogee (Map p99), Sydney Heads (Map pp92-3), and off Royal National Park (Map pp86-7).

**Dive Centre Bondi** (Map p99; ☎ 9369 3855; www.divebondi.com.au; 192 Bondi Rd, Bondi; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, from 7.30am Sat & Sun) Four-day PADI course from \$350; shore and boat dives.

**Dive Centre Manly** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 4355; www.divesydney.com.au; 10 Belgrave St, Manly; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, from 7.45am Sat & Sun) Similar rates and offerings as its sister office in Bondi.

## Golf

There are more than 80 golf courses in the metropolitan area, though most are members only. Book to play on public courses (especially at weekends).

**Bondi Golf Club** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 1981; www.bondi.golf.com.au; 5 Military Rd, North Bondi; 18 holes \$18.50; ☎ 7am-sunset Mon-Fri, 12.30pm-sunset Sat & Sun)

**Moore Park Golf Course** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9663 1064; www.mooreparkgolf.com.au; cnr Anzac Pde & Cleveland St; 18 holes Mon-Fri \$45, Sat & Sun \$50; ☎ 6am-10pm)

## Horse Riding

The **Centennial Parklands Equestrian Centre** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9332 2809; www.cp.nsw.gov.au; Lang Rd, Paddington; per hr incl equipment \$60; ☎ 9am-5pm) conducts one-hour, 3.6km horse rides around

tree-lined Centennial Park, Sydney's favourite urban green space. Several stables at the centre conduct rides; equine familiarity is not required.

**Centennial Stables** (☎ 9360 5650; www.centennialstables.com.au)

**Eastside Riding Academy** (☎ 9360 7521; www.eastsideriding.com.au)

**Moore Park Stables** (☎ 9360 8747; www.mooreparkstables.com.au)

## In-Line Skating

The beach promenades at Bondi and Manly and the paths of Centennial Park are the favoured spots for skating.

**Manly Blades** (Map p97; ☎ 9976 3833; www.manlyblades.com.au; 2/49 North Steyne, Manly; hire per hr from \$15; ☎ 9am-6pm) Excellent blades and gear.

**Rollerblading Sydney** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0411-872 022; www.rollerbladingsydney.com.au; Milsons Point Station; per hr/2hr \$50/99; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun) Lessons, quality skates and protective gear.

## Sailing

Sydney has dozens of yacht clubs and sailing schools. Even if you're not a serious old salt, an introductory lesson is a super way to see the harbour.

**Eastsail Sailing School** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9327 1166; www.eastsail.com.au; d'Albora Marina, New Beach Rd, Rushcutters Bay; cruises per person from \$95; ☎ 9am-6pm) A sociable outfit offering cruises, and introductory 'Yachtmaster' courses from \$475.

**Sydney by Sail** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9280 1110; www.sydneysails.com.au; Festival Pontoon, National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour; tours \$130, courses \$425; ☎ 9am-5pm) Daily harbour sailing tours and introductory weekend sailing courses.

## Surfing

On the South Shore, get tubed at Bondi, Tamarama, Coogee, Maroubra and Cronulla. The North Shore is home to a dozen gnarly surf beaches between Manly and Palm Beach, including Curl Curl, Dee Why, Narrabeen, Mona Vale and Newport.

**Aloha Surf** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 3777; alohasurfmanly@hotmail.com; 44 Pittwater Rd, Manly; board hire half-/full day \$20/40; ☎ 9am-6pm) Longboards, shortboards, bodyboards.

**Let's Go Surfing** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 1800; www.letsgosurfing.com.au; 128 Ramsgate Ave, Bondi; 2hr lesson incl board & wetsuit adult/child \$75/39; ☎ 9am-7pm) Small-group lessons. Board and wetsuit hire is \$30 for two hours. Also at Maroubra.

**Manly Surf School** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 6977; www.manlysurfschool.com; North Steyne Surf Club, Manly; lessons per hr incl board & wetsuit adult/child \$50/40; ☎ 9am-6pm) Small-group surf lessons.

## Swimming

There are 100-plus public swimming pools in Sydney, and many beaches have protected rock pools. Harbour beaches offer sheltered and shark-netted (but sometimes soupy) swimming, but nothing beats (or cures a hangover faster than) Pacific Ocean waves. Always swim within the flagged lifeguard-patrolled areas, and never underestimate the surf.

Outdoor city pools:

**Andrew 'Boy' Charlton Pool** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9358 6686; www.abcpool.org; 1C Mrs Macquaries Rd, The Domain; adult/child \$5.20/3.60; ☎ 6am-8pm Sep-Apr) A 50m outdoor saltwater pool and harbour-view café.

**Dawn Fraser Baths** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9555 1903; Ellington Park, Glassop St, Balmain; adult/child \$3.40/2; ☎ 7.15am-6.15pm Oct-Nov & Mar-Apr, 6.45am-7pm Dec-Feb) These magnificently restored late-Victorian baths (1884) picturesquely protect swimmers from underwater undesirables.

**North Sydney Olympic Pool** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9955 2309; www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au; Alfred St South, Milsons Point; adult/child \$4.90/2.40; ☎ 5.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 7am-7pm Sat & Sun) Next to Luna Park, right on the harbour.

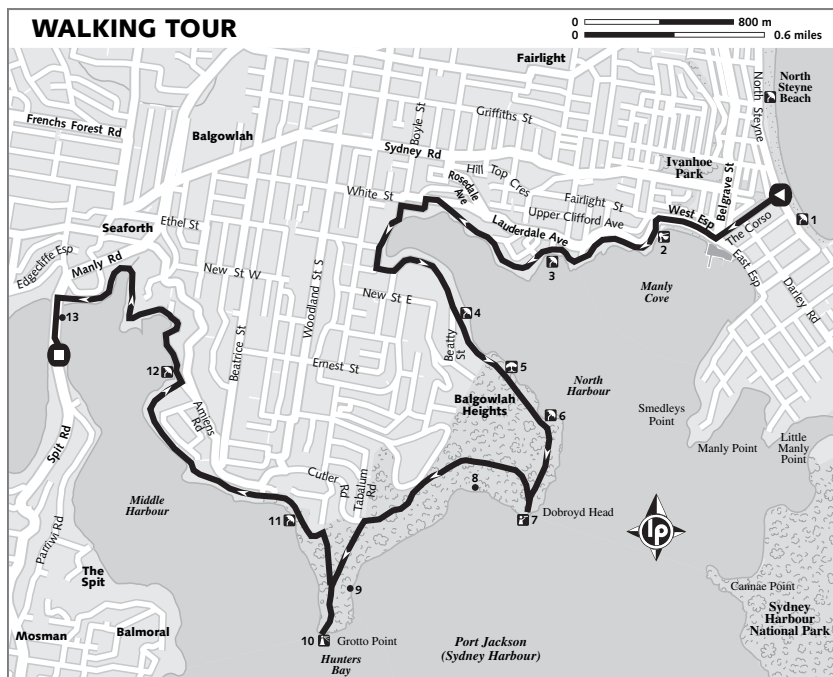
## WALKING TOUR

The epic Manly Scenic Walkway tracks west from Manly around North and Middle Harbour, past waterside mansions and harbour viewpoints and through rugged Sydney Harbour National Park (wear sturdy shoes!). Take water and grab a snack before you leave Manly (to get there, catch the Manly ferry, bus 151 from the QVB, or bus 169 or E69 from Wynyard). At times you'll feel completely isolated in bushland – it's easy to forget you're right in the middle of Sydney!

Check the surf at **Manly Beach** (1; p111), then cruise down the Corso to **Oceanworld** (2; opposite) on West Esplanade. Scan the view

### WALK FACTS

**Start** Manly Beach  
**Finish** Spit Bridge  
**Distance** 10km  
**Duration** four hours



through the Heads from **Fairlight Beach (3)** and the yachts tugging on their moorings near **Forty Baskets Beach (4)**. Cackling kookaburras mock you as you enter the **Sydney Harbour National Park (5)**; p102) and approach **Reef Beach (6)**. The track becomes steep, sandy and rocky further into the park – look for wildflowers, fat goannas sunning themselves and spiders in bottlebrush trees. The views from **Dobroyd Head (7)** are unforgettable. Check out the deserted **1930s sea shanties (8)** at the base of Crater Cove cliff, and the **Aboriginal rock carvings (9)** on an unsigned ledge left of the track before the **Grotto Point Lighthouse (10)** turnoff. Quiet, calm **Castle Rock Beach (11)** is at the western end of the national park.

There aren't any eateries en route, so fortify yourself at Manly before your walk, or pack a picnic and hit the tables at Tania Park or **Clontarf Beach (12)**. From the southern end of the **Spit Bridge (13)**, head back to the city on bus 151, 169 or E69.

## SYDNEY FOR CHILDREN

Organised ankle-biter activities ramp up during school holidays (December/January,

April, July and September) – check [www.sydneyforkids.com.au](http://www.sydneyforkids.com.au) and the free *Sydney's Child* and *Kid Friendly* magazines for listings. Otherwise, **Sydney Aquarium** (p107), **Taronga Zoo** (p111), **Oceanworld** (p112) and **Luna Park** (p111) are sure-fire entertainers. The Sunday afternoon GalleryKids programme at the **Art Gallery of NSW** (p106) includes dance, stories, magic, cartoons, Aboriginal performance, costumed tour guides and exhibition-specific events.

The **Sydney Opera House** (p103) runs the Kids at the House programme, featuring kids' music, dance and drama including the Babies' Proms Orchestra (orchestral nursery rhyme and picture-book accompaniment) and introductory ballet with Australian Ballet dancers.

Darling Harbour is great for kids – there's a playground, a paddleboat and a pond, or they can just feed your lunch to the seagulls. **Lollipops Playland** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9331 0811; [www.lollipopsplayland.com.au](http://www.lollipopsplayland.com.au); Shop 201, Bent St, Entertainment Quarter, Lang Rd, Moore Park; adult/child under 1/child over 1 \$5/free/\$12; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) is a multi-storey exploratory funhouse with ball pits, mazes,

tunnels and nets. There are also two outdoor, state-of-the-art playgrounds built on bouncy matting for spills 'n' thrills. At Manly Quarantine Station, the **Kids' Ghost Walk** (p112) is a spooky good time. If all else fails, take them to the beach!

The **Wright Nanny** (☎ 9660 6621; [www.thewrightnanny.com.au](http://www.thewrightnanny.com.au)) service supplies first aid-qualified babysitters and nannies across Sydney. A casual nanny costs \$18 per hour; babysitters are \$15 per hour. An \$18 agency fee applies. **Perfect Solutions** (☎ 9976 2214; [www.perfectsolutions.com.au](http://www.perfectsolutions.com.au)) babysits for \$15 per hour (minimum four hours) plus a \$20 booking fee. **Lollipops Playland** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9331 0811; [www.lollipopsplayland.com.au](http://www.lollipopsplayland.com.au)) has childcare for five-to-nine year olds – \$20 for three hours.

## TOURS

There are countless tours available in Sydney. You can book most of them at the visitor centres (p102).

### City Bus Tours

**Bondi Explorer** (☎ 13 15 00; [www.sydneypass.info](http://www.sydneypass.info); adult/child \$39/19; ☎ 8.45am-4.15pm) Two-hour, 19-stop loop from Circular Quay to Kings Cross, Double Bay, Rose Bay, Vaucluse, Watsons Bay, the Gap, Bondi Beach and Coogee, returning to the city along Oxford St. Buses depart every 30 minutes; buy your ticket on board or at STA offices.

**Sydney Explorer** (☎ 13 15 00; [www.sydneypass.info](http://www.sydneypass.info); adult/child \$39/19; ☎ 8.40am-5.20pm) The red STA Sydney Explorer bus follows a two-hour, 26-stop hop-on, hop-off loop from Circular Quay through Kings Cross, Chinatown, Darling Harbour and the Rocks, with pithy on-board commentary and discounted entry to attractions. Buses depart every 20 minutes.

### Harbour Cruises

**Captain Cook Cruises** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9206 1111; [www.captaincook.com.au](http://www.captaincook.com.au); Wharf 6, Circular Quay; adult/child/family \$25/12/55) Also at Aquarium Wharf, Darling Harbour.

**Matilda Cruises** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9264 7377; [www.matilda.com.au](http://www.matilda.com.au); Pier 26, Aquarium Wharf, Darling Harbour; adult/child/family \$29/25/75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) One-hour catamaran, yacht and ferry cruises. Cocktail dinner cruises also available.

**Sydney Ferries** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9246 8300, 131 500; [www.sydneyferries.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sydneyferries.nsw.gov.au); Wharf 4, Circular Quay; adult/child/family from \$15/9/45; ☎ 8am daily, 1pm Mon-Fri, 12.30pm Sat & Sun, 8pm Mon-Sat) Hop on board for one of the one-hour to 2½-hour harbour-sights-and-lights cruises.

## Walking Tours

**BridgeClimb** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8274 7777; [www.bridgeclimb.com](http://www.bridgeclimb.com); 5 Cumberland St, The Rocks; adult \$179-295, child \$109-195; ☎ 3½hr tours around the clock) Don a headset, an umbilical cord and a dandy grey jumpsuit and up you go. Go to the toilet *before* you start the climb.

**Sydney Aboriginal Discoveries** (☎ 9680 3098, 0405-289 016; [www.sydneyaustour.com.au/Abordiscover.html](http://www.sydneyaustour.com.au/Abordiscover.html); per person \$65-180; ☎ 2-4hr tours daily) Tours focusing on Aboriginal culture and history, landmarks, sacred sites, a tasty feast of native Australian foods, and a Dreamtime cruise.

**Sydney Architecture Walks** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8239 2211; [www.sydneyarchitecture.org](http://www.sydneyarchitecture.org); adult/concession \$25/20; ☎ 2hr walks, rain or shine) Four themed walks guided by young archi-buffs. Tours depart from the Museum of Sydney, at the corner of Bridge and Phillip Sts.

## Other Tours

**Bonza Bike Tours** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 1127; [www.bonzabiketours.com](http://www.bonzabiketours.com); adult/child \$70/50; ☎ 10.30am & 2.30pm Oct-Mar, 10.30am & 1.30pm Apr-Sep) Three- to four-hour 'Sydney Classic' bike tours, trundling past the Opera House, Hyde Park, Darling Harbour, Chinatown, Sydney Tower and the Royal Botanic Gardens. Tours depart from the Portobello Caffé at Circular Quay East.

**Maureen Fry** (☎ 9660 7157; [www.ozemail.com.au/~mpfry](http://www.ozemail.com.au/~mpfry); 2hr tours per person from \$18) The omniscient Maureen runs introductory tours to Sydney, from the Rocks to Macquarie St to Paddington. Mainly for groups; individuals by arrangement.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Sydney has plenty of festivals and special goings-on year-round. Visitor information centres will be able to advise you what's on when you're in town.

### January

**Australia Day** ([www.australiaday.gov.au](http://www.australiaday.gov.au)) Australia's 'birthday' – 26 January; regattas, BBQs and fireworks.

**Sydney Festival** ([www.sydneyfestival.org.au](http://www.sydneyfestival.org.au)) This massive event floods the city with art, including free outdoor concerts in the Domain.

**Flickerfest** ([www.flickerfest.com.au](http://www.flickerfest.com.au)) International short-film festival at Bondi Pavilion.

### February

**Chinese New Year** ([www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/cny](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/cny)) Celebrated in Chinatown with fireworks in late January or early February.

**Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras** ([www.mardigras.org.au](http://www.mardigras.org.au)) Late February. The highlight of this world-famous festival is the over-the-top, sequined Oxford St parade, culminating in a bacchanalian party at the Entertainment Quarter.



**Tropfest** (www.tropfest.com) The world's largest short-film festival, judged by an international megastar like Salma Hayek or Gabriel Byrne.

### March/April

**Royal Easter Show** (www.eastershow.com.au) Twelve-day agricultural show and funfair at Homebush Bay.

**Women's Festival** (www.internationalwomensday.com) Celebrations coinciding with International Women's Day.

### May

**Sydney Writers' Festival** (www.swf.org.au) Celebrates the literary in Sydney, with guest authors, talks and forums.

**Australian Fashion Week** (www.mafw.org.au) Early May. At Circular Quay.

### June

**Sydney Biennale** (www.biennaleofsydney.com.au) International art festival held in even-numbered years at the Art Gallery of NSW and city venues.

**Sydney Film Festival** (www.sydneyfilmfestival.org) A 14-day orgy of cinema held at the State Theatre and other cinemas.

### July

**Yulefest** (www.katoomba-nsw.com/yulefest.html) Blue Mountains businesses celebrate a maladjusted southern-hemisphere Christmas.

### August

**City to Surf Run** (www.city2surf.sunherald.com.au) This 14km-long fun run takes place on the second Sunday in August and attracts a mighty 40,000 nutcases who run from Hyde Park to Bondi Beach.

### September

**Royal Botanic Gardens Spring Festival** (www.rbgsgov.au) Spring into spring, with concerts, colourful flower displays and plenty of pollen.

**Festival of the Winds** (www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/info/pavilion/fotw) A multicultural kite-flying festival at Bondi Beach.

**Rugby League Grand Final** (www.nrl.com) The two best teams left standing in the National Rugby League (NRL) meet to decide who's best.

### October

**Manly Jazz Festival** (www.manly.nsw.gov.au/manlyjazz) Labour Day long weekend. The jazz is mostly free.

### November

**Sculpture by the Sea** (www.sculpturebythesea.com) Mid-November. The Bondi-to-Bronte walk is transformed into an outdoor sculpture gallery.

### December

**Christmas Day** Thousands of backpackers descend on Bondi Beach on Christmas Day (25 December), much to the consternation of overworked lifesavers.

**Boxing Day** On 26 December Sydney Harbour is a sight to behold as hundreds of boats crowd its waters to farewell the yachts competing in the gruelling Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race (www.rolexsydneyhobart.com).

**New Year's Eve** The Rocks, Kings Cross and Bondi Beach heave with alcohol-soaked celebrations on 31 December.

### SLEEPING

Sydney's well of accommodation seems to never run dry, with everything from budget hostels to cosy B&Bs, comfortable motels, authentic Aussie pubs and deluxe harbour-view hotels. Between November and February, you should expect prices (especially at beachside hotels) to jump by as much as 40%. Conversely, when tumbleweeds blow through foyers in the slower winter months you can often strike a bargain. Many city hotels cater primarily to business travellers, so their weekend rates may be lower. Predictably, a view can play a big part in determining the price of a Sydney room. Booking through an accommodation agency like Tourism New South Wales (p102) can sometimes land you a discount.

Read up on Sydney's neighbourhoods before you decide where to stay: party people should head for Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, Paddington or Bondi; shoppers, gourmants and highlight hunters should shoot for the Rocks, the CBD, Darling Harbour or Chinatown. If you want to keep things low-key, try Glebe, Potts Point, Surry Hills or Manly.

In this Sydney section, a budget room is classified as up to \$50/100 per night for a single/double. Midrange doubles cost between \$101 and \$200; top-end doubles in this city start at \$200 a night. Serviced apartments usually sleep more than two people – good value for groups and families.

### Budget

#### CITY CENTRE

**Railway Square YHA** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 9666; www.yha.com.au; 8 Lee St; dm \$27-33, d \$78-88; ☑ ☒) Adjoining Central Station, this hostel's main building is a historic 1904 train shed – some of the dorms are inside NSW's old 'red rattler' train carriages. Facilities lean to the functional side of fancy but are better than you'd expect

for these prices. The more expensive doubles have bathrooms.

**Sydney Central YHA** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9218 9000; www.yha.com.au; 11 Rawson Pl; dm from \$29, d & tw from \$86; ☑ ☒ ☓ ☒) Near Central Station this 1913 heritage-listed monolith has been renovated to within an inch of its life. Rooms are brightly painted and the kitchens are great, but the highlight is sitting in the rooftop pool making faces at the Department of Commerce workers in the office tower across the street.

**Wake Up!** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9288 7888; www.wakeup.com.au; 509 Pitt St; dm from \$24, d & tw from \$88; ☑ ☒) Backpackers sleep soundly in this converted 1900 department store on top of Sydney's busiest intersection. It's a convivial, colourful, professionally run hostel with a tour desk, 24-hour check-in, a sunny café, a bar and no excuse for neglecting your inner party-animal.

**Base Backpackers Wanderers on Kent** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9267 7718; www.basebackpackers.com; 477 Kent St; dm \$26-32, s & d \$90; ☑ ☒) Strangely deserted during the day (everyone's out enjoying themselves), Sydney's Base Backpackers branch livens up at night when things get downright raucous at the bar. Stay in the sanitary girls-only 'sanctuary' (\$34) or risk boy-contamination in the dorms. Some rooms are shoeboxes.

**Y Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9264 2451; www.yhotel.com.au; 5-11 Wentworth Ave; dm \$35, s/d/tr/f from \$75/90/110/175; ☑ ☒ ☓ ☒) Standards here are high – simple, spotless rooms with TV, phone, fridge and air-con plus an adjoining café downstairs. The city centre is just beyond Hyde Park across the road and Oxford St is a wiggle away. Child-friendly; good wheelchair access.

**Grand Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9232 3755; www.merivale.com; 30 Hunter St; s/d/tr \$80/90/110; ☑) One of Sydney's oldest hotels, the Grand has lower floors pulsating with pokies, pool tables and beer hordes. Keep going up and you'll find neat rooms with TVs and fridges.

#### KINGS CROSS

**Eva's Backpackers** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 2185; www.evasbackpackers.com.au; 6-8 Orwell St, Potts Point; dm \$25, d & tw \$60; ☑) Eva's is a perennial backpackers' favourite, probably because it's far enough out of the Kings Cross fray to maintain some composure and dignity. Smile-free staff have a bit too much composure at times, but it's clean and secure, and there's an ace

rooftop-BBQ area and a sociable kitchen/dining room.

**Pink House** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 1689, 1800 806 385; www.pinkhouse.com.au; 6-8 Barndleugh Sq, Kings Cross; dm \$26, d & tw incl breakfast from \$65; ☑) Yep, it's a pink house. The relentless colour attack continues inside through spritely communal areas and across creaky floorboards into robustly furnished dorms. There are three leafy patios where hung-over guests nod off in the shade. Free BBQs are a hit.

**Original Backpackers** (Map p98; ☎ 9356 3232; www.originalbackpackers.com.au; 160-162 Victoria St, Kings Cross; dm/s/d \$25/55/65; ☑) A hostel for almost 25 years, this may well be Sydney's original backpackers. It's a rambling 176-bed affair in two character-filled Victorian houses, with friendly staff, decent bathrooms, good security and gas cooking. The social scene is lively and inclusive without being debauched.

**Highfield Private Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9326 9539; www.highfieldhotel.com; 166 Victoria St, Kings Cross; dm/s/d incl breakfast \$25/60/70) Clean and serviceable without igniting anyone's interior-design passions, Highfield is a reliable independent option, with simple rooms (shared bathrooms) and solid 24-hour security. Top-floor rooms are the sunniest.

**Woodcock Harbour City Backpackers** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 1800 882 922; www.harbourcitybackpackers.com.au; 50 Sir John Young Cres, Woolloomooloo; dm \$20-25, d & tw from \$70; ☑) Friendly and funky, this Woolloomooloo hostel has been getting great feedback from travellers, mostly for its awesome roof terrace that floats you up into the city lights. It's a huge place with 250 beds, but the ceilings are high and rooms airy – you'll never feel like you're stuffed into someone else's backpack.

**O'Malley's Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 2211; www.omalleyshotel.com.au; 228 William St, Kings Cross; s/d/tr incl breakfast \$70/80/90) This jovial Irish pub has traditionally decorated, well-furnished rooms with private bathrooms upstairs that are surprisingly quiet, given the William St location and nightly twiddle-dee-dee live music downstairs. Harbour-view rooms are winners.

**Royal Sovereign Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9331 3672; www.darlobar.com.au; cnr Liverpool St & Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst; d from \$80) Directly above the boozy Darlo Bar (BYO earplugs), these small, nifty rooms put you in the thick of the action at a bargain price. Olive/cream/grey colour schemes scream, 'I was hip five years ago', but communal bathrooms are immaculate.

**GAY & LESBIAN SYDNEY**

Gay is the new (and old, actually) straight in Sydney; gay and lesbian culture forms a vocal, vital part of the city's social fabric. **Taylor Square** (Map pp94-5) on Oxford St is the centre of arguably the second-largest gay community in the world; Newtown is home to Sydney's lesbian scene. Gay beach life focuses on **Lady Bay** and **Tamarama** (see the boxed text, p111). Also check out **Red Leaf Pool** on New South Head Rd, **Double Bay**, and **Andrew 'Boy' Charlton Pool** (p113). Despite broad acceptance, a homophobic streak still taints some community sectors and 'gay bashing' isn't unknown.

Sydney's famous **Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras** (☎ 9568 8600; www.mardigras.org.au) started in 1978 as a political march commemorating New York's Stonewall riots. It has evolved into a month-long arts festival that culminates in a fleshy street parade on the last Saturday in February. The rampant 200-float parade begins on Elizabeth St around 7.30pm and cavorts the length of Oxford St. Around 700,000 spectators line the streets.

Free gay media includes *SX*, the *Sydney Star Observer* and *Lesbians on the Loose*. For counselling and referral, call the **Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service of NSW** (☎ 8594 9596; www.glcnsw.org.au). **Gay & Lesbian Tourism Australia** (www.galta.com.au) has a wealth of information about gay and lesbian travel in Oz.

Go for a wander along the city end of **Oxford Street**, or try the following popular faves on for size.

**ARQ** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9380 8700; www.arqsydney.com.au; 16 Flinders St, Darlinghurst; Thu/Fri/Sat/Sun free/\$10/20/5; 🕒 9pm-6am Thu & Fri, 10pm-9am Sat, 9pm-9am Sun) This flash megaclub has a cocktail bar, a recovery room and two dance floors with high-energy house music, drag shows and a hyperactive smoke machine.

**Exchange Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 2956; www.qbar.com.au; 34-44 Oxford St, Darlinghurst; Exchange/Q Bar/Phoenix free/free-\$20/5-10; 🕒 10pm-late Q Bar & Phoenix, to 4am Exchange Mon-Fri, 9am-6am Sat & Sun) Q Bar upstairs pumps hot house nightly; the Phoenix club downstairs is the sticky, sexy, claustrophobic home to an alternative gay crowd. Sandwiched in between, the Exchange is a regulation beery pub.

**Imperial Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9519 9899; www.theimperialhotel.com.au; 35 Erskineville Rd, Erskineville; admission free; 🕒 3pm-midnight Sun-Wed, to 2.30am Thu, to 6am Fri & Sat) The Art Deco Imperial's drag shows inspired *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (the opening scene was filmed here). Any drag queen worth her sheen has played the Cabaret Room, while the Cellar Bar, Public Bar and Priscilla Lounge heave with chesty pool boys and raging house.

**Midnight Shift** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 4319; www.themidnightshift.com; 85 Oxford St, Darlinghurst; video bar free, club \$10-20; 🕒 video bar noon-late Mon-Fri, from 3pm Sun, club 11pm-late Fri & Sat) Sydney's perennial good-time boy palace packs in everyone from beefcakes to drags. The grog is cheap, the patrons messy and Kylie rules. Pick up a 'Pick-up Card' at the bar to help with introductions ('I'm easy...but it looks like you're hard...').

**Oxford Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 3467; 134 Oxford St, Taylor Sq, Darlinghurst; admission free; 🕒 24hr downstairs, 5pm-late Gilligans, 6pm-late Ginger's Wed-Sat) Big and crimson, the ever-lovin' Oxford is a Taylor Sq beacon. Downstairs it's beer-swilling and mannish. First-floor Gilligan's serves luxe cocktails, and top-floor Ginger's has indulgent lounge service. After-dance party crowds heave and sway.

Also try the **Newtown Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9517 1728; www.newtownhotel.com; 174 King St, Newtown; admission free; 🕒 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, to 10pm Sun), good for a few laughs at a local boozier (with drag queens for entertainment) or **Sol's Deck Bar** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 8868; www.soldeckbar.net.au; 191 Oxford St, Darlinghurst; admission free Mon-Wed, \$5 Thu-Sun; 🕒 11am-late restaurant, 8pm-late bar) for beer, tapas and a perv over Taylor Sq.

**BONDI**

**Bondi Sands** (Map p99; ☎ 1800 026 634; www.bondisands.com; 252 Campbell Pde; dm/d incl breakfast from \$20/50; 📺) Just 60m from the sand, Bondi Sands was on a

highway to hell before the new owners steered it back from the brink. Rooms are simple and clean with shared bathrooms; a few have stunning views – ask for No 7, 8, 17 or 18.

**Indy's Surfside Bondi** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 4900; www.surfsidebackpackers.com.au; 35a Hall St; dm/d \$25/65; 📺) Not for the mild-mannered, beer-stained Indy's is Bondi Party Central, with enormous psychedelic surf murals, big-screen TVs and frenetic communal areas smelling vaguely of illicit herbs. Security is tight, preventing the whole street from crashing the party.

**Sinclair's of Bondi** (Map p99; ☎ 9338 9911; www.sinclairsbondi.com.au; 11 Bennett St; dm \$28, s \$50-80, d & tw incl breakfast \$66-90, f \$110-127; 📺) High on the hill above Bondi Beach, this austere-looking house has 25 rooms with varying bed configurations. It's clean, quiet and low-key; stay elsewhere if you're in party mode.

**Bondi Beachouse YHA** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 2088; www.bondibeachouse.com.au; 63 Fletcher St; dm/s/d/f from \$22/70/80/110; 📺) A short stroll from the beach, Bondi Beachouse has clued-up staff, a pool table, TV rooms, a BBQ, free play stuff (surfboards, snorkels, etc) and Tamarama Beach views from the rooftop spa. It's a friendly, clean, sunnyside-up kinda joint. Bus 380 from Circular Quay stops nearby.

**Beach Road Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 7247; brhbondi@bigpond.com; 71 Beach Rd; s/d \$70/85; 📺) This chipper hotel is part of a big, boxy pub two blocks back from the beach. Nautical décor surfs through the bars, eateries and nightclub to the rooms, which are clean and bright with TV and decent bathrooms. Lose yourself (and perhaps others) in the massive beds. Things get rowdy after dark (good or bad, it's up to you...).

**COOGEE**

**Wizard of Oz Backpackers** (Map p99; ☎ 9315 7876; www.wizardofoz.com.au; 172 Coogee Bay Rd; dm \$22-44; 📺) In a refurbished California bungalow a few hundred metres up the yellow brick road from the beach, this laid-back place is painted in muted sea tones (perhaps in an effort to subdue Coogee's incessant party vibe). Dorms house four to 14 slumberers; communal areas (centring on the BBQ and big-screen TV) are lively.

**Grand Pacific Private Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 6301; fax 9665 6203; cnr Beach & Carr Sts; s/d/tr with shared bathrooms from \$45/65/85) Actually it's a far cry from grand, but these digs are oddly charming in a decaying, Charles Bukowski kind of way. And the beachside location is absolutely sensational! Perfect for dirty weekends (or affairs!), this hotel is straight from a true-crime novel.

**Coogee Beachside Accommodation** (Map p99; ☎ 9315 8511; www.sydneybeachside.com.au; 178 Coogee Bay Rd; d & tw \$75) Run by the folks from Wizard of Oz up the road, Beachside offers simple, clean doubles and twins with tidy shared bathrooms in a converted house. If you're in Sydney for a while, there are also one-, two- and three-bed apartments for longer stays.

**GLEBE, NEWTOWN & BALMAIN**

**Glebe Point YHA** (Map p100; ☎ 9692 8418; www.yha.com.au; 262-264 Glebe Point Rd; dm \$25-29, s/d \$60/70; 📺) This incredible hulk of a hotel features colourful, basic rooms and shared bathrooms. The main lure has to be the party-people rooftop with its BBQ nights, speed-dating extravaganzas and salsa showdowns. Kitchens and bathrooms are reliable in a YHA kind of way.

**Billabong Gardens** (Map p100; ☎ 9550 3236; www.billabonggardens.com.au; 5-11 Egan St; dm/s \$25/49, d \$66-80; 📺) This enduring motel/hostel offers a broader experience than most backpacker joints, with travellers, touring rock bands and urbanites of all persuasions lobbing up on the doorstep. Rooms come with or without bathrooms, encircling a central solar-heated swimming pool.

**Alishan International Guest House** (Map p100; ☎ 9566 4048; www.alishan.com.au; 100 Glebe Point Rd; dm \$25, s/d from \$55/77; 📺) In a substantial, quiet, 111-year-old house in the centre of Glebe, the Alishan guesthouse (it's an area of Taiwan, don't you know?) is clean, quiet and well run, with multilingual staff, spacey communal areas, gas cooking and a disabled-access room.

**Balmain Lodge** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9810 3700; fax 9810 1500; 415 Darling St; s & d \$80; 📺) Rotating around a ferny courtyard on Balmain's Darling St backbone, the no-fuss, shared-facility rooms here have kitchenettes, TV and DVD and not much chutzpah. But you're not here to sit in your room, are you? Balmain has enough pubs, cafés and restaurants to keep you entertained for weeks. Two disabled-access rooms; kid-free zone.

**Wattle Guest House** (Map p100; ☎ 9552 4997; www.wattlehouse.com.au; 44 Hereford St; dm/s/d incl breakfast \$30/75/80; 📺) Readers have bombarded us with glowing reports of the Wattle – they must be doing something right! It's a super-tidy 1877 Victorian house with shared bathrooms and affable management, not far from Glebe Point Rd. Sorry, no kids.

**MANLY**

**Manly Beach House** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 7050; www.manlybeachhouse.com.au; 179 Pittwater Rd; s/d/tr \$50/60/70; P) Readers recommend this homely, mega-friendly, good-value option, a four-minute walk from the beach. Polite management prides itself on making *sure* you're comfortable and have all the requisite local info. Shared facilities are clean and serviceable.

**Manly Backpackers** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 3411, 1800 662 500; www.manlybackpackers.com.au; 24 Raglan St; dm/d/apt \$34/80/180; P) Manly's most reliable budget option, this converted ambulance station boasts plenty of beds, boozy nocturnal activities, international staff and enormous kitchens. The best rooms open onto balconies; studio apartments (in a separate building) are perfect for small groups. Winter rates plummet.

**NORTH SHORE**

**Collaroy Beachhouse YHA** (Map p141; ☎ 9981 1177; www.sydneybeachhouse.com.au; 4 Collaroy St, Collaroy; dm \$20-39, d & tw \$54-80, f\$84-130; P) If you're bombing around the northern beaches, this clean, airy hostel will make you feel at home. There are free surfboards, bikes and snorkelling gear if the Pacific is calling your name, or hang out by the rooftop pool. Pizza, BBQ and movie nights churn in a constant giddy circle.

**Glenferrie Lodge** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9955 1685, 1800 121 011; www.glenferrielodge.com; 12a Carabella St, Kirribilli; dm/s/d/ incl breakfast \$40/79/99/159; P) Outside this barrel-chested 1880s house is a ridiculous sculpture that someone unearthed in their backyard. Ignore it and head inside where clean rooms, spotless shared bathrooms and helpful management await. Close to Milsons Point Station and Kirribilli ferry pier.

**Midrange****CITY CENTRE, THE ROCKS & CIRCULAR QUAY**

**Mercantile Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 3570; www.mercantilehotel.citysearch.com.au; 25 George St, The Rocks; d from \$110) The Mercantile's green-tiled exterior hints at the Irish sympathies emanating from the bar. Upstairs the basic, renovated, pub-style rooms take a less partisan approach with neutral colours and shared bathrooms. Four suites have spas (\$140); avoid near St Patrick's Day.

**Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 4044; www.lordnelson.com.au; 19 Kent St, Millers Pt;

d\$120-180; ☎) Built in 1841, this boutique sandstone pub has its own brewery (try a pint of 'Nelson's Blood') and is just far enough from the Rocks' tourist throng. Rooms are elegantly colonial (stripy sheets and dormer windows), most with private bathrooms.

**Australian Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 2229; www.australianheritagehotel.com; 100 Cumberland St, The Rocks; d\$125) Despite the shared bathrooms, this pub accommodation scores points for snug communal rooms, 24-hour harbour-view roof terrace, complimentary glasses of port and the patriotic bar downstairs (96 Australian beers!).

**Palisade Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 2272; www.palisadehotel.com.au; 35 Bettington St, Millers Pt; d/tw \$125/130) Standing in Gothic isolation atop Millers Point, this old-time, nicotine-stained dock workers' pub has dodged kitsch Rocks-style makeovers and remains a great place for a beer and a cheap night's sleep. Basic, shared-facility rooms are weary but have magnificent harbour views.

**Russell** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9241 3543; www.therussell.com.au; 143a George St, The Rocks; d incl breakfast from \$140, with bathroom \$235; ☎) Traditionally decorated rooms (think lace and frills), lounge areas with fireplaces, library and a rooftop garden just minutes from Circular Quay make the Russell a solid choice. Rooms have fresh flowers; families dig the four-bed suite.

**B&B Sydney Harbour** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 1130; www.bedandbreakfastsydney.com; 142 Cumberland St, The Rocks; s/d from \$130/155; P) This 100-year-old guesthouse boldly claims to be the 'World's best-located B&B' – with the Rocks and the city on your doorstep, it's difficult to argue. Rooms with private bathrooms manage to capture an Australian flavour without being twee. Smaller shared-bathroom rooms are also available.

**Hyde Park Inn** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9264 6001; www.hydeparkinn.com.au; 271 Elizabeth St; s/d/ incl breakfast from \$140/155/190; P) Dating back to the late '60s, this place invests little in aesthetics but a lot in generous room sizes and friendliness. All rooms have kitchenettes; the best of them have Hyde Park views. The 1986 apricot colour scheme is soon destined to meet its maker.

**our pick Vibe Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9282 0987; www.vibehotels.com.au; 111 Goulburn St; d from \$185; P) Vibe's management ran the renovators' broom through every corner of this old-stager hotel, creating an utterly funky establishment. Lime, purple and black colours

course through foyers; rooms feature maximal mirrors, stripy retro bed linen and cool abstract art. Good weekend rates.

**CHINATOWN & DARLING HARBOUR AREA**

**Capitol Square Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 8633; www.rydges.com/capitolssquare; cnr George & Campbell Sts; d from \$110; P) Entirely convenient as it's near both Chinatown and Darling Harbour, with double-glazed widows to keep out the noise. Tidy en-suite rooms strive for a plush, mildly regal atmosphere. Wheelchair access available; frequent internet deals.

**Pensione Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9265 8888; www.pensione.com.au; 631-635 George St; s/d/f \$100/115/170; P) This tastefully reworked post office features smart, neutrally shaded rooms with air-con, TV, fridge and good security. Mark Rothko prints and a wooden staircase warm the simple, restrained surrounds. Aim for a rear room – George St traffic grumbles at night.

**Vulcan Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 3283; www.vulcanhotel.com.au; 500 Wattle St, Ultimo; s/d from \$100/130; P) Vulcan was a watering hole well into the '90s before the lousy pub rooms were converted into boutique budget accommodation. Discreet staff direct you to minimalist grey-and-white en-suite rooms, complete with TV and mini-bar. Live long and prosper.

**Aaron's Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 5555; www.aaronshotel.com.au; 37 Ultimo Rd, Chinatown; s/d from \$110/130; ☎) Aaron doesn't actually exist – he was invented to secure top-of-the-page 'Aa' listing in the *Yellow Pages*. The cunning plan seems to have worked – Aaron's brilliantly located, clean, light-filled rooms are always full. Kid-friendly; wheelchair accessible.

**Metro Hotel Sydney Central** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9283 8088; www.metrohospitalitygroup.com; 431 Pitt St; d from \$135; P) Centrally located, the courteous Metro has a brassy lobby, a business centre and serviceable rooms with classy touches (Brett Whiteley prints), plus a rooftop pool if you feel like ignoring the city below. Deluxe rooms are stylish; standard rooms aren't.

**Glasgow Arms Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 2354; www.glasgowarmshotel.com.au; 527 Harris St, Ultimo; s/d \$120/135; ☎) Scoot your way across the road from the Powerhouse Museum, through the bar, beyond the poker machines and upstairs to the Glasgow Arms' traditionally decorated, no-frills rooms. The balcony rooms on William Henry St are the pick of the bunch.

**KINGS CROSS**

**Maisonette Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 3878; maisonettehotel@bigpond.com; 31 Challis Ave, Potts Point; s/d from \$60/100) This friendly place above the Challis Ave caffeine cauldron is top value, offering small, bright rooms with kitchenettes, TVs and spick-and-span bathrooms. Ask about lower rates for longer stays.

**Hotel 59** (Map p98; ☎ 9360 5900; www.hotel59.com.au; 59 Bayswater Rd, Kings Cross; s/d/tr from \$90/100/135; ☎) Hotel 59 is good bang for your buck on the quiet part of Bayswater Rd, with nouveau-Med rooms and smiley staff who go out of their way not to get in your way. The café downstairs does whopping cooked breakfasts (\$5 to \$11).

**Macleay** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 7755; www.themacleay.com.au; 28 Macleay St, Potts Point; d \$115-135, tw & tr \$130-150; P) The upper floors of these serviceable serviced apartments have harbour panoramas. Rooms are mired in an '80s design quagmire (shame, Ken Done, shame...), and when the laundry's running the hallways smell like an oven full of wet socks, but the location, price and friendliness-factor win through.

**Crest Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 2755; www.cresthotel.com.au; 111 Darlinghurst Rd, Kings Cross; d \$130-150; ☎) With the definitive Kings Cross location, the Crest caters to business bods, visiting Koreans (there's an amazing Ginseng Bathhouse on site) and boozy boys' weekends away. The rooms are comfy but could be anywhere in the world if you don't have a harbour view.

**Victoria Court Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 3200; www.victoriacourt.com.au; 122 Victoria St, Potts Point; d from \$150; P) The Victoria is a sweetly run guesthouse filling a pair of three-storey 1881 brick terrace houses. The 22 rooms have private bathroom, a TV and plenty of over-the-top Victoriana (floral quilts, chandeliers, paintings of fruit etc). Still, it's clean, secure and tastily located.

**Mariners Court** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 3888; www.marinerscourt.com.au; 44-50 McElhone St, Woolloomooloo; d/tr/f from \$155/175/200; P) A tucked-away treasure, this ship-shape package ain't the flashiest of Sydney's sleeps, but it offers that rare combination of location, price and roominess. All rooms have courtyards or balconies, some with leafy outlooks. Good wheelchair access.

**Simpsons of Potts Point** (Map p98; ☎ 9356 2199; www.simpsonspottspoint.com; 8 Challis Ave, Potts Point; s/d from \$155/175; P) An 1892 red-brick



politician's palace, Simpsons has been dutifully converted into a quiet, refined B&B. The 14 spacious rooms with private bathrooms feature fireplaces, balconies and antique prints. The lounge has a piano if you want to mingle or tinkle.

#### DARLINGHURST & SURRY HILLS

**Hotel Altamont** (Map p98; ☎ 9360 6000; www.altamont.com.au; 207 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst; d incl breakfast from \$100; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) Altamont flagged the end of '60s peace and love, but here in Darlinghurst the good times continue unabated. Spiffy-looking doubles with private bathrooms feel as though they should cost more than they do, staff and communal areas are welcoming (especially the terrace), and it's tantalisingly close to the Cross.

**City Crown Motel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 2433; www.citycrownmotel.com.au; 289 Crown St, Surry Hills; d from \$100; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) In an awesome Surry Hills location, this unfailingly busy motel has plush carpet, clean, simple (and snug) rooms, and an on-site café serving mean caffeine. Prices double during Mardi Gras.

**Cambridge Park Inn** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9212 1111; www.cambridgeinn.com.au; 212 Riley St, Surry Hills; d \$145-170; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) The embodiment of what famous architect Robin Boyd called the 'Great Australian Ugliness', this hotel ain't pretty. On the plus side, it's superbly located, personable for its size, and it has a heated pool, a spa, a sauna and super views from the upper floors. Beauty is only skin deep.

#### PADDINGTON & WOOLLAHRA

**Sullivans Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9361 0211; www.sullivans.com.au; 21 Oxford St, Paddington; d \$145-160; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) Popular with gay travellers, this well-managed 64-room motel in 'Paddinghurst' has tidy, if slightly bland, rooms with contemporary bathrooms. Still, the location's great, and the brick-paved central courtyard has a solar-heated pool and a dribbling fountain.

**Hughenden** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9363 4863; www.hughendenhotel.com.au; 14 Queen St, Woollahra; s/d incl breakfast from \$130/150; (P) (☎) (♿)) A quirky Italianate guesthouse, the Hughenden is located a stone's throw from Paddington, the SCG and Centennial Park. Rooms feature antique bric-a-brac flourishes; some have balconies. For your distraction there's Sunday high tea, poetry readings and Sir Victor the nocturnal pianist.

#### EASTERN SUBURBS

**Savoy Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9326 1411; www.savoyhotel.com.au; 41 Knox St, Double Bay; d \$120-150, f \$190-260; (P) (☎) (♿)) Sitting pretty among the generically good-looking in Double Bay's coffee strip, the Savoy's rooms offer unexpected amounts of individual character. Atrium-view rooms are the cheapest; strive for an executive balcony room of a suite looking towards the harbour. See p124 for more accommodation options in the Eastern suburbs.

#### BONDI

**Hotel Bondi** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 3271; www.hotelbondi.com.au; 178 Campbell Pde; s/d/tr from \$50/100/130; (P) (☎) (♿)) Let it all hang out at the landmark 'Pink Palace' on Bondi Beach. Small, tidy rooms have wardrobe-sized private bathrooms and faux-colonial furnishings, and they sometimes aren't far enough from the drunken hordes downstairs. Still, if you have a beach view, you'll be laughing.

**Bondi Beach B&B** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 6522; www.bondibeach-bnb.com.au; 110 Roscoe St; s/d/tw/f incl breakfast \$100/150/150/250; (P) (☎)) Owners Nadia and Michael go all-out to make this place feel like your own home (only cleaner, and more Mediterranean). You're close to all the good stuff in Bondi, but you can also find a park. Ask about room-only rates and low-season discounts.

#### COOGEE

**Coogee Bay Boutique Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 0000; 9 Vicar St; d \$100-250; (P) (☎) (♿)) Above the impossibly effervescent Coogee Bay Hotel are casual, old-school pub rooms, plus fancier, spacious suites in a newer wing on Vicar St. All rooms have private bathrooms, fridge and TV – bring earplugs for the older rooms if you don't want to lip-synch to the bands downstairs or the garbage truck in the morning.

**Dive Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 5538; www.divehotel.com.au; 234 Arden St; d & tw incl breakfast \$150-220; (♿) (♿)) This impeccable beachside midranger is about as far from being a dive as it is from the city. Plush purple and green carpets, huge comfy beds, TVs and private bathrooms in every room, 50m to the beach – the bus ride from town is a small price to pay.

#### GLEBE

**Hotel Unilodge** (Map p100; ☎ 9338 5000; www.unilodgehotel.com.au; cnr Broadway & Bay St; d/tr/f \$130/155/170; (P) (♿) (♿)) The rooms inside this former Grace

Bros department store lack the 'wow' factor but are good value. Impressive facilities include a business centre, an indoor lap pool, a pool table, a gym, a magical roof terrace and efficient staff who natter away to each other on walkie-talkies.

**Tricketts Bed & Breakfast** (Map p100; ☎ 9552 1141; www.tricketts.com.au; 270 Glebe Point Rd; s \$150, d \$180-200; (P) (♿) (♿)) Inside this preciously restored 1880s merchant's mansion, seven large rooms with private bathrooms are decked out with antiques and Persian rugs. The garden is a verdant wonderland, and there's a kitchen, a ballroom, a billiard table and a BBQ, but no under-12s.

#### MANLY & NORTH SHORE

**Manly Paradise** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 5799; www.manlyparadise.com.au; 54 North Steyne; motel d \$110-165, apt \$220-400; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) These comfortable apartments sleep five and have balconies overlooking Manly's ocean beach. There's a heated rooftop pool, a spa, a sauna, half-court tennis and cable TV. Grab an '80s-style motel room (plenty of plastic and peach) if you're feeling more 'road'.

**101 Addison Road** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 6216; www.bb-manly.com; 101 Addison Rd; s/d \$100/150) Behind a huge frangipani tree, this quaint four-star B&B has two romantic rooms and snug communal areas. If it's not beach weather, plunk on the grand-piano ivories, perfect your chess moves, or pain your neighbours with atrocious guitar skills. There are only two rooms, so book ahead.

**Periwinkle Guest House** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 4668; www.periwinkle.citysearch.com.au; 18-19 E Esplanade; s/d incl breakfast \$135/165; (P) (♿)) This lavishly restored Victorian manor faces the sunset across Manly Cove. Twelve rooms with private bathrooms are elegant and well appointed, and there's a stylish, cosy kitchen. If your wallet can stand the heat, avoid the ground-floor rooms facing the courtyard as they can get a bit stuffy.

#### Top End

##### CITY CENTRE

**Blacket** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9279 3030; www.theblacket.com; 70 King St; d from \$225; (☎) (♿) (♿)) Alluringly calm, Blacket's uber-stylish suites blend 'escape' with lashings of contemporary cool. Loft suites – all white, caramel and grey – sleep four and have spa, separate lounge, kitchenette and mod-cons (cable TV, CD player and wi-fi). Online bargains.

**Hilton** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9266 2000; www.sydney.hilton.com; 488 George St; d from \$270; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) Try to keep your cool as you waltz into the refurbished Hilton. Sweetly swish rooms feature black-timber bed heads, flat-screen TVs, DVD player and internet telephony. Oz celebrity chef Luke Mangan runs the restaurant; Zeta bar (p129) lures beautiful people. Business facilities are state of the art.

**Establishment Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 3100; www.establishmenthotel.com; 5 Bridge Lane; d from \$290; (☎) (♿) (♿)) So hip it hurts, Establishment is the secret hideaway for superstars and squillionaires (not so secret now, eh?), with the snazziest interiors in town – exquisite furnishings, indulgent bathrooms and high-tech services proliferate. Clubs, bars and restaurants on site.

#### KINGS CROSS AREA & WOOLLOOMOOLOO

**Regents Court** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 1533; www.regentscourt.com.au; 18 Springfield Ave, Potts Point; d \$240-275; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) Boutique, Art Deco Regents Court is big on personal service and mid-century furnishings. Handsome, spacious rooms with private bathrooms have impeccably stocked kitchenettes. Michael Hutchence once roamed the roof terrace with its Potts Point pot plants and BBQ.

**BLUE Sydney** (Map p98; www.tajhotels.com/Sydney; 6 Cowper Wharf Rdwy, Woolloomooloo; d from \$405; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) The hotel in this redeveloped wharf may be a bit poky, but boutique sensibilities are redemptive. Hobnob with bigwigs and biz-kids at the Water Bar, relax at the day spa, cruise the wharf restaurants or sneak a peep at Russell Crowe's end-of-pier pad.

#### DARLINGHURST & SURRY HILLS

**Kirketon** (Map p98; ☎ 9332 2011; www.kirketon.com.au; 229 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst; d from \$220; (P) (☎) (♿) (♿)) The Kirketon's designer rooms are as impeccably turned out as its brash young clientele (and good-looking staff). Stylishly sparse suites are jazzed up with ritzy toiletries, bright wall colours, retro furnishings, Lindt chocolates, mohair throw rugs and plush bathrobes.

**Medusa** (Map p98; ☎ 9331 1000; www.medusa.com.au; 267 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst; d from \$270; (☎) (♿) (♿)) Medusa the seducer's shocking-pink exterior hints at the witty, luscious décor inside. Small, vivid suites with enormous beds, mod-con bathrooms and regal furnishings open onto a tranquil courtyard and reflection pool. Does it get better? Yes – Medusa is pet-friendly.

**EASTERN SUBURBS**

**Doyles Palace Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9337 5444; www.doyles.com.au; 1 Military Rd, Watsons Bay; d \$145-420; P ♻️) In one of Sydney's most beautiful spots, this is really a plush-o-rama top-end hotel, but it has excellent midrange rooms and good winter rates too. Reservations, and fish and chips at Doyles on the Beach (p126) are essential.

**MANLY**

**Manly Pacific** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 7666; www.accorhotels.com.au; 55 North Steyne; d from \$190; P ♻️) Right on Manly's ocean beach, this dapper mid-rise hotel is 15 minutes by JetCat from Circular Quay and a million miles from the city's withering hustle. Check the surf from oceanfront balconies, or hit the rooftop pool.

**Camping**

Sydney's caravan parks, most of which also have sites for tents, are a fair way out of town. The following are up to 26km from the city centre. Note that peak seasons (such as Christmas) see rate hikes.

**Grand Pines Tourist Park** (Map p141; ☎ 9529 7329; www.thegrandpines.com.au; 289 The Grand Pde, Sans Souci; powered sites \$40, cabins from \$69; P ♻️) This friendly, good-quality caravan park is 17km south of Sydney on beautiful Botany Bay, but it has no tent sites.

**Lane Cove River Tourist Park** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9888 9133; www.lcrtp.com; Plassey Rd, North Ryde; unpowered/power sites \$45/50, cabins from \$140; P ♻️) This cheery place lies 14km north of the city and has good facilities (including over 150 caravan sites, plus cabins). You can chill out in the pool when temperatures swelter.

**Sydney Lakeside Holiday Park** (p141; ☎ 9913 7845; www.sydneylakeside.com.au; Lake Park Rd, Narrabeen; unpowered/power sites \$45/50, cabins from \$140; P ♻️) Located 26km north of Sydney, this nifty place occupies prime real estate around the northern beaches. If roughing it doesn't appeal, there are good cabins and lakeside 'villas'.

**EATING**

With abundant fresh produce, innovative and highly competitive chefs, and a multicultural melange, it's no surprise that eating out is a pure delight in Sydney.

Start the day with a stiff macchiato and a plate of inner-city ricotta hotcakes, then

chow down on the fresh catch of the day at a waterfront restaurant for lunch. For dinner go highbrow with Mod Oz or lowbrow with a pie and sauce at the footy. Before a night on the tiles, dabble in tapas and sangria and then spend the wee hours lingering over a chandelier-and-laminate supper in a Chinatown food den.

**City Centre, the Rocks & Circular Quay**

The mix of dining options in Sydney's urban core ranges from frenetic lunchtime cafés to some of the finest culinary offerings in Australia. Cheap grub is hidden in building food courts, and the Rocks, although heavy on tourist traps, is also the haunt of excellent and upscale Mod Oz.

**Bodhi** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 2523; Cook & Phillip Parks, 2-4 College St; yum cha \$5-8, mains \$6-18; ♻️ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sun) Bodhi scores high for its cool design and leafy disposition. Quick-fire waiters rebound off the minimalist interior and slat-wood tables outside. Yum cha is a daily affair, and the relaxed milieu and value for money are perennial.

**Mother Chu's Vegetarian Kitchen** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9283 2828; 367 Pitt St; mains \$8-15; ♻️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Shimmering in plastic splendour beneath the monorail, Mother Chu's blends vegetarian Taiwanese, Japanese and Chinese influences to ensure the perfect tofu or claypot hit. The ambience is at a minimum, but the veg-lovers don't seem to mind.

**Sailors Thai Canteen** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 2466; 106 George St; mains \$16-26; ♻️ noon-8pm) Wedge yourself into a gap between arts-community operators, politicians and media manoeuvres at Sailors' long communal zinc-topped table and order the Chang Mai chicken curry. The balcony tables are hot property and fill up fast.

**One Alfred Street** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9241 4636; 1 Alfred St; mains around \$17) An unexpected gem amid an ocean of fast-food, One Alfred Street serves up classics like slow-cooked Wagyu beef with potato and parsnip flakes, and quality fish and chips. Also great for a morning caffeine fix or a lazy afternoon vino (Antipodean wines only!).

**Quay** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 5600; Level 3, Overseas Passenger Terminal, Circular Quay W; mains \$33-54; ♻️ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner daily) With iconic Sydney on view, sitting on the balcony next to the teary, streamer-hurling non-embarkers at the OPT is surreal. Equally euphoric is Quay's stylish

service, outstanding wine list and Peter Gilmore's cooking (try the poached quail with truffle custard).

**Guillaume at Bennelong** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9241 1999; Sydney Opera House; mains \$35-42; ♻️ lunch Thu & Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Turn the old 'dinner-and-a-show' cliché into something meaningful at the Sydney Opera House. Snuggle into a banquet and enjoy acclaimed chef Guillaume Brahimi's masterful cuisine. His basil-infused tuna with mustard seed and soy vinaigrette is worthy of a standing ovation.

**Aria** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9252 2555; 1 Macquarie St; mains \$44-52; ♻️ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Aria shines in Sydney's fine-dining firmament, an award-winning combination of stellar dishes, awesome Opera House views and faultless service. The mouthwatering lamb rack is hard to overlook. Pre- and after-theatre supper menu available.

**Rockpool** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9252 1888; 107 George St, The Rocks; mains \$49-60; ♻️ dinner Tue-Sat) Tucked behind an unassuming green façade, Rockpool is one of Australia's best restaurants. So get your culinary skates on. Chef Neil Perry's modern seafood creations continue to wow the critics – expect crafty, contemporary cuisine with Asian influences, faultless service and an alluring wine list.

**Chinatown & Darling Harbour**

Chinatown is flush with spicy nooks dishing up fantastic plastic décor and cheap and scrumptious fare. Conversely, Darling Harbour has fabulous views and food, but it's much heavier on the wallet.

**Chinese Noodle Restaurant** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 9051; Shop 7, Prince Centre, 8 Quay St, Chinatown; mains \$7-12; ♻️ lunch & dinner) It is sweaty, shoulder-to-shoulder eating beneath wreaths of plastic grapes in this busy noodle nook, but the stringy fare made fresh daily. The combination dish of masses of thick wheat noodles, pork, shredded cucumber and lashings of chilli and black vinegar looks a little like spaghetti on steroids. The restaurant entrance is on Thomas St.

**BBQ King** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9267 2433; 18-20 Goulburn St, Chinatown; mains \$10-30; ♻️ lunch & dinner) Low on fine silverware but big on flavour, the King serves up royal portions of roast duck, suckling pig and other Cantonese staples. Tsing Tao is a suitable anaesthetic for the mildly obnoxious chaos. Takeaway available; open late.

**Blackbird** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9283 7385; Balcony, Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour; mains \$12-20; ♻️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place veritably throbs from the first coffee to the last bill. Funky young staff cruise the cool interior delivering hearty bowls of pasta, New York-style pizzas, and fat triangles of cake. Perfect to fuel up before or after a big night out.

**Chinta Ria, Temple of Love** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9264 3211; Level 2, Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour; mains \$15-26; ♻️ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Swirling choreographically around an enormous concrete Buddha, Chinta Ria's temple-in-the-round offers zingy Malaysian hawker-style food at reasonable prices. Take on the rabble for Hokkien noodles, sambal prawns, seafood laksa or super-slippery fried *kuay teow*.

**Golden Century** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9212 3901; 393-399 Sussex St, Chinatown; mains \$15-50; ♻️ lunch & dinner) Open until 4am, this frenetic restaurant cooks crustaceans straight from the fish tanks. Perhaps steer your eyes from the watery window-to-the-world if you don't want to see your nervous dinner. But do splash out on the whole lobster cooked in ginger and shallots.

**Zaaffran** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 8900; 2nd fl, 345 Harbourside, Darling Harbour; mains \$18-34; ♻️ lunch & dinner) In a city with a gazillion cheap Indian joints, Zaaffran stands out. Authentic and innovative curries are served up in front of awesome views across Darling Harbour's sparkle and sheen. Book a balcony seat and launch into the beef vindaloo. Good vegetarian selection.

**Kings Cross, Potts Point & Woolloomooloo**

The Cross has a good mixture of tiny cafés, swanky eateries and fast-food joints with greasy fare to soak up beer, or gargantuan hangover breakfasts if you're a little too late.

**Harry's Café de Wheels** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 3074; Cowper Wharf Rdwy, Woolloomooloo; mains \$5-10) For over 50 years, cab drivers, sailors and boozed-up nocturnals have slurred orders for pea-and-pie floaters over Harry's famous counter. Sit on a milk crate overlooking the hulking Woolloomooloo warships and inhale a 'Tiger' (pie, peas, mashed potatoes and gravy).

**Fratelli Paradiso** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 1744; 12 Challis Ave, Potts Point; mains \$12-25; ♻️ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Fri) This stylish bistro-bakery has them queuing at the door. The intimate, mod room showcases seasonal Italian dishes cooked with



Mediterranean zing. Bounteous busy waiters, Italian chatter, and oversized sunglasses – aah Roma!

**Hugo's Bar Pizza** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 4018; 33 Bayswater Rd, Kings Cross; mains \$18-24; ☺ dinner) Punchy little brother of Hugo's Lounge upstairs, this indoor/outdoor neighbourhood nook wows pizza fans with its delicious discs and home-style Italian fare. The marble-fronted bar and sunken velvet lounge are luxurious, but the menu won't break the bank.

### Darlinghurst, Surry Hills & East Sydney

Victoria St sports the most eateries in Darlinghurst. There's a second cluster of (mostly Italian) restaurants on Stanley St, just south of William St between Crown and Riley Sts.

**Bar Reggiao** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9332 1129; 135 Crown St, East Sydney; mains \$10-15; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Blink and you'll miss this classic, dimly lit Italian diner in East Sydney's 'Little Italy' district. The walls are plastered with Ferrari flags and Rome murals; the menu board in the window has been there so long the lettering has started to flake off. Pasta, pizza, meat and fish dishes have stood the test of time. Closed Sunday (church!).

**Onde** (Map p98; ☎ 9331 8749; 345 Liverpool St, Darlinghurst; mains \$18-26; ☺ dinner) Culturally enriching, palate pleasing and great value – no wonder Onde is always packed. Some Darlinghursters eat here three times a week for the great service, adventurous wine list and trad faves like duck terrine, lamb tenderloin and buttermilk berry pudding. No bookings.

**ills** (Map p98; ☎ 9360 9631; 433 Liverpool St, Darlinghurst; mains \$19-25; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Sydney adores Bill Granger's sunny eatery with its newspaper-strewn communal table. Dishes such as sweetcorn fritters with roast tomato, spinach and bacon are equally adorable. There are also locations at 359 Crown St, Surry Hills (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 4762) and 118 Queen St, Woollahra (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9328 7997).

**Longrain** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9280 2888; 85 Commonwealth St, Surry Hills; mains \$18-36; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Longrain serves masses of superb Thai-inspired offerings to a thick throng of Sydney's beautiful set and makes it look easy. Inside a century-old, wedge-shaped printing-press building, urbanites slurp down delicacies such as red venison and snakebean curry. Cocktails at the bar; no reservations.

**Billy Kwong** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9332 3300; 3/355 Crown St, Surry Hills; mains \$19-42; ☺ dinner) Chef Kylie Kwong's novel take on Chinese cuisine soon explains why this hip eating house is always so busy. You can't go wrong with staples like spicy, diced, fried green beans with hoisin and garlic, or a generous serve of Kylie's signature dish, the crispy-skin duck with plum sauce.

**our pick Wildrice** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8354 0088; Shop 1, 160 Flinders St, Darlinghurst; mains \$20-28; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) In Darlinghurst's obscure southern reaches, Wildrice is a glorious exaltation of contemporary Thai cooking. Rice arrives in moulded conical mounds, which you smother with red chicken-breast curry and grilled sweet-chilli scampi. Coriander by the bushel; absolutely sensational.

### Paddington, Woollahra & Eastern Suburbs

**Gusto** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9361 5640; 2a Heely St, Five Ways, Paddington; mains \$6-14) Busy to the point of embarrassment for neighbouring businesses, Gusto does things with gusto. Egg, ham and tomato breakfast rolls nourish skinny actresses on the footpath tables; the deli doles out cheeses, pesto, hams and olives with enthused abandon.

**Jones the Grocer** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9362 1222; 68 Moncur St, Woollahra; mains \$10-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch) JTG offers high-end groceries, cookbooks and gourmet goodies galore. Munch into a caramel slice with a serious coffee at the café, then double wrap some double brie for a Centennial Park picnic.

**Arthur's Pizza** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9332 2220; 260 Oxford St, Paddington; mains \$10-25; ☺ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily) For some reason Arthur's sign was originally installed upside down. We liked it that way, but in a fit of reverse rebellion it's been turned right side up. Fortunately, the pizzas continue to rebel (the right way round). Try the 'Zorro' (olives, ricotta, red onion, spinach and semi-dried tomato).

**Doyles on the Beach** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9337 2007; 11 Marine Pde, Watsons Bay; mains \$29-51; ☺ lunch & dinner) King of Sydney seafood for so long, you might think Doyles is resting on its laurels. Nevertheless, it ain't your average fish-and-chipper, and catching the harbour ferry to Watsons Bay for a seafood lunch is a quintessential Sydney experience.

### Bondi

It gets pretty touristy in this neck of the woods, and you may have to tussle with fashionistas

and rock-star wannabes for a table with a sea view. But the abundance of options caters to all budgets, from fancy bistros in side streets to a bag of takeaway fish and chips and a patch of sand.

**Gertrude & Alice** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 5155; 40 Hall St; mains \$10-15) This second-hand bookshop/café is so un-Bondi – there's not a model or surfer in sight! Students and academics hang out reading, sipping chai tea and acting like Americans in Paris. Join them for a meze platter and theological discussion around communal tables in shambolic book-lined rooms.

**Gelbison** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 4042; 10 Lamrock Ave; mains \$10-18; ☺ dinner) Legendary enough for a local rock band to name themselves after it, never-changing Gelbison entertains families, backpackers, locals and visiting movie stars with great-value pizza and pasta. Sit with the surfers over a steaming bowl of prawn-and-mushroom fettuccine or a 'magic boot' pizza.

**Sean's Panaroma** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 4924; 270 Campbell Pde; mains \$24-35; ☺ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) One of Sydney's more romantic dinner spots, with ocean vistas, creative dishes, friendly staff and celebrity attendees. Sean Moran's restless menu roasts you eat with the seasons. Suckling pig layered with cabbage, pear, sweet potato and anise is a winter night's feast. In summer, succumb to seafood.

**North Bondi Italian Food** (Map p99; ☎ 9300 4400; 118-120 Ramsgate Ave; mains \$26-29; ☺ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner daily) Expansive windows float your eyes beyond the terrace to the sighing North Bondi swell. You won't hear any sighs inside (it's all hard surfaces and conversations), but the pasta, seafood, soups and salads engage your other senses. Try the generous wild boar *pappardelle*. Wines by the glass.

**Bondi Icebergs** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 9000; 1 Notts Ave; mains \$35-75; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Poised above the famous swimming pool, Icebergs' views sweep across the Bondi Beach arc to the sea. Jacketed, bow-tied waiters deliver fresh seafood and steaks cooked with élan. The wine list is superb, and the bar, overlooking the Campbell Pde lights, is never boring for a beer.

### Coogee & Bronte

**Siam Spice** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 5077; 215 Coogee Bay Rd, Coogee; mains \$10-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Sydney and cheap Thai are synonymous, but the food here sidesteps the cliché by virtue of its quality. The Southeast Asian décor and stock standards done exceptionally, like chunky

beef *massaman* curry or grilled king prawns with aromatic salad and chilli jam, will spice up your life.

**Swell** (Map p99; ☎ 9386 5001; 465 Bronte Rd, Bronte; mains \$11-28) Pull up a pew for seaside Swell's spanking day-turns-to-night menu. Greet the day with poached eggs, pumpkin, feta and spinach, linger into lunch with a snazzy steak sandwich and return at dinnertime for the salt-and-pepper squid.

**Barzura** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 5546; 64 Carr St, Coogee; mains \$17-26) Frequented by retired Australian cricketers in pitch sunglasses, Barzura has to have the best views of any café in Sydney. The sunbaked stretch north along Coogee Beach to Bondi is a stunner, as are deliciously uncomplicated salads, pides, pasta dishes and generous breakfasts, all served with a smile.

### Glebe, Newtown, Balmain & Leichhardt

The inner west is one of Sydney's most condensed melting pots, and ethnic zest from around the globe tickles diners' tastebuds on the main strips. Glebe touts a laid-back, unpretentious atmosphere and good-value food. Funky cafés and multicultural restaurants catering to student budgets line Newtown's King St. In Leichhardt you can quaff cheap spaghetti or savour upmarket Italian (food!) on Norton St, plus tuck into Greek, Chinese and Thai.

**Iku Wholefoods** (Map p100; ☎ 9692 8720; 25a Glebe Point Rd; mains \$5-12; ☺ lunch & dinner) Here's one of the best vegan places in town, offering cheap and healthy takeaway treats (mostly organic). Order the miso soup, tofu fritters and Japanese rolls, and have a picnic at nearby Victoria Park. Iku closes relatively early (between 7.30 and 8pm) at weekends.

**Kilimanjaro** (Map p100; ☎ 9557 4565; 280 King St, Newtown; mains \$10-13; ☺ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner daily) Its cosy tables, carved-wooden bowls, saffron aromas and cheery atmosphere will raise your appetite high above the Serengeti. Authentic dishes, such as the Yassa (chicken on the bone marinated in spicy tomato sauce) are utterly filling.

**Old Fish Shop Café** (Map p100; ☎ 9519 4295; 239a King St, Newtown; mains \$10-15) Yep, it used to be a fish shop. Now it's a tiny corner café with tasty sandwiches and pizzas, garlic hanging from above, paint peeling off the walls and open windows to catch King St's fumes. The place opens early for simple breakfasts but closes at 7pm.



**Green Gourmet** (Map p100; ☎ 9519 5330; 115 King St, Newtown; mains \$13-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) This is a self-serve, pay-per-kilo, kind-to-animals eatery, plating up Chinese-Malaysian vegetarian at affordable prices. At weekends grab a few morsels of cruelty-free yum cha and wash it down with one of the excellent teas on offer. Alcohol-free too.

**Bar Italia** (Map p100; ☎ 9560 9981; 169-171 Norton St, Leichhardt; mains \$14-24) This enduringly popular restaurant serves fabulous pasta and famous *gelato*, the essential accessory for a Norton St *passaggiata* (stroll). A wisteria-hung courtyard, Italian soccer posters, good honest food and a little red wine make for an authentic experience. Don't expect slick Italian design – the pleasure is in the food.

**Osteria dei Poeti** (Map p100; ☎ 9571 8955; 73 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe; mains \$17-28; ☺ lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Mon-Sat) Fostering 'benign benevolence' through stomach satisfaction, the talkative 'Tavern of Poets' serves unpretentious, home-style Italian that's poetic enough to be beyond most domestic kitchens. If the occasional poetry readings are overly florid, head for the deck outside.

**Spanish Tapas** (Map p100; ☎ 9571 9005; 26 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe; tapas \$10-14, mains \$20-23; ☺ lunch Thu-Sat, dinner daily) This is a good-time restaurant: shared tapas plates, spirited music, raucous diners and waiters who say, 'Yezzz, we jave a table forl yo!'. Cheap jugs of sangria dissolve party resistance and fire you up for flamenco-dancing displays.

**Grappa** (Map p100; ☎ 9560 6090; Shop 1, 267-277 Norton St, Leichhardt; mains \$30-40; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri & Sun, dinner daily) Grappa's open kitchen, snazzy bar and cream-leather seats provide the setting for rich, succulent dishes (such as baked snapper in rock-salt crust) and bounteous wood-fired pizzas. Sit on the sunny terrace, sip Chianti and think of Tuscany (...that fiery little red-head you met in Bondi).

**Kazbah** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 6555 7067; 37a Darling St, Balmain; mains \$33-35; ☺ breakfast & lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) Rock the Kazbah for weekend brunch (bookings essential), or a peppy dinner with the windows folded out to the hot summer street. Generous serves feature plenty of eggplant, tahini, hummus and cumin; leave room for the Turkish delight ice cream with blueberries and currant vodka.

**Boathouse on Blackwattle Bay** (Map p100; ☎ 9518 9011; Ferry Rd, Glebe; mains \$39-43; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The best restaurant in Glebe, and one of

the best seafood restaurants in Sydney. Offerings range from oysters so fresh you'd think you shucked them yourself to a snapper pie that'll go straight to the top of your favourite dish list. Anzac Bridge views; reservations essential.

### North Shore & Manly

**Bathers' Pavilion Café** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9969 5050; 4 The Esplanade, Balmoral; mains \$21-32) Romantic Spanish Mission-style architecture, sweeping harbour views and contemporary cuisine collide at one of Sydney's most timeless eateries. You can dine with the snooty Balmoral set at the restaurant next door for far less democratic prices.

**Bower Restaurant** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 5451; cnr Marine Pde & Bower Lane, Manly; mains \$24-30; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu) Follow the foreshore path east from Manly's ocean beach to this little white food room, sidling up to Fairy Bower Beach. The 'Big Bower Breakfast' (\$17) is a knockout, Mod Oz mains are delicious, it's BYO, and 'our Livvy' (...Newton John) wails from the stereo.

**Le Kiosk** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 4122; 1 Marine Pde, Shelly Beach, Manly; mains \$29-37; ☺ lunch daily, dinner Fri-Sun) 'Le Kiosk' sounds ugly but defines romance – a little sandstone cottage, subtle lighting, an open fireplace and the lull of lapping waves. The food proves a worthy paramour; swoon over snapper fillet with sautéed calamari, bacon, chilli and cauliflower. Vegetarians get a look in too.

**Aqua Dining** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9964 9998; cnr Paul & Northcliff Sts, Milsons Point; mains \$35-38; ☺ lunch & dinner) Perched above the North Sydney Olympic Pool, Aqua Dining is dressed in muted mushroom hues that play second fiddle to Bridge and harbour views, while the service is superior – that rare mix of courteous, knowledgeable (the wine list beggars belief) and amiable. Yell enthusiastically for the saddle of lamb and book ahead.

### DRINKING

Pubs are a crucial part of the Sydney social scene, and you can down that sweet gold nectar at elaborate 19th-century affairs, cavernous Art Deco joints, modern and minimalist recesses, and everything in between. Bars are generally more stylish and urbane, often with a dress code. Unless otherwise specified, admission to the bars and pubs below is free.

### City Centre & the Rocks

The Rocks is littered with rambling old pubs, although just how old remains an inexact science. Things get rowdy here at weekends and St Patrick's Day (March 17). For more stylish surrounds and long cocktail lists, join the after-work booze hounds in the city and Circular Quay.

**Australian Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 2229; 100 Cumberland St, The Rocks; ☺ 11.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun) This laid-back, good-humoured hotel has an astounding 96 Australian brews on offer. Try to think of four more to hit the century as you wobble through the list. The pub food borders on gourmet, and you can stumble upstairs after too many (see p120).

**Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 4044; 19 Kent St, Millers Point; ☺ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Built in 1841, the 'Nello' claims to be Sydney's oldest pub (or is it the Hero of Waterloo down the road?) The on-site brewery cooks up six robust stouts and ales – *do* try them all at once, particularly if you're sleeping upstairs (see p120).

**Zeta** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9265 6070; 4th fl, Hilton Hotel, 488 George St; ☺ 5pm-2am Mon-Fri, to 3.30am Sat) Perched loftily above the Hilton, Zeta captivates a chic young city crew with its white vinyl lounges, discreet curtained booths and enormous gas inferno. Sip grilled-fruit cocktails and eyeball the QVB dome from the terrace.

**Bar Europa** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9232 3377; Basement, 82 Elizabeth St; ☺ 4pm-late Tue-Fri, 8pm-late Sat) Basement vibe, subtle lighting and three debonair rooms divided by sexy screens cement Europa's reputation as an intimate, clubby hideaway for inner-city professionals. Sip a Sydneysider Sour as DJs play laid-back funk, sigh, and wonder what he/she is doing now...

**Establishment** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 3000; 252 George St; ☺ 11am-late Mon-Fri, 6pm-late Sat) Establishment's cashed-up crush proves the art of swilling cocktails after a hard, city day is not lost. Sit at the majestic marble bar, in the swish courtyard or be absorbed by a leather lounge as stockbrokers scribble their phone numbers on the backs of coasters for flirty city chicks.

### Kings Cross, Darlinghurst & Surry Hills

Twenty-four-hour party people head for Darlinghurst and Kings Cross – its trashy main drag, Darlinghurst Rd, has plenty of drinking (and stripping) options, though there are some stylish speakeasies around here too. Glitzy

fashion addicts populate Paddington's pubs; students and artists drink in Surry Hills.

**Darlo Bar** (Map p98; ☎ 9331 3672; 306 Liverpool St, Darlinghurst; ☺ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Occupying its own tiny block, the Darlo's triangular retro room is a magnet for thirsty urban bohemians with something to read or a hankering for pinball or pool. Essentially, it's a neighbourhood pub, but given the neighbourhood that makes for some interesting drinking sessions.

**Cricketers Arms** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 3301; 106 Fitzroy St, Surry Hills; ☺ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun) The polysexual Cricketers with its cruisy, cosy vibe is a favourite haunt of arts students, locals, gays and turntable boffins. It's ace for a beer any time, and there's tapas on tap and open fires for those rare times Sydney actually gets cold.

**Jimmy Lik's** (Map p98; ☎ 8354 1400; 186 Victoria St, Potts Point; ☺ 5pm-midnight) Understated and subtle, Jimmy's is very cool, with benches almost as long as the cocktail list (try a Thai-hewn Mekong Mary with chilli *nam jim*). Jimmy's Thai restaurant is next door and there are tasty bar snacks to fill in the long wait for a table.

**Victoria Room** (Map p98; ☎ 9357 4488; Level 1, 235 Victoria St, Darlinghurst; ☺ 6pm-midnight Tue-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) Plush chesterfields, Art Nouveau wallpaper, dark-wood panelling and bamboo screens – this joint is 1920s Bombay gin palace meets Hong Kong opium den. Don your white linen suit and panama hat and order a Raspberry Debonair.

**Hollywood Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 2765; 2 Foster St, Surry Hills; ☺ 11am-midnight Mon-Wed, to 3am Thu-Sat) An inner-city prow-shaped Art Deco gem, the Hollywood hasn't felt the need to buff itself up to a superficial sheen. A mixed (dare we say, Bohemian) crowd of Surry Hillbillies gets down to serious beer business. Live jazz Monday to Thursday from 8pm.

**Green Park Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9380 5311; 360 Victoria St, Darlinghurst; ☺ 10am-2am Mon-Fri, noon-2am Sat & Sun) The ever-rockin' Green Park has pool tables, a beer garden with funky Dr Seuss lighting and a huge central bar teeming with travellers, gays and pierced locals. Bowie and Queen rule the jukebox.

**Mars Lounge** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9267 6440; 16 Wentworth Ave, Darlinghurst; ☺ 5pm-midnight Tue, Wed & Sun, to 3am Thu-Sat) Red-leather booths; disco-ball reflections catching in the corner of your eye – Mars is *sooo* money. Sip a cocktail and

try to stay focussed as you watch the bar staff in action, most of whom seem to be auditioning for a gig in a Justin Timberlake video.

**Bar Coluzzi** (Map p98; ☎ 9380 5420; 322 Victoria St, Darlinghurst; ☎ 5am-7pm) Legendary Coluzzi has been infusing Darlinghurst with caffeine for 50 years. The food is fine, but what you're here for is the spoon-standing-up-straight-in-the-cup coffee.

### Paddington & Woollahra

**Paddington Inn** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9380 5277; 338 Oxford St, Paddington; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat) The Paddo's exterior makes stylised use of peeling paint – inside it's all organically shaped wall nooks, stainless-steel stools and mildly sinister lighting. Good-looking locals elbow around the pool table; the restaurant serves upmarket pub grub.

**Lord Dudley Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9327 5399; 236 Jersey Rd, Woollahra; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Wed, to midnight Thu-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Packed with poncy, scarf-wearing MG drivers and block-shouldered Rugby Union types, the Lord Dudley is as close as Sydney gets to a (toffy) English pub, right down to the quality beers by the pint.

### Woolloomooloo

**Old Fitzroy Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9356 3848; 129 Dowling St, Woolloomooloo; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, 3-10pm Sun) Is it a pub? A theatre? A bistro? Actually it's all three. Grab a bowl of laksa, assess the acting talent of tomorrow and wash it all down with a beer (\$33 the lot). The outdoor deck is unbeatable on a steamy summer night.

**Tilbury Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 9368 1955; 12-18 Nicholson St, Woolloomooloo; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat, from 10am Sun) Once the dank domain of burly sailors and salty ne'er-do-wells, the Tilbury now sparkles on Sydney's social scene. Yuppies, yachties, suits, gays and straights populate the light, bright interiors, packing the bistro and beer garden at weekends.

### Watsons Bay

**Watsons Bay Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9337 4299; 10 Marine Pde, Watsons Bay; ☎ 10am-midnight) Surrounded by two pricey seafood restaurants (both called Doyles) and a boutique hotel (also called Doyles), you'll be pleased to know that Doyles' superlative harbour views can also be enjoyed with a jug of beer and a seat on the terrace. Avoid weekends, when it's packed to the gills.

### Bondi & Coogee

**Coogee Bay Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9665 0000; cnr Coogee Bay Rd & Arden St, Coogee; ☎ 9am-3am Thu-Sat, to midnight Sun, to 1am Mon-Wed) The rambling, rowdy Coogee Bay complex has live music at the legendary Selinas, a beer garden, open-mic nights, comedy, a cocktail lounge, a sports bar, a bistro and a bottle shop. Sit on a stool in the window overlooking the beach, sip a cold one and wait for the perfect sunset.

**Beach Road Hotel** (Map p99; ☎ 9130 7247; 71 Beach Rd, Bondi; ☎ 10am-2.30am Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30am Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) Weekends at this big, yellow, boxy pub are a boisterous multilevel alcohol holiday, with Bondi types (bronzed, buff and brooding) and woozy out-of-towners playing pool, drinking beer, and digging live bands and DJs. Sleep off your hangover upstairs (p119).

**Ravesi's** (Map p99; ☎ 9365 4422; cnr Campbell Pde & Hall St, Bondi) Bondi at its slickest – glass walls for divine ocean views and street crowd perv-ing. Low black leather sofas and high chrome stools mean cocktails won't come cheap, but they guarantee a hip, good-looking crowd.

### Balmain, Newtown & Glebe

The inner west is great for a low-key schooner – Balmain, Glebe and Newtown have plenty of decent boozers. Wide-awake caffeine strips include Darlinghurst Rd and Victoria St in Darlinghurst, Newtown's King St and Glebe Point Rd.

**London Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9555 1377; 234 Darling St, Balmain; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) The watery Harbour Bridge views from the London's long balcony above the street are quintessentially Sydney (about as far from London as you can get). There's a great range of Oz beers on tap, plus a few quality Euro interlopers (Heineken, Hoegaarden et al), jovial punters and non-stop rugby on the telly.

**Friend in Hand Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9660 2326; 58 Cowper St, Glebe; ☎ 10am-late) This place has changed the rules of what's supposed to happen in an Australian pub. Sure, you can drink all the beer you want, but don't be surprised when the eating competitions, water-pistol fights, crab racing, cheesy Joel/John piano men and hula-hoop spin-offs cut into your drinking time.

**Old Fish Shop Café** (Map p100; ☎ 9519 4295; 239a King St; ☎ 6am-7pm) In a converted fish shop (no prizes for figuring that out), this is Newtown's tattooed, dreadlocked, caffeine-hungry hub. Friendly pierced staff will fix you a double shot as you put your feet up on the cushions

in the window and watch the Newtown freak show pass onwards to oblivion.

**Badde Manors** (Map p100; ☎ 9660 3797; 37 Glebe Point Rd; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, 9am-midnight Sun) The feeling's eclectically old-world, but Badde Manors is a new-age kinda café, with cool, composed service – no sign of the alleged bad manners. Dogs sleep blissfully outside, dreaming of the Portuguese custard tarts and the steaming lattes behind the glass.

### Manly

**Manly Wharf Hotel** (Map p97; ☎ 9977 1266; E Esplanade; ☎ 11.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) On the harbour side of Manly, the fabulously well-designed Manly Wharf Hotel is perfect for sunny afternoon beers. Tuck away a few mid-dies after a salty day combating the surf, then pour yourself onto the ferry.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Sydney has an eclectic and innovative arts, entertainment and music scene. Outdoor cinemas and sports stadiums cater to families, the city's jazz and blues circuit is healthy and dynamic, and the live rock scene is reclaiming patrons so rudely stolen by clubs in the '90s.

Cinema listings can be found in Sydney's daily newspapers. Pick up the Metro section in Friday's *Sydney Morning Herald* for comprehensive entertainment details. Free weekly street magazines such as *Drum Media*, *3D World* and *Brag* specialise in gig and club information. Tickets for most shows can be purchased directly from venues or the following distributors:

**Moshtix** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9209 4614; www.moshtix.com.au; Red Eye Records, 370 Pitt St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Thu, to 5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Servicing alternative music venues.

**Ticketek** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 132 849; www.ticketek.com.au; 195 Elizabeth St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Wed, to 7pm Thu & Fri, to 4pm Sat)

**Ticketmaster** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 136 100; www.ticketmaster.com.au; State Theatre, 49 Market St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

### Nightclubs

**Slipp Inn** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8297 7000; 111 Sussex St; admission free-\$15; ☎ noon-4am Thu & Fri, 6pm-4am Sat) This warren of moody rooms swims with Sydney's cool kids (and this is where Crown Prince Frederick of Denmark met his Tasmanian missus – bless). Resident and international DJs serve

up old-school funk, Latin, breaks, tech and house. Refuel on pizza and Thai.

**Yu** (Map p98; ☎ 9358 6511; 171 Victoria St, Potts Point; admission \$10-20; ☎ 10pm-6am Fri-Sun) Debut the glam new eastern-suburbs you at Yu. Sydney's best house DJs and vocal MCs (MC Fro) spin hip-hop, nu-skoool, vocal and funky house in three rooms divided by sliding video screens. Sunday's 'After Hours' session kicks till you can't take no mo'.

**Home** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9266 0600; Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour; admission \$25; ☎ 11pm-6am Fri, 9pm-6am Sat) Welcome to the pleasure dome: a three-level, 2000-capacity timber-and-glass extravaganza, home to a huge dance floor, countless bars, outdoor balconies and sonics that make other clubs sound like tinny two-ways. Top-name international DJs spin house; live bands amp it up.

**GoodBar** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 6759; 11a Oxford St, Paddington; admission \$10-15; ☎ 9pm-3am Wed, Fri & Sat) Looking for Mr Goodbar? If he's hiding in this tiny club, it won't take you long to flush him out. No luck? Console yourself with funk, soul, reggae and hip-hop among the taut Paddington bods who make it past the face police on the door.

**Tank** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 3007; 3 Bridge Lane, Sydney; admission \$15-25; ☎ 10.30pm-6am Fri & Sat) They've got a VIP room here – if you're 'it' you might make it in. Otherwise, muster tank-loads of glamour and guts and just crash the party. If you can't be bothered with 'it', mingle with waaay-too-young clean-shaven stockbrokers and their waif girlfriends in this world-class, underground club.

### Cinemas

Unless otherwise stated, tickets generally cost \$14 to \$15 for an adult, and \$10 to \$12 for a child. Most cinemas have a cheap night when tickets are discounted by around a third.

**Academy Twin Cinema** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9331 3457; www.palacecinemas.com.au; 3a Oxford St, Paddington) ART house enthusiasts roll up for Academy's broad selection of independent Australian and international releases and annual Italian, Mardi Gras, French and Spanish film festivals (in February, March, April and May respectively).

**Verona Cinema** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 6099; www.palacecinemas.com.au; 17 Oxford St, Paddington) Just down the road from the affiliated Academy Twin (above), the Verona also has a café and bar, so you can sit, sip and dissect the good (usually nonmainstream) flick you've just seen.



**Dendy Opera Quays** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 3800; www.dendy.com.au; Shop 9, 2 Circular Quay E) When the harbour glare and squawking seagulls get too much, duck into the dark folds of this plush cinema, screening first-run, independent world films. There's also a Dendy cinema at 261-263 King St, Newtown (Map p100; ☎ 9550 5699).

**Chauvel Cinema** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9361 5398; www.chauvelcinema.net.au; cnr Oxford St & Oatley Rd, Paddington) Inside the historic Paddington Town Hall, the recently revamped Chauvel is on a mission to offer distinctive and alternative cinema experiences and to foster Sydney's film culture.

**Govinda's Movie Room** (Map p98; ☎ 9380 5155; www.govindas.com.au; 112 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst; dinner & movie \$22; ☎ 6-11pm) The Hare Krishna Govinda's is an all-you-can-gobble vegetarian smorgasbord, including admission to the mainstream movie-room upstairs.

**IMAX** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 3300; www.imax.com.au; Southern Promenade, Darling Harbour; adult/child \$18/14) Size matters; everything about IMAX is big. The eight-storey screen shimmers with kid-friendly documentaries (sharks, Mars, haunted castles etc), many in 3-D, that win over reluctant adults as well.

**George Street Cinemas** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9273 7431; www.greaterunion.com.au; 505 George St) This big-screen behemoth combines three huge complexes and serves truckloads of popcorn to the tune of Hollywood's latest fodder.

**Moonlight Cinema** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 1300 551 908; www.moonlight.com.au; Centennial Park, Oxford St; adult/concession \$15/13; ☎ dusk, late Nov-early Mar) What better way to enjoy a balmy summer evening than to bring a rug, a picnic and a mate, and watch a film on a huge outdoor screen! This nightly summer tradition screens classics such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *A Clockwork Orange*. Buy tickets online, by phone or at the gate from 7pm (subject to availability). Enter the park at Woollahra Gate.

**Open Air Cinema** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 1300 366 649; www.stgeorge.com.au/openair; Mrs Macquaries Point, Royal Botanic Gardens; adult/concession \$18/17; ☎ box office 6.30pm, screenings 8.30pm Jan & Feb) Similar to Moonlight, this version has a three-storey screen with surround sound, harbour sunsets and swanky food and wine.

**Bondi Open Air Cinema** (Map p99; ☎ 9209 4614; www.bondiopenair.com.au; Bondi Pavilion, Bondi) Same as the Botanic Gardens Open Air Cinema (above) but saltier. Bookings essential for both Open Air venues.

## Theatre

**Company B** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9699 3444; www.belvoir.com.au; Belvoir Street Theatre, 25 Belvoir St, Surry Hills; adult/concession from \$48/30; ☎ box office 9.30am-6pm Mon & Tue, to 7.30pm Wed-Sat, 2.30-7.30pm Sun) Artistic director Neil Armfield is the darling of the Sydney theatre world. Stars like Geoffrey Rush clamour to perform his adventurous interpretations to recently refurbished Belvoir Street Theatre.

**Sydney Comedy Store** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9357 1419; www.comedystore.com.au; Entertainment Quarter, Lang Rd, Moore Park; tickets \$15-30; ☎ box office 10am-6pm Mon, to midnight Tue-Sat) This purpose-built comedy hall lures big-time Australian and overseas (US, Irish, Scottish etc) and Edinburgh stand-ups and nurtures new talent with open-mic and 'New Comics' nights.

**Sydney Theatre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9250 1999; www.sydneytheatre.org.au; 22 Hickson Rd, Walsh Bay; tickets \$69-130; ☎ box office 9am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, from 11am Sat) The resplendent Sydney Theatre at the base of Observatory Hill puts 850 bums on seats for specialist drama and dance.

**Sydney Theatre Company** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9250 1777; www.sydneytheatre.com.au; Wharf Theatre, Pier 4, 5 Hickson Rd, Walsh Bay; tickets \$20-130; ☎ box office 9am-8.30pm, from 11am Sat) Working in tandem with the Sydney Theatre across the road, the STC is Sydney's premier theatre company. Major Australian actors (Barry Otto, Deborah Mailman) perform works by Alan Bennett, David Williamson and Shakespeare. Ask about \$20 'Student Rush' tickets. In late 2006 Cate Blanchett and hubby Andrew Upton joined the company as joint Artistic Directors.

Major theatres hosting West End and Broadway musicals, opera and concerts (tickets from \$50 to \$150):

**Capitol Theatre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9320 5000; www.capitoltheatre.com.au; 13 Campbell St, Haymarket; ☎ box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Lyric Theatre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9657 8500; www.lyrictheatre.com.au; Star City Casino, 80 Pyrmont St, Pyrmont; ☎ box office 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, from 11am Sun)

**State Theatre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9373 6852; www.statetheatre.com.au; 49 Market St, Sydney; ☎ box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm performance nights)

**Theatre Royal** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9224 8444; www.mlcentre.com.au; MLC Centre, 108 King St, Sydney; ☎ box office Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat, 1-8pm Sun)

## Live Music

### CLASSICAL

**City Recital Hall** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 8256 2222; www.cityrecitalhall.com; 2-12 Angel Pl, Sydney; tickets free-\$60;

☎ box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Classically configured, this custom-built 1200-seat venue boasts near-perfect acoustics. Top-billing companies here include Musica Viva, the Australian Brandenburg and Chamber Orchestras and the Sydney Symphony, plus touring international ensembles, soloists and opera singers.

**Sydney Conservatorium of Music** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9351 1222; www.music.usyd.edu.au; cnr Macquarie & Bridge Sts; tickets free-\$25; ☎ box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) 'The Con's' annual student/teacher performance programme includes choral, jazz, opera and chamber recitals, and free lunchtime and 'Cocktail Hour' concerts.

**Sydney Opera House** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9250 7777; www.sydneyoperahouse.com; Bennelong Point, Circular Quay E; ticket prices vary with shows; ☎ box office 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 2hr pre-show Sun) As well as theatre and dance, the Opera House (p103) regularly hosts the following classy classicists:

**Australian Chamber Orchestra** (☎ 8274 3800; www.aco.com.au)

**Musica Viva** (☎ 8694 6666; www.mva.org.au)

**Opera Australia** (☎ 9699 1099; www.opera-australia.org.au)

**Sydney Philharmonic Choirs** (☎ 9251 2024; www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au)

**Sydney Symphony** (☎ 8251 4600; www.sydney-symphony.com)

### JAZZ & BLUES

**Basement** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 2797; www.thebasement.com.au; 29 Reiby Pl, Circular Quay; tickets from \$15; ☎ noon-1.30am Mon-Thu, to 2.30am Fri, 7.30pm-3am Sat, 7pm-1am Sun) Sydney's premier jazz venue presents big touring acts (Taj Mahal) and big local talent (Vince Jones, Mia Dyson). A broad musical mandate also sees funk, blues and soul bands performing, plus the odd spoken-word gig. Book a table by the stage.

**Wine Banq** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9222 1919; www.winebanq.com.au; 53 Martin Pl, Sydney; tickets from \$10; ☎ noon-late Tue-Fri, 6pm-late Sat) Sydney's sexiest jazz room adds a brilliant wine list to performers along the lines of Wynton Marsalis, James Morrison and Harry Connick Jr.

**Empire Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9557 1701; www.empirelive.com.au; cnr Parramatta Rd & Johnston St, Annandale; tickets free-\$20; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) The Empire's 300-capacity bar gets down 'n' dirty with Sydney's best blues and roots. Local bands with loyal followings play free gigs; listen out for international artists and regular metal, ska, rockabilly, country-and-western and swing dancing nights!

**Soup Plus** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9299 7728; www.soupplus.com.au; cnr Margaret & Clarence Sts; tickets \$10-12 Mon-Thu, dinner & show \$35 Fri & Sat; ☎ live music 7.30pm Mon-Fri, from 8.30pm Sat) Ditching its sweaty, low-altitude George St cellar for slick new digs was risky, but Soup Plus continues to lure city jazzniks with jazz, swing, big-band and a parade of vocal stylists. Raucous office groups shake the boss off their backs most nights.

## ROCK

**Annandale Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9550 1078; www.annandalehotel.com.au; cnr Parramatta Rd & Nelson St, Annandale; tickets free-\$30; ☎ 11am-midnight Tue-Sat, to 10pm Sun, to 11pm Mon) The Annandale survived the live-music morgue in the '90s and now spearheads Sydney's rock revival, coughing up nightly alt-rock, metal, punk and electronica. Afroed punters traverse the sticky carpet between sets by Jet, the Dandy Warhols and Eskimo Joe.

**Enmore Theatre** (Map p100; ☎ 9550 3666; www.enmoretheatre.com.au; 130 Enmore Rd, Newtown; tickets \$20-60; ☎ box office 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Originally a vaudeville playhouse, the elegantly wasted Enmore now hosts alt-cum-mainstream rockers like Queens of the Stone Age, the James Butler Trio, Ben Harper, and PJ Harvey. The 1600-capacity theatre feels like an old-time movie hall, complete with lounge areas and balconies.

**Metro** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9287 2000; www.metrotheatre.com.au; 624 George St; tickets \$25-65; ☎ box office 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-7pm Sat) Big-name indie acts grace the Metro's stage, like the Eels and well-chosen local rockers like the Butterfly Effect. International DJs lend weight to the cause. Theatre-style tiers, air-con, and super sound and visibility.

**Gaelic Club** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 1687; www.thegaelicclub.com.au; 64 Devonshire St, Surry Hills; tickets \$10-30; ☎ varies with shows) Get your earwax blasted out at the Gaelic courtesy of iconic internationals like the Darkness and the Strokes, or home-grown sonic assailants like Wolfmother and Silverchair. It's a midsize, split-level, multi-purpose affair – much beer and moshing.

**Hopetoun Hotel** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9361 5257; www.hopetounhotel.com.au; 416 Bourke St, Surry Hills; tickets free-\$15; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun) Once the uncontested crucible for new Sydney rock bands, the diminutive 'Hoey' is still a launching pad for garage bands on the boil.

**Sandringham Hotel** (Map p100; ☎ 9557 1254; fax 9517 9325; 387 King St, Newtown; tickets \$8-12; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun) You can get rocked from



Tuesday to Sunday at the Sando for not much money. Acoustic acts upstairs; Goth-metal night Sunday.

**Vanguard** (Map p100; ☎ 9557 7992; www.thevanguard.com.au; 42 King St, Newtown; dinner & show per person from \$36, general admission \$10-40; 🍷 dinner from 7pm, music from 8pm) This place aspires to be freethinking, intellectual, and artistic. The intimate 1920s-themed band room satisfies these criteria; occasional Russell Crowe gigs do not... Most seats are reserved for dinner-and-show punters.

**Sydney Entertainment Centre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9320 4200; www.sydentent.com.au; 35 Harbour St, Haymarket; ticket prices vary with shows; 🍷 box office 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Sydney's largest indoor venue holds 12,000 howling rock fans and hosts the massive international acts when they're in town. Like most monster venues, the sound quality leaves a little to be desired.

### Spectator Sports

On any given Sydney weekend there'll be all manner of balls being hurled, kicked and batted around, plus sailing on the harbour. Sydneysiders are excruciatingly passionate about the **National Rugby League** (NRL; www.nrl.com.au; Ticketek tickets \$20-40), the season transpiring at suburban stadia and **Aussie Stadium** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9360 6601; www.aussiestadium.com; Driver Ave, Moore Park), with September finals. The fever-inducing NSW versus Queensland State of Origin series is played annually.

From March to September, 2005's premier-ship-winning Sydney Swans play in the **Australian Football League** (AFL; www.afl.com.au; Ticketmaster tickets \$20-40) at the **Sydney Cricket Ground** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9360 6601; www.sydneycricketground.com.au; Driver Ave, Moore Park) and **Telstra Stadium** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 8765 2000; www.telstrastadium.com.au; Olympic Blvd, Homebush Bay).

The **National Basketball League** (NBL; www.nbl.com.au; Ticketmaster tickets \$10-60) season runs from April to November, the local team, the Sydney Kings, play at the Sydney Entertainment Centre (above).

The **cricket** (www.cricinfo.com) season runs from October to March, the Sydney Cricket Ground (above) hosting interstate Pura Cup matches and sell-out international test and World Series Cup matches.

**Tennis NSW** (☎ 9763 7644; www.tennissnw.com.au) has info on local tournaments and the Adidas International event at the **Sydney International Tennis Centre** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 8746 0777;

www.sydneytennis.com.au; Rod Laver Dr, Olympic Park, Homebush) in the second week of January.

Out on the harbour, the 18ft-skiff racing season runs from September to March. The **Sydney Flying Squadron** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9955 8350; www.sydneyflying squadron.com.au; 76 McDougall St, Millsons Point; adult/child \$15/5.50; 🍷 2-4.30pm Sat, Sep-Apr) conducts viewings.

### SHOPPING

Shopping in central Sydney is fast and furious – the CBD brims with department, chain and international fashion stores around Pitt Street Mall. It's much more relaxing to shop for fashion on popular inner-city strips such as Oxford St, Paddington; for furnishings and antiques on Queen St, Woollahra; for CDs around Crown St, Surry Hills; for outdoor gear near the corner of Kent and Bathurst Sts in town; or at Sydney's markets. The Rocks is where you'll generally find what's known as 'Australiana' (ie souvenirs), though it won't be cheap. Try Paddy's Markets in Chinatown instead.

Late-night shopping is on Thursday, when most stores stay open until 9pm.

### Aboriginal Art

**Artery** (Map p98; ☎ 9380 8234; Shop 2, 221 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst) Artery deliberately steers away from the glitzy Sydney gallery scene, sourcing its contemporary, original selections from up-and-coming Central Australian artists. Prices are realistic and affordable: modern indigenous jewellery, hand-woven baskets and gorgeous canvasses start at \$25.

**Gannon House** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9251 4474; 45 Argyle St, The Rocks) Purchasing works directly from Aboriginal communities, Gannon House (named after colonial builder Michael Gannon) takes an umbrella approach to its exhibits, jumbling Aboriginal artefacts, paintings and didgeridoos with contemporary white Australian abstract art.

**Gavala** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9212 7232; Shop 131, 1st fl, Harbourside Shopping Centre, Darling Harbour) Gavala sells only authentic indigenous products that are licensed, authorised or purchased directly from artists and communities, or both. It's 100% Aboriginal-owned, stirring up an outback vibe with a mind-boggling collation of paintings, boomerangs, didgeridoos, artefacts, books, clothing and CDs.

**Hogarth Galleries** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9360 6839; 7 Walker Lane, Paddington) This cultural beacon

### BUYING INDIGENOUS ART

Most of Sydney's amazing indigenous art comes from elsewhere in Australia. To ensure you're not perpetuating nonindigenous cash-in on Aboriginal art's popularity, make sure you're buying from an authentic dealer selling original art, and if the gallery doesn't pay their artists up front, ask exactly how much of your money will make it back to the artist or community. Another good test is to request some biographical info on the artists – if the vendor can't produce it, keep walking.

has supported and promoted Aboriginal art since 1972. Hogarth exhibits contemporary dot paintings, basketry, framed prints, fabrics, spears and didgeridoos.

### Australiana

**Australian Wine Centre** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 2755; Shop 3, Goldfields House, 1 Alfred St, Circular Quay) This basement store is packed with quality Australian wine, beer and spirits. Pick up some Yellowglen for a bubbly night or organise a shipment of Ninth Island Pinot Noir back home. For larger wallets, there's a mind-boggling range of Penfold's Grange wines.

**Flame Opals** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9247 3446; 119 George St, The Rocks) Shimmering opals are sold in all shapes and sizes at this outlet, and prices range from about \$20 to 'If you have to ask, you can't afford it'. There's a tax-free concession for overseas customers.

**RM Williams** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9262 2228; 389 George St, Sydney) Urban cowboys and country folk can't get enough of this hard-wearing outback gear. It's the kind of stuff Prime Ministers don when they want to seem sincere about something, whilst referring to it as 'cllobber'. Favourites include oilskin jackets, Akubra hats, moleskin jeans and leather work boots.

**Strand Hatters** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9231 6884; Shop 8, Strand Arcade, 412 George St) Strand Hatters can coat your noggin with a classically Australian Akubra bush hat (made from rabbit felt). Staff block and steam hats to customers' cranial requirements (crocodile-teeth hatbands cost extra).

### Clothing

**Calibre** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9380 5993; 398 Oxford St, Paddington) Hip, high-calibre Calibre fills the wardrobes of Sydney's power players with

shnick suits in seasonal fabrics and colours, plus brand-name sunnies, shoes, ties and briefcases.

**Leona Edmiston** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9331 7033; 88 William St, Paddington) Leona Edmiston's designs have been described as exuberantly feminine, flirtatious and fun, cut from the best cottons, silks and jerseys and in luscious and sophisticated colours.

More Aussie talent: **Collette Dinnigan** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9360 6691; 33 William St, Paddington) ... as worn by Hollywood A-listers.

**Morrissey** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9380 4722; 372 Oxford St, Paddington) Sexy, high-heeled, high-priced style.

**Wayne Cooper** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9221 5292; 1st fl, Strand Arcade, 412 George St, Sydney) Devilish rags for true vixens.

**Zimmerman Swim** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9387 5111; Shop 3048, Westfield Shopping Centre, 500 Oxford St, Bondi Junction) ... as worn by Bondi's sexiest boobs and bums.

### Markets

**Balmain Market** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0418-765 736; cnr Darling St & Curtis Rd, Balmain; 🍷 8.30am-4pm Sat) Set in the shady grounds of St Andrews Congregational, stalls sell arts, crafts, books, clothing, jewellery, plants, and fruit and veg.

**Bondi Markets** (Map p99; ☎ 9315 8988; Bondi Beach Public School, cnr Campbell Pde & Warners Ave, Bondi; 🍷 9am-4pm Sun) The kids are at the beach on Sunday while their school fills up with Bondi funksters rummaging through funky secondhand clothes and books, hippy beads and earrings, aromatherapy oils, candles, old records, and more.

**Glebe Markets** (Map p100; ☎ 4237 7499; Glebe Public School, cnr Glebe Point Rd & Derby Pl, Glebe; 🍷 9am-4pm Sat) The best of the west; Sydney's dreadlocked, shoeless, inner-city contingent beats a hazy course to this crowded market. Once massaged, fuelled on lentil burgers and swathed in funky retro gear, they retreat to the lawns, pass the peace pipe and chill out to an African drum soundtrack.

**Paddington Market** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9331 2923; St John's Church, 395 Oxford St, Paddington; 🍷 10am-4pm Sat) Sydney's most-attended weekend market dishes up vintage clothes and hip fashions, jewellery, books, massage and palmistry. Parking is a misery – take public transport.

**Paddy's Markets** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 1300 361 589; cnr Hay & Thomas Sts, Haymarket; 🍷 9am-5pm Thu-Sun) Possibly Australia's best location to stock up on mobile-phone covers, Eminem T-shirts

and cheap sneakers. This capitalist cavern offers over 1000 stalls specialising (mostly) in tack.

**Rocks Market** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9240 8717; George St, The Rocks; ☹ 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) Under a long, white canopy near Sydney Harbour Bridge, the 150 stalls here target tourists with fossils, opals, faux-Aboriginal art etc.

## Shopping Centres & Department Stores

**David Jones** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9266 5544; cnr Market & Castlereagh Sts, Sydney) In two enormous city buildings, DJs is Sydney's premier department store. The Market St store has menswear, electrical and a highbrow food court; Castlereagh St has women's and children's wear and a friendly concierge to point you in the right direction.

**Queen Victoria Building** (QVB; Map pp94-5; ☎ 9265 6869; 455 George St, Sydney) This high-Victorian masterpiece occupies an entire city block, and though there are some inspiring retail offerings, they run a distant second to the magnificent wrought-iron balconies, stained-glass shopfronts, mosaic floors, tinkling Baby Grand and hyper-kitsch animated Royal Clock.

**Strand Arcade** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9232 4199; 412 George St & 193-5 Pitt St Mall, Sydney) Constructed in 1891 in a squeeze space between George and Pitt Sts, the Strand Arcade rivals the QVB in the ornateness stakes. Three floors of designer fashions, Australiana and old-world coffee shops will make your shortcut through here considerably longer.

**Westfield Bondi Junction** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9947 8000; 500 Oxford St, Bondi Junction) This slick mall is Sydney's biggest, with more than 300 shops over six shiny levels.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9667 9111; www.sydneyairport.com.au) is Australia's busiest, so don't be surprised if there are delays. It's only 10km south of the city centre, making access easy, but this also means that flights cease between 11pm and 5am due to noise regulations. The T1 (international) and T2 and T3 (domestic) terminals are a 4km, \$5 bus or train ride apart.

You can fly into Sydney from all the usual international points and from within Australia. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au), and

**Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) have frequent flights to other capital cities. Smaller Qantas-affiliated airlines fly to smaller Oz destinations.

For further details on air travel within Australia, see p90. For air travel to/from Australia, see p1020.

### Bus

All private interstate and regional bus travellers arrive at **Sydney Coach Terminal** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9281 9366; Central Station, Eddy Ave; ☹ 6am-10.30pm). Sample destinations include Brisbane (\$116, 16 hours), Byron Bay (\$105, 13 hours), Canberra (\$36, four hours) and Melbourne (\$74, 13 hours).

The government's CountryLink rail network is also complemented by coaches. Most buses stop in the suburbs on the way in and out of Sydney. If you hold a VIP or YHA discount card, shop around the major bus companies with offices here:

**Firefly** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au)

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au)

**Murrays** (☎ 13 22 51; www.murrays.com.au)

### Train

Sydney's main rail terminus for CountryLink interstate and regional services is **Central Station** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info; Eddy Ave; ☹ staffed ticket booths 6am-10pm, ticket machines 24hr). Call for information, reservations and arrival/departure times. CountryLink discounts often nudge 40% on economy fares – sometimes cheaper than buses!

Sample train fares (without discount) include Brisbane (\$75, 14 hours), Canberra (\$35, 4½ hours) and Melbourne (\$75, 11 hours).

## GETTING AROUND

For information on buses, ferries and trains call the **Transport Infoline** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au).

### To/From the Airport

One of the easiest ways to get to and from the airport is with a shuttle company such as **Kingsford Smith Transport** (KST; ☎ 9666 9988; www.kst.com.au; one-way/return \$10/18; ☹ 5am-11pm), which services central Sydney hotels, and **Manly Airport Bus** (☎ 0500 505 800; one-way/return \$30/63; ☹ 5am-11pm), from Manly. Bookings are essential for both.

**Airport Link** (☎ 13 15 00; www.airportlink.com.au; one-way/return from Central Station to domestic terminal

\$12/18, to international terminal \$13/19; ☹ 5am-midnight) is a train line that runs to and from the airport terminals every 10 to 15 minutes.

Taxi fares from the airport are approximately \$25 to \$35 to Circular Quay, \$40 to \$50 to North Sydney and Bondi, and \$60 to Manly.

### Boat

#### FERRY

Sydney transport's most civilised option – harbour ferries, JetCats (to Manly) and RiverCats (to Parramatta) – depart Circular Quay. Most ferries operate between 6am and midnight; those servicing tourist attractions operate shorter hours. The **Ferry Information Office** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9207 3170; www.sydneyferries.info; ☹ 7am-5.45pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5.45pm Sun) at Circular Quay has details. Many ferries have connecting bus services.

A one-way inner-harbour ride on a regular ferry costs \$5/3 adult/concession. A one-way ride to Manly on the JetCat costs \$8 (no concession, 15 minutes, half-hourly). A one-way RiverCat ride to Parramatta costs \$8/4 adult/concession (50 minutes, hourly).

### WATER TAXI

Water taxis ply dedicated shuttle routes; rides to/from other harbour venues can be booked.

**Watertours** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9211 7730; www.watertours.com.au; ☹ 9.30am-11pm) Opera House to Darling Harbour \$15/10 adult/child; one-hour Harbour and Nightlights Tours \$30/20 adult/child. **Yellow Water Taxis** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 9555 9778; www.yellowwatertaxis.com.au; ☹ 7am-midnight) Circular Quay to Darling Harbour \$13/8 adult/child; 40-minute Harbour Tours \$25/15 adult/child.

### Bus

Sydney buses run almost everywhere. Bondi, Coogee and parts of the North Shore are serviced only by bus. Nightrider buses operate skeletally after regular services cease around midnight.

The main city bus stops are Circular Quay, Wynyard Park (York St) and Railway Sq. Buy tickets from newsagencies, Bus TransitShops and on buses. Pay the driver as you enter, or dunk prepaid tickets in ticket machines by the door. Fares start at \$1.70; most trips are under \$3.50. There's a **Bus TransitShop** (Map pp94-5; www.sydneybuses.info; cnr Alfred & Loftus Sts; ☹ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat

& Sun) at Circular Quay, and there are others at the Queen Victoria Building (Map pp94-5), Railway Sq (Map pp94-5) and Wynyard Station (Map pp94-5).

Bus routes starting with an X indicate limited-stop express routes; those with an L have limited stops. Most buses depart the city on George or Castlereagh Sts, ploughing down George or Elizabeth Sts on the way back in.

## Car & Motorcycle

Cars are good for day trips out of town, but driving one in the city is like having an anchor around your neck. Heavy traffic, elusive and very expensive parking (even at hotels, expect \$30 per day) and the extra costs just aren't worth the stress.

### BUYING OR SELLING A CAR

The secondhand car industry is a minefield of mistrust and dodgy wheelers and dealers, but with a bit of research you can still land yourself a decent deal. Parramatta Rd is lined with used-car lots, and the *Trading Post* (www.tradingpost.com.au), a weekly rag available at newsagents, lists secondhand vehicles. For more information on buying or selling a vehicle, see p73.

The **Kings Cross Car Market** (Map p98; ☎ 1800 808 188; www.carmarket.com.au; car park Level 2, cnr Ward Ave & Elizabeth Bay Rd, Kings Cross; ☹ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, to 4pm Fri & Sat) is a good spot to buy and sell a car. It's potentially hit and miss, but always busy.

### RENTAL

Expect to pay around \$70 per day for a zippy small car. Rates sometimes include insurance and unlimited kilometres; some companies require you to be over 25 years old. At the time of writing, petrol cost around \$1.20 per litre, with fluctuations taking it as high as \$1.45.

**Standbycars** (☎ 1300 789 059; www.standbycars.com) has cheap last-minute deals on cars and camper vans and specialises in car relocations, whereby you return a rental vehicle to its original location after a one-way rental; see p1029 for more information.

Major rental agencies with offices in Sydney:

**Avis** (☎ 13 63 33; www.avis.com.au)

**Budget** (☎ 13 27 27; www.budget.com.au)

**Europcar** (☎ 1300 131 390; www.europcar.com.au)

**Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39; www.hertz.com.au)

**Thrifty** (☎ 1300 367 227; www.thrifty.com.au)



The Yellow Pages lists many other car-hire companies, some specialising in renting clapped-out wrecks at rock-bottom prices – read the fine print!

### ROAD TOLLS

There's a \$3 southbound toll on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Tunnel. If you're heading from the North Shore to the eastern suburbs, it's easier to take the tunnel. There's a \$4 northbound toll on the Eastern Distributor; the infamous Cross City Tunnel costs \$3.50 one-way. Sydney's main motorways (M1, M2, M4, M5 and M7) are also tolled (\$2.20 to \$3.80). There are cash booths at toll gates, but the whole system will soon be electronic – check [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au) for the latest info.

### Fare Deals

The **SydneyPass** ([www.sydneypass.info](http://www.sydneypass.info)) offers three, five or seven days' unlimited travel over seven days on STA buses, ferries and the rail network's Red TravelPass zone (inner suburbs). Passes include the Airport Express, Sydney and Bondi Explorer buses, JetCats, RiverCats and three STA-operated harbour cruises. They cost \$100/55/275 adult/child/family (three days), \$145/70/360 (five days) and \$165/80/410 (seven days). Buy passes from STA offices, train stations, Bus TransitShops, the Sydney visitor centre at the Rocks (p102) and from Airport Express and Explorer bus drivers.

TravelPasses offer unlimited rail, bus and ferry rides at cheap weekly rates. There are various colour-coded grades offering combinations of distance and service. A weekly Red TravelPass (inner suburbs), available at train stations, STA offices, Bus TransitShops and newsagents, costs \$33/17 adult/concession.

If you're just catching buses, a TravelTen ticket from newsagents and Bus TransitShops offers 10 discounted bus trips. There are various colour codes for different distances; a Red TravelTen ticket (inner suburbs) costs \$30/15 adult/concession. FerryTen tickets from the Circular Quay ticket office are also good value – 10 inner-harbour rides for \$33/17 adult/concession. DayTripper tickets letting you ride most inner-suburban trains, buses and ferries cost \$16/8 adult/concession.

Several transport-plus-entry tickets available from the Circular Quay Ferry Information Office (p137) work out cheaper than catching a return ferry and paying entry separately.

These include the **ZooPass** (adult/child/concession \$39/21/34) and the **AquariumPass** (adult/child/family \$33/17/81).

### Monorail & Metro Light Rail (MLR)

The privately operated **Metro Monorail** (☎ 9285 5600; [www.metromonorail.com.au](http://www.metromonorail.com.au); single circuit \$5, day pass adult/family \$9/22; ♿ every 4min, 7am–10pm Mon–Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, 8am–10pm Sun) is an elevated worm circling around Darling Harbour and the city. The full loop takes about 14 minutes.

Also privately run, the future-slick **Metro Light Rail** (MLR; ☎ 9285 5600; [www.metrolightrail.com.au](http://www.metrolightrail.com.au); Zone 1 adult/concession \$3/2, Zone 1 & 2 adult/concession \$4/3, day pass adult/concession \$9/7; ♿ 24hr, every 15min 6am–midnight, every 30min midnight–6am) glides between Central Station and Pyrmont via Chinatown and Darling Harbour. The Zone 2 service beyond Pyrmont to Lilyfield stops at 11pm Sunday to Thursday, midnight Friday and Saturday. Purchase tickets on board.

Note that the SydneyPass isn't valid on the monorail or the MLR.

### Taxi

Taxis and cab ranks proliferate in Sydney. Flag fall is \$2.80, then it's \$1.62 per kilometre (plus 20% from 10pm to 6am). The waiting charge is 68c per minute. Passengers must pay bridge, tunnel and road tolls (even if you don't incur them 'outbound', the returning driver will incur them 'inbound').

The four major taxi companies offering phone bookings (\$1.40 fee):

**Arrow Taxis** (☎ 13 22 11)

**Legion** (☎ 13 14 51)

**Premier Cabs** (☎ 13 10 17)

**Taxis Combined** (☎ 8332 8888)

### Train

Sydney's vast suburban rail network is the deft way to get around. Lines radiate from the underground City Circle (seven city-centre stations) but don't service the northern and southern beaches, Balmain or Glebe. All suburban trains stop at Central Station, and usually one or more of the other City Circle stations too.

Trains run from around 5am to midnight. At weekends and after 9am on weekdays you can buy an off-peak return ticket, valid until 4am the next day, for little more than a standard one-way fare.

Twenty-four-hour ticket machines occupy most stations, but humans are usually

available too if you'd rather talk to something that'll listen. If you have to change trains, buy a ticket to your ultimate destination, but don't exit the transfer station en route or your ticket will be invalid.

For train information, visit the **CityRail Information Booth** (Map pp94–5; ☎ 13 15 00; [www.131500.com.au](http://www.131500.com.au); Wharf 5, Circular Quay; ♿ 9.05am–4.50pm).

## AROUND SYDNEY

The dramatic and rugged landscape around Sydney's urban tentacles hems the suburban sprawl, and filters into superb national parks and historic small towns.

To the west, the wooded foothills of the Great Dividing Range rise to the lofty Blue Mountains. To the south, Royal National Park harbours lost-to-the-world beaches, rainforest pockets and precipitous cliff-scapes. Inland, fertile soils support the rural settlements of Macarthur Country and historic Macquarie towns, extending south to the dignified Southern Highlands.

### BOTANY BAY

It's a common misconception that Sydney is built around Botany Bay. Sydney Harbour is actually Port Jackson, and Botany Bay is 10km to 15km south on the city's fringe.

The white beaches, craggy landscape and native bush that confronted Cook when he stepped ashore still dominate Botany Bay's coastal verges, but digging deeper exposes south Sydney's smoke-stacked industrial heartland. Despite the refineries, Botany Bay has scenic stretches and holds a special, endearing place in Australian history. The Bay was named by Joseph Banks, Cook's expedition's naturalist, for the many botanical specimens he found here.

**Botany Bay National Park** (cars \$7, pedestrians & cyclists free; ♿ 7am–7.30pm Sep–May, to 5.30pm Jun–Aug) occupies both headlands of the bay – 458 hectares of bushland and coastal walking tracks, picnic areas, and an 8km cycle track. Cook's monument-marked landing place is on the southern side of the park in trailer-trashy Kurnell. The **Discovery Centre** (☎ 02-9668 9111; [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au); Cape Solander Dr, Kurnell; admission free; ♿ 11am–3pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4.30pm Sat & Sun) conveys the impact of European arrival, and has information on the surrounding wetlands. There's also material exploring

Cook's life and expeditions. The entry fee for cars applies only on the southern headland – pedestrian access is free. Most of the walking tracks begin close to the park entrance, so you might as well park outside. To get here via public transport, catch the train to Cronulla, then **Crowthers Buslink** (☎ 02-9523 4047; [www.buslink.net.au](http://www.buslink.net.au)) bus 987 from Cronulla train station 10km away (one way \$4/2 adult/child, 20 minutes, hourly 8am to 5pm).

**La Perouse**, on the northern headland, is named after the French explorer who arrived in 1788, just six days after the arrival of the First Fleet. Nevertheless, Anglo-Franco relations were apparently conducted without the usual disdain, and La Perouse and his men camped at Botany Bay for a few weeks before sailing off into the Pacific and disappearing. The fabulous **La Perouse Museum & Visitors Centre** (☎ 02-9311 3379; [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au); Cable Station, Anzac Pde, La Perouse; adult/child/family \$6/3/13; ♿ 10am–4pm Wed–Sun) housed inside the old cable station (1882), has relics from La Perouse's many expeditions, plus changing exhibitions on local history and environment.

About 50m offshore at La Perouse is the strange **Bare Island** (☎ 02-9247 5033; [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au); tours adult/concession/family \$8/6/22; ♿ 1.30 & 2.30pm Sat & Sun Oct–Feb, Sun only Mar–Sep), a decaying, grass-tussocked concrete fort built in 1885 to discourage a feared Russian invasion. A 45-minute guided tour is the only way to access the island.

Buses 394 and L94 run from Circular Quay to La Perouse (one way \$5/3 adult/child, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes).

### ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

The traditional lands of the Tharawal people, the 16,500-hectare **Royal National Park** (cars \$11, pedestrians & cyclists free; ♿ main roads 24hr, beach roads sunrise–8.30pm) was established in 1879, the oldest national park in the world. The park features vertiginous cliffs, secluded beaches, coastal scrub, lush rainforest, isolated seaside communities and raucous flocks of huge yellow-tailed black cockatoos.

The national park begins at Port Hacking, 30km south of Sydney, and stretches 20km further south. Its main road detours to Bundeena, a small town on Port Hacking, where you can swim at Horderns Beach and walk the **Bundeena-Maianbar Heritage Walk** (coastal views and Aboriginal sites).

The sandstone plateau at the northern end of the park is an ocean of low scrub, the fuel for three voracious bushfires in recent years. The most serious one (1994) destroyed 95% of the park. You'll find taller forest trees in river valleys and at the park's southern boundary on the edge of the Illawarra Escarpment. In late winter and early spring the park is carpeted with wild flowers.

Further into the park, there's lovely swimming at Wattamolla Beach, and great surf at Garie Beach. You can also swim in the upper reaches of Kangaroo Creek but not the Hacking River.

A walking and cycling trail follows the Hacking River south from Audley; others pass tranquil freshwater swimming holes. The spectacular two-day, 28km coastal walking trail skirts the park's eastern boundary and is highly recommended.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 02-9542 0648; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Farnell Rd, Audley; ☹ 9am-4pm) can assist with camping permits, maps and bushwalking details. **Audley Boat Shed** (☎ 02-9528 9867; Farnell Rd, Audley; ☹ 9am-5pm) rents rowboats, canoes and kayaks (\$16/30 per hour/day), aqua bikes (\$12 per 30 minutes) and bicycles (\$14/30 per hour/day).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Garie Beach YHA** (☎ 02-9261 1111; Garie Beach, Royal National Park; dm \$14) There's no phone or electricity at this mega-basic, 12-bunk hostel, and you have to lug in all your food, but it's close to one of the best surf beaches in NSW and is utterly secluded. Book via the YHA Membership & Travel Centre (p102) or the Cronulla Beach YHA. It's a 15-minute walk from Garie Beach car park, 3½ hours from Otford train station, or 6½ hours from Bundeena.

**Cronulla Beach YHA** (☎ 02-9527 7772; www.cronullabeachyha.com; Level 1, 40 Kingsway, Cronulla; dm/d/f \$28/75/95; ☹) Run by two gregarious brothers, this is a top spot for cheerful vibes, honing your surfing skills, or hooking up with fellow coastal trail walkers. En-suite doubles approach motel quality, there's good wheelchair access, and the pool table and body boards are free.

**Beachhaven Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 02-9544 1333; www.beachhavenbnb.com.au; 13 Bundeena Dr, Bundeena; d incl breakfast \$250-275; ☹) Beachhaven B&B looks a bit naff in a faux-Tudor kind of way, but it has two lavish suites right on heavenly Hordens Beach. There's a BBQ and a beautiful beach-view deck for the Sunday papers.

There's a drive-in camp site (\$8/4 adult/child) at Bonnie Vale near Bundeena. If you're walking, you can camp along the coastal trail and at Uloola on the western side of the park; grab a permit (\$3 per person per night) from the visitor centre.

**Passionfruit Café** (☎ 02-9527 6555; 48 Brighton St, Bundeena; mains \$5-20; ☹) breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri-Tue) Passionfruit's owners expertly disguise their top-quality cooking as fast food, managing to fool even the crustiest of local yokels. The homemade lasagne, cakes and pizzas are winners; the Big Bundeena Brekky (\$10) will set your day on a steady course.

## Getting There & Away

From Sydney, take the Princes Hwy south and turn off south of Loftus to the park's northern end – it's about a 45-minute drive from the city. If you're driving north from Wollongong, don't miss the famous 665m sea-bridge section of Lawrence Hargrave Dr between Clifton and Coalcliff, dangling out over the cliffs.

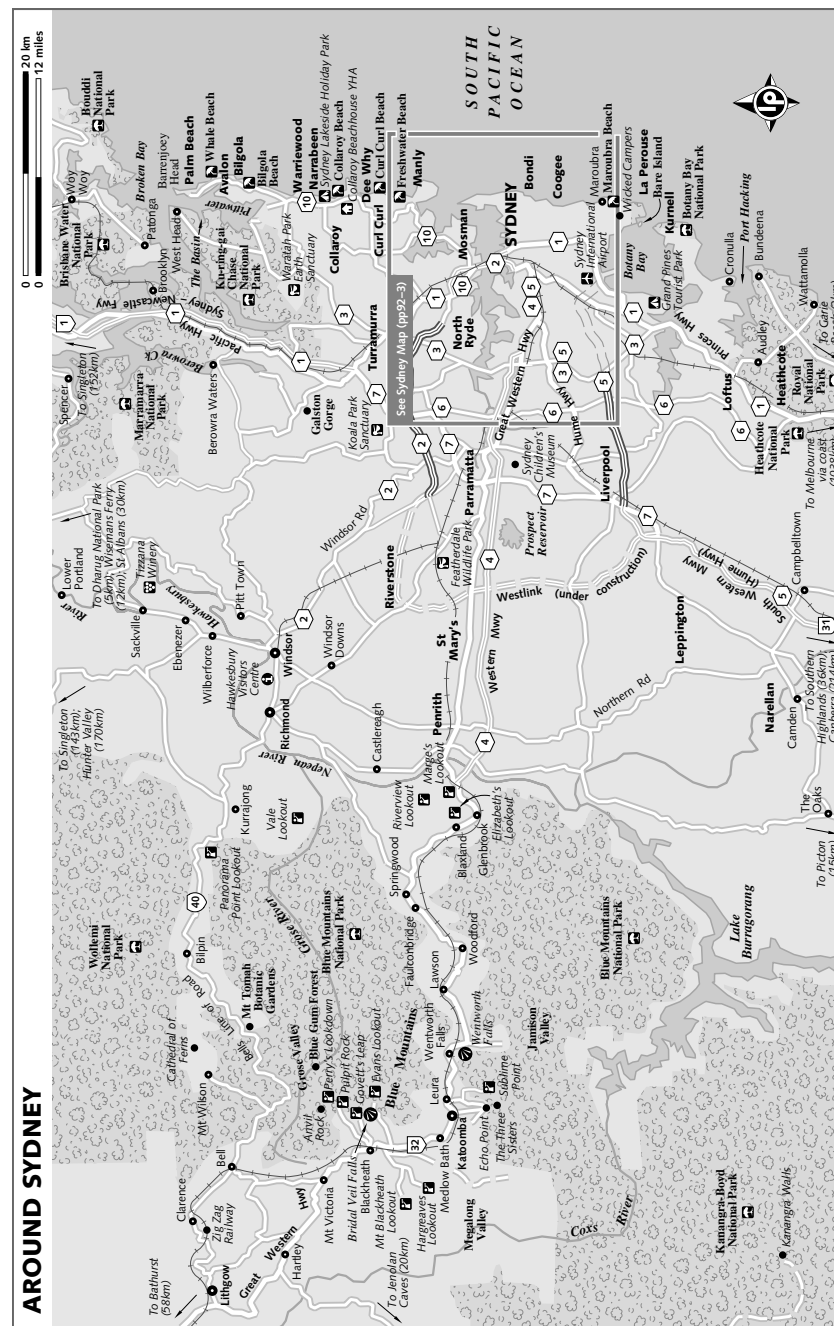
The most scenic route into the park is to take the CityRail train (one way \$5/3 adult/concession, one hour, half-hourly) to Cronulla and then jump aboard a **Cronulla National Park Ferry** (☎ 02-9523 2990; www.cronullaferries.com.au; Cronulla Wharf) to Bundeena (one-way \$5/3 adult/concession, 30 minutes, hourly). Cronulla Wharf is off Tonkin St just below the train station. This outfit also runs **Port Hacking Scenic Cruises** (adult/child/family \$18/13/50, ☹ 3hr cruise 10.30am Monday to Saturday, 10.30am & 2pm Sunday) through the summer, and some services in winter. Alternatively, Loftus, Engadine, Heathcote, Waterfall and Otford train stations are on the park boundary and have trails leading into the park. Loftus is closest to the visitor centre (6km).

## PARRAMATTA

☎ 02 / pop 152,600

Twenty-four kilometres west of Sydney, Parramatta, a Dharug Aboriginal name meaning 'the place where eels lie down', was Australia's second European settlement.

During the 1980s, the local Rugby League team the Parramatta Eels were unbeatable, their acid-wash-clad, mullet-proud fans perpetuating Sydneysiders' view of Parramatta as little more than a lowbrow shopping-mall 'burb' full of Neanderthals. But with the '80s dead and buried, Parramatta has got on with





the task of establishing itself as Sydney's second CBD, injecting a healthy dose of culture and a nascent style of its own.

Modernity aside, Parramatta retains a small-town vibe and a clutch of precious colonial buildings. The helpful **Parramatta Heritage Centre** (☎ 8839 3311; www.parracity.nsw.gov.au; 346a Church St; ☎ 9am-5pm) can steer you towards the city's attractions.

**Old Government House** (☎ 9635 8149; www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au; Parramatta Park; adult/concession/family \$8/5/18; ☎ 1hr tours 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun), established in 1799, was Parramatta's first farm and housed successive NSW governors until the 1850s. It's now a carefully maintained museum. Nearby on O'Connell St, between Argyle St and Campbell St, the open, paper-dry lawns of **St John's Cemetery** (☎ 9686 6861; ☎ sunrise-sunset) comprise Australia's oldest cemetery (1870), the resting place of many an early settler.

**Elizabeth Farm** (☎ 9635 9488; www.hht.nsw.gov.au; 70 Alice St; adult/concession/family \$8/4/17; ☎ 10am-5pm) contains part of Australia's oldest surviving European home (1793), built by renegade pastoralist/rum trader John Macarthur. It's now a hands-on museum – recline on the furniture and thumb voyeuristically through Elizabeth Macarthur's letters.

Not far away, **Hambledon Cottage** (☎ 9635 6924; cnr Hassall St & Gregory Pl; adult/child \$4/3; ☎ 11am-4pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun), built in 1824 for the Macarthurs' daughter's governess, was later used as weekend lodgings and almost became a car park in the 1980s.

An 1880s colonial bungalow, **Experiment Farm Cottage** (☎ 9635 5655; 9 Ruse St; adult/concession/family \$6/4/14; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) was built by Governor Phillip in 1791 for emancipist farmer James Ruse as an experiment to see how long it would take him to wean himself from government supplies. Ruse subsequently became Australia's first private farmer; his life is depicted in the musty cellar museum.

### Getting There & Around

The most scenic way to reach Parramatta is by RiverCat from Circular Quay (one way \$8/4 adult/child, 50 minutes) – otherwise catch a train from Central Station (one way \$4/2 adult/child, 30 minutes). By car, exit the city via Parramatta Rd and detour onto the Western Motorway tollway (\$2) at Strathfield.

## CAMDEN AREA

About 50km southwest of Sydney, Camden is a rootsy, country town with a whiff of agriculture in the air, and a heritage bravely holding off the encroaching big-house-on-a-small-block suburbia. In the 1830s, John and Elizabeth Macarthur ran vaguely Frankensteinian sheep-breeding experiments here, the beginnings of Australia's wool industry.

**John Oxley Cottage** (☎ 02-4658 1370; Camden Valley Way, Elderslie; ☎ 9.30am-4pm) is a historic house with a visitor centre on the town's northern outskirts.

The 400-hectare **Mount Annan Botanic Garden** (☎ 02-4648 2477; www.rbg Syd.nsw.gov.au; Mt Annan Dr, Mt Annan; adult/child/family \$4/2/9; ☎ 10am-6pm Oct-Mar, to 4pm Apr-Sep) is the native-plant branch of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens and claims to be the largest botanic garden in the southern hemisphere. With 4000 species on 1000 acres strewn with 400 lazy kangaroos and wallaroos, the claim seems entirely plausible.

South of Camden is the small, comely town of **Picton**. A number of historic buildings still stand, including the old post office, where you'll find the **Wollondilly visitor centre** (☎ 4677 3962; www.stonequarry.com.au; cnr Argyle & Menangle Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm). Pick up the *Historic Picton Walking Tour* pamphlet and then rest the pins in a spa room at the **White Waratah Retreat** (☎ 4677 2121; www.whitewaratahretreat.com.au; 1665 Remembrance Dr; d from \$110; ☎).

CityRail trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Picton (one way \$9/5 adult/child, roughly hourly). They also run to Campbelltown (one way \$7/4 adult/child, half-hourly), then **Busways** (☎ 4368 2277; www.131500.com.au) bus 895 and 896 (one way \$5/3 adult/child, 25 minutes, half-hourly) run to Camden.

## KU-RING-GAI CHASE NATIONAL PARK

This 15,000-hectare **national park** (per car \$11; ☎ sunrise-sunset), 24km north of the city centre, borders Broken Bay's southern edge and Pittwater's western shore. It has the classic Sydney mixture of sandstone, bushland and water vistas, plus walking tracks, horse-riding trails, picnic areas, Aboriginal rock engravings and spectacular views of Broken Bay, particularly from West Head at the park's northeastern tip.

The **Kalkari visitor centre** (☎ 02-9457 9300; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Ku-ring-gai Chase Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) runs guided tours. It's about 2.5km into

the park from the Mt Colah entrance. The road descends from Kalkari to **Bobbin Head picnic area** and **Bobbin Head Information Centre** (☎ 02-9472 8949; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Bobbin Head Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm) at the old Bobbin Head Inn on Cowan Creek, then climbs to the Turramurra entrance. Contact **Halvorsen** (☎ 02-9457 9011; www.halvorsenmarina.com.au; ☎ 8am-5pm) at Bobbin Head for information on boat hire. Sharks in Broken Bay make for a risky swim, but there's a netted area at the Basin if you simply must cool off.

Recommended walks include the America Bay Trail and the Gibberagong and Sphinx tracks. The best places to see **Aboriginal engravings** are on the Basin Trail and the Garigal Aboriginal Heritage Walk at West Head. There's a mangrove boardwalk at Bobbin Head.

### Sleeping

**Pittwater YHA Hostel** (☎ 02-9999 5748; www.yha.com.au; Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park; dm \$28, d & tw \$66) Proud of the outstanding Pittwater views and idyllic location, the staff here are almost as friendly as the wildlife. The isolated bush setting is a must for wilderness fans, who won't mind the basic but comfy facilities. Splash around in a two-person kayak (\$15 per hour); BYO food. Bookings essential. To get here, take the ferry from Church Point to Halls Wharf, then stomp 10 minutes up the hill.

### WILDLIFE PARKS

Several parks on Sydney's fringes let you get close to Australia's iconic wildlife.

**Koala Park Sanctuary** (Map p141; ☎ 9484 3141; 84 Castle Hill Rd, West Pennant Hills; adult/child \$19/9; ☎ 9am-5pm, koala presentations 10.20am, 11.45am, 2pm & 3pm) is a 4.5 hectare forest – as much a sanctuary for visitors as it is for the little grey tourist-magnets. Cuddle the cute critters at koala presentations while kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, dingoes and native birds watch nonplussed from the sidelines. Take the train to Pennant Hills, then catch Hills Bus 631, 632 or 633 (adult/child \$3/2, 10 minutes).

The bushy surroundings at **Featherdale Wildlife Park** (Map p141; ☎ 9622 1644; www.featherdale.com.au; 217 Kildare Rd, Doonside; adult/child/family \$19/10/55; ☎ 9am-5pm) house 2000 native Australians eating, sleeping, shagging, defecating and generally being beastly. Hand-feed kangaroos, wallabies and emus, slither with reptiles, stroke sporific koalas or kill some time with a Tasmanian devil (no, they don't spin around like tornados). Excellent wheelchair access. It's a 40-minute drive from the city, or take the train to Blacktown then Busways bus 725 (adult/child \$2/1, 10 minutes).

The **Waratah Park Earth Sanctuary** (Map p141; ☎ 9986 1788; www.waratahpark.com.au; 13 Namba Rd, Duffys Forest; adult/child \$17/11; ☎ 10am-9pm, reduced winter hr) was once the backdrop to the iconic '60s Australian TV show *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*. Skip and his mate Sonny have long gone, as have the grim old cages that once resided here. Now it's a rambling free-range wildlife park, where mammals such as kangaroos, bandicoots, potoroos and wallabies come out to play on evening spotlight tours (80% of Australia's wildlife is nocturnal). Entry via bookings only. It's a 30-minute drive from the city.

**Basin campsites** (☎ 02-9974 1011; www.basincampground.com.au; Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park; per night adult/child \$10/5) Camping is permitted at the Basin (bookings essential) on the western side of Pittwater. Getting there takes a walk of about 2.5km from West Head Rd, or a ferry or water-taxi ride from Palm Beach.

### Getting There & Away

There are four road entrances to the park: Mt Colah, on the Pacific Hwy; Turramurra, in the southwest; and Terrey Hills and Church Point, in the southeast. **Shorelink Buses** (☎ 02-9457 8888; www.shorelink.com.au) runs bus 577 every hour from Turramurra Station to the park entrance (one way \$4/2 adult/child, 20 minutes, hourly). From here it's about 3km to Bobbin Head.

The **Palm Beach Ferry Service** (☎ 02-9974 2411; www.palmbeachferry.com.au) shunts between Palm Beach Wharf in Pittwater and the Basin (one-way \$12/6 adult/concession, 15 minutes, hourly). **Palm Beach & Hawkesbury River Cruises** (☎ 02-9974 2159, 0414-466 635; www.sydney scenicruises.com) operates a there-and-back ferry from Palm Beach to Bobbin Head, via Patonga (return \$35/20 adult/child, 4½ hours). Call for bookings. **Church Point Water Taxis** (☎ 0428-238 190) operates services on demand between Church Point Ferry Wharf and Palm Beach (\$55 for up to six people, 20 minutes).

To get to Palm Beach, take bus 190 or L90 from Wynyard Park (one-way adult/child \$6/3, 1½ hours, half-hourly).

## HAWKESBURY RIVER

The slow-roaming, smoky Hawkesbury River begins as a wet sliver near Richmond, from where it ribbons and moils its way around a series of rainy river towns and bushy promontories. By the time it reaches the sea, 30km north of Sydney at Broken Bay, its beautiful bulk dominates the landscape. For the final 20km it spreads into inlets at Berowra Creek, Cowan Water and Pittwater to the south, and Brisbane Water to the north. The Hawkesbury also links the shorelines of Marramorra and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Parks in the south and Dharug, Brisbane Water and Bouddi National Parks to the north.

The fertile farming country around the Hawkesbury sustains vineyards, vegetable farms, flower acreages and alpaca studs. Contact **Hawkesbury Harvest** (☎ 02-4570 1250, 0415-244 477; www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au) for information on wine and farm trails and seasonal work opportunities.

The **Riverboat Postman** (☎ 02-9985 7566; fax 02-9985 7658; Brooklyn Wharf, Brooklyn; adult/child/family \$45/25/115; ☎ 9.30am-1.15pm Mon-Fri) is Australia's last operating mail boat and an old-school way to get a feel for the river. It chugs 40km up the Hawkesbury as far as Marlow, near Spencer, with additional 'coffee cruises' in summer.

Further upstream, a narrow forested waterway diverts from the Hawkesbury and peters down to the chilled-out river town **Berowra Waters**, where a handful of businesses, boat sheds and residences cluster around the free, 24-hour

ferry across Berowra Creek. If you feel like exploring, rev the river in an outboard dinghy from the **Berowra Waters Marina** (☎ 02-9456 3200; fax 02-9456 4244; 199 Bay Rd, Berowra Waters; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, from 7.30am Sat & Sun) for \$70 per half-day. In the same complex, the **Fish Café** (☎ 02-9456 4665; 199 Bay Rd, Berowra Waters; mains \$10-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sun) serves various fishy delights.

CityRail trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Berowra (one way adult/child \$6/3, 45 minutes, roughly hourly) and on to Brooklyn's Hawkesbury River Station (one way adult/child \$7/4, one hour). Berowra Station is a solid 6km trudge from Berowra Waters. **Hawkesbury Cruises** (☎ 02-9985 9900; www.hawkesburycruises.com.au) run water taxis on demand to anywhere along the river.

The sedentary riverside hamlet of **Wisemans Ferry** spills over a bow of the Hawkesbury River where it slides east towards Brooklyn. The prettiest access is from the east, via Old Wisemans Ferry Rd, wedged between Dharug National Park and the river. Two free 24-hour ferries connect the Wisemans Ferry river banks.

The town's social hub is the historic sandstone **Wisemans Ferry Inn** (☎ 02-4566 4301; fax 02-4566 4780; Old Northern Rd, Wisemans Ferry; d & tw \$66, f \$75), which has six basic pub rooms with shared bathrooms, and a bistro (mains \$12 to \$25; open for lunch and dinner) oozing country singers, smokers and lingerie barmaids.

Alternatively, **Del Rio Riverside Resort** (☎ 02-4566 4330; www.delriosort.com.au; Chaseling Rd, Webbs Creek, Wisemans Ferry; unpowered/powerd sites \$30/33, cabins from \$100; ☎ ☎) is a rambling caravan park with a restaurant (mains \$16 to \$27; open for lunch Saturday and Sunday and for dinner daily) on the opposite side of the river.

**Yengo National Park** (Map pp86-7), a rugged sandstone area covering the foothills of the Blue Mountains, stretches from Wisemans Ferry to the Hunter Valley. It's a wilderness area with no facilities and limited road access. North of the river, a scenic road leads east from Wisemans Ferry to the Central Coast, following the river before veering north through bushland and orange groves.

Largely unsealed but photogenic roads on both sides of the Macdonald River run north from Wisemans Ferry to tiny **St Albans** in Darkinjung tribal country. The **Settlers Arms Inn** (☎ 02-4568 2111; www.settlersarms.com.au; 1 Wharf St, St Albans; d from \$130; ☎) dates back to 1836 and is the town's heart and soul. The chunky old bar (mains \$13 to \$25; open for lunch daily and for dinner Friday to Sunday) has English-style ales on tap, a thigh-warming winter hearth, and fabulous pies, steak sandwiches and antipasto.

On the hill behind the pub, **St Albans Gallery** (☎ 02-4568 2286; stalbansgallery@mysip.net.au; ☎ 11am-5pm Fri-Sun) has quirky exhibitions of local jewellery, glass, painting, sculpture and indigenous art.

## WINDSOR & RICHMOND

☎ 02

Windsor, founded in 1810 on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, was the main Macquarie Town and retains a crop of gracefully proportioned colonial buildings. The **Hawkesbury Historical Museum** (☎ 4577 2310; www.windsor-nsw.com.au; 7 Thompson Sq; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 11am-3pm Fri-Wed), in the 1843 Daniel O'Connell Inn, has a collection of exhibits portraying pioneering life in the region.

If you're architecturally inclined, have a wander around the lantern-topped, convict-built **St Matthew's Church** (☎ 4577 3193; fax 4577 3193; Moses St; ☎ 10am-3pm, services 8am, 10am & 5.30pm Sun), erected in 1820, and the elegant 1822 **Windsor Courthouse** (☎ 4577 5023; fax 4577 7272; cnr Court & Pitt Sts), still a functional courthouse.

The shambling **Macquarie Arms Hotel** (☎ 4577 2206; fax 4577 3465; 99 George St; ☎ 10am-midnight) is the quintessential small-town pub, with a sunny beer garden, a decent bistro (mains \$13 to \$24; open for lunch and dinner), and rows of shiny Harleys parked out the front.

The spanking new **Hawkesbury Regional Gallery** (☎ 4560 4441; www.hawkesbury.com.au; Level 1, Deerubbin Centre, 300 George St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm

Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) has become Windsor's cultural centre, with art exhibitions, literary launches, film screenings and kids' events.

About 18km north of Windsor, and established in 1887, the Tuscanesque sandstone **Tizzana Winery** (☎ 02-4579 1150; www.tizzana.com.au; 518 Tizzana Rd, near Ebenezer; incl breakfast \$175-220; ☎) has cellar-door sales and superb five-star accommodation. One of the rooms here has its own veranda and courtyard, ideal for knocking off the rest of the red.

Founded in 1810, **Richmond** is a substantial country town with some fine Georgian and Victorian buildings, but it lacks Windsor's touch of class.

Architectural relics of interest include the 1878 **courthouse** and **police station** (☎ 4578 0731; fax 4578 0732; cnr Market & Windsor St) and, around the corner on Market St, the quasi-Gothic **St Andrew's Church** (☎ 4578 3820; ☎ services 8.30am, 9.45am & 6pm Sun), dating from 1845. The similarly historic **St Peter's Church** (☎ 4578 1205; www.richmondanglican.com.au; 384 Windsor St; ☎ services 8am, 10am & 7pm Sun), built in 1841, is at the western end of town.

Halfway between Richmond and Windsor, the **Hawkesbury visitor centre** (☎ 4578 0233; www.hawkesburytourism.com.au; Bicentennial Park, Ham Common, Windsor Rd, Clarendon; ☎ 9am-5pm) handles accommodation bookings. Richmond's **NPWS Office** (☎ 4588 5247; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Bowmans Cottage, 370 Windsor St; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is inside a heritage-listed 1817 weatherboard cottage, providing information and permits for the area's national parks.

If you're hungry, duck into **Madisons Bar & Brasserie** (☎ 4588 5808; cnr Windsor & Paget Sts; mains \$14-20; ☎ breakfast Sun, lunch & dinner daily), a stylish Georgian house dishing up steaks, roasts and the odd seafood dish.

CityRail trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Windsor (one way adult/child \$7/4, one hour 10 minutes, roughly hourly) and Richmond (one way adult/child \$7/4, one hour 20 minutes, roughly hourly).

## BLUE MOUNTAINS

For more than a century the Blue Mountains (Map p141) have been luring Sydneysiders up from the sweltering plains with promises of cool-climate relief and naughty fireside weekends. Sweetening the invitation are astounding

### HAWKESBURY HOUSEBOATS

Stressed-out Sydneysiders love to switch off their mobile phones, pack the kids in the back of the SUV and flee to the Hawkesbury for a relaxed weekend of fishing, Chardonnay sipping and houseboat cruising. Houseboat hire rates skyrocket during summer and school holidays, but most outfits offer affordable low-season, midweek and long-term rental specials. As a rough guide, a two-/four-/six-berth boat for three nights costs from \$600/750/1000 between May and September, prices doubling during summer.

Most companies base themselves at Brooklyn; some of the main players:

- **Able Hawkesbury River Houseboats** (☎ 1800 024 979; www.hawkesburyhouseboats.com.au; 3008 River Rd, Wisemans Ferry)
- **Brooklyn Marina** (☎ 02-9985 7722; www.brooklynmarina.com.au; 45 Brooklyn Rd, Brooklyn)
- **Holidays Afloat** (☎ 02-9985 7368; www.holidaysafloat.com.au; 65 Brooklyn Rd, Brooklyn)
- **Ripples Houseboats** (☎ 02-9985 5555; www.ripples.com.au; 87 Brooklyn Rd, Brooklyn)



scenery, fabulous bushwalks and more gorges, gum trees and gourmet restaurants than seem viable. The slate-coloured haze that gives the mountains their name comes from a fine mist of oil exuded by eucalyptus trees.

The foothills begin 65km inland from Sydney, rising to a 1100m-high sandstone plateau riddled with valleys eroded into the stone over thousands of years. In 1813, Wentworth, Blaxland and Lawson were the first Europeans to traverse the mountains. Today's Great Western Hwy follows their route through the laid-back towns of Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth Falls. Katoomba is the King of the Mountain, with Art Deco cafés, an edgy arts scene and active pub life.

There are three national parks in the area, the most accessible of which is the Blue Mountains National Park, protecting large tracts of forest north and south of the Great Western Hwy. Absorb the park's jaw-dropping scenery at the numerous drive-up lookouts, or get amongst the greenery on established bushwalking trails. Southwest of here is Kanangra Boyd National Park, accessible from Oberon or Jenolan Caves. Launch into a bushwalk, descend into limestone caverns or check out the amazing Kanangra Walls plateau, encircled by sheer cliffs. Wollemi National Park, north of Bells Line of Rd, is the state's largest forested wilderness area (nearly 500,000 hectares) with rugged bushwalking and native critters aplenty.

Entry to these national parks is free unless you enter the Blue Mountains National Park at Bruce Rd, Glenbrook (per car \$7, walkers free). For more information (including camping), contact the **NPWS Visitor Centre**

(☎ 02-4787 8877; [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au); Govetts Leap Rd, Blackheath; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), about 2.5km off the Great Western Hwy and 10km north of Katoomba.

### Climate

Be prepared for a climatic shift as you ascend the Blue Mountains – swelter in Coogee, shiver in Katoomba. The mountains are promoted as a cool-climate attraction, but visit any time: summer days are hazy perfection; autumn fogs make Katoomba an eerily atmospheric place. Despite the chill, winter days can be sunny and, down in the sheltered valleys, insects buzz in warm, windless bliss. Winter snows sometimes dapple the highest peaks.

### Getting There & Away

To reach the Blue Mountains by road, leave Sydney via Parramatta Rd. At Strathfield detour onto the Western Motorway tollway (M4; \$2.30), which becomes the Great Western Hwy west of Penrith.

To reach Bells Line of Rd, head out on Parramatta Rd, and from Parramatta drive northwest on the Windsor Rd to Windsor. The Richmond Rd from Windsor becomes the Bells Line of Rd west of Richmond.

CityRail trains regularly service Leura, Katoomba, Blackheath, Mt Victoria and Lithgow.

### Getting Around

The **Blue Mountains Bus Company** (☎ 02-4751 1077; [www.mountainlink.com.au](http://www.mountainlink.com.au)) has services from Valley Heights (near Springwood) to Mt Victoria, stopping pretty much everywhere in between. Check the website for details and schedules.

### FOOTING IT IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The roads across the mountains offer tantalising glimpses of the majesty of the area, but the only way to really experience the Blue Mountains is on foot. There are walks lasting from a few minutes to several days. The two most popular areas are Jamison Valley, south of Katoomba, and Grose Valley, east of Blackheath. The area south of Glenbrook is also good.

Blackheath's **Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (p152) is a good source of information for long hikes; for shorter walks, ask at Katoomba's **Echo Point visitor centre** (p148). It's rugged country, and walkers sometimes get lost, so it's imperative to get reliable information, not to go alone, and to tell someone where you're going. People have perished by skipping one of these three necessities. Many Blue Mountains watercourses are polluted, so you must sterilise water or take your own. Most importantly, be prepared for rapid weather changes.

Guided bushwalking can be arranged through companies in Katoomba (see p150).

Good walking books on the area include *Exploring the Blue Mountains* (Key Guide, \$30) and *Walks in the Blue Mountains* (Neil Paton, \$11).

There are train stations in Blue Mountains towns along the Great Western Hwy. Trains run roughly every hour between stations east of Katoomba, and roughly every two hours between stations to the west.

**RediCar** (☎ 02-4751 8920; 42 Great Western Hwy, Valley Heights; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) hires cars from \$69 per day.

### GLENBROOK TO WENTWORTH FALLS

From Marge's Lookout and Elizabeth's Lookout, near Glenbrook, there are super views back to Sydney. The section of the Blue Mountains National Park south of Glenbrook contains **Red Hands Cave**, an old Aboriginal shelter with hand stencils on the walls. It's an easy, 7km return walk southwest of the Glenbrook NPWS centre (closed at the time of writing) on the Great Western Hwy.

Celebrated artist, author and bon vivant Norman Lindsay, famed for his saucy artworks, lived in Faulconbridge from 1912 until his death in 1969. His home and studio is now the **Norman Lindsay Gallery & Museum** (☎ 02-4751 1067; [www.hermes.net.au/nlg](http://www.hermes.net.au/nlg); 14 Norman Lindsay Cres, Faulconbridge; adult/child \$9/6; ☎ 10am-4pm), with a significant collection of his paintings, watercolours, drawings and sculptures.

A brick and iron barn sprouting from the bush 8km northeast of Springwood, the eco-friendly **Hawkesbury Heights YHA** (☎ 02-4754 5621; [www.yha.com.au](http://www.yha.com.au); 840 Hawkesbury Rd, Hawkesbury Heights; adult/child \$24/12) has solar power and sensational valley views. Inside, beneath tree-trunk structural framing, are comfortable rooms, a wood heater and a huge kitchen. Reservations are essential. Unless you have wheels, it's a sweaty hike from Springwood.

As you head into Wentworth Falls, you'll get your first real taste of Blue Mountains scenery: views to the south open out across the majestic Jamison Valley. Wentworth Falls itself launches a plume of fraying droplets over a 300m drop – check it out from Falls Reserve. This is also the starting point for a network of walking tracks, which delve into the sublime Valley of the Waters, with waterfalls, gorges, woodlands and rainforests.

Camp sites are accessible by road at Eureka Clearing (vehicle/adult/child \$7/6/3) near Glenbrook, and Murphys Glen near Woodford. Check track/road condition updates and collect permits for Eureka Clearing at the Richmond NPWS Office (p145).

### LEURA

☎ 02 / pop 4000

Leura is a gracious, affluent town, fashioned around undulating streets, unparalleled gardens, Art Deco houses and sweeping Victorian verandas. **Leura Visitors Gateway** (☎ 4784 2881; [www.bmgst.com](http://www.bmgst.com); 121 The Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm) books accommodation and tours and has a local-art gallery next door.

**Leuralla Toy & Railway Museum** (☎ 4784 1169; [www.toyandrailwaymuseum.com.au](http://www.toyandrailwaymuseum.com.au); 36 Olympian Pde; adult/child \$12/6; ☎ 10am-5pm), set amidst five misty hectares of handsome English gardens, is a memorial to HV 'Doc' Evatt, a former Australian Labor Party leader and the first UN president.

Designed in the 1930s by famous Dutch landscaper Paul Sorensen, **Everglades Gardens** (☎ 4784 1938; [www.evergladesgardens.info](http://www.evergladesgardens.info); 37 Everglades Ave; adult/child \$6/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Oct-Mar, to 4pm Apr-Sep) is a National Trust property and Leura's horticultural heartland. **Sublime Point** is a dramatic cliff-top lookout south of Leura. On sunny days the clouds shadow-dance across the vast blue valley below. Further north is **Gordon Falls Reserve**, an idyllic picnic spot. From here you can trek the Prince Henry Cliff Track, or take the Cliff Drive 4km west past Leura Cascades to Katoomba's Echo Point.

Beyond a Hobbitesque entrance, **Woodford of Leura** (☎ 4784 2240; [www.leura.com](http://www.leura.com); 48 Woodford St; incl breakfast from \$185) has genteel rooms, stylish suites and long-stay discounts. The ambient **Post Office Restaurant** (☎ 4784 3976; 148 The Mall; mains \$28-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves fresh café fare by day and cultivated cuisine at night.

The direct route to the Blue Mountains from Sydney is via Parramatta Rd, detouring onto the tolled Western Motorway (M4; \$2) at Strathfield.

CityRail trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Leura (adult/child \$12/6, two hours, hourly). The Blue Mountains Bus Company (opposite) connects Leura to other Blue Mountains towns.

### KATOOMBA

☎ 02 / pop 18,000

The Blue Mountains' crowning urban glory manages to be bohemian and bourgeois, embracing and menacing all at once. Its steep streets are lined with Art Deco buildings and bathed in swirling mists. Right in town there are astonishing valley views and a quirky miscellany of brilliant restaurants, buskers,

## MURU MITTIGAR ABORIGINAL CULTURAL CENTRE

On your way out to the Blue Mountains take a few hours out in Penrith to visit the **Muru Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (☎ 02-4729 3277; www.murumittigar.com.au; 1951 Castlereigh Rd, Cranebrook; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, by appointment Sun), which was opened as an Aboriginal Meeting Place in 1998 to acknowledge the Dharug people as the traditional custodians of the region. The Cultural Museum here showcases the art and stories of the Dharug people as well as the rich diversity of indigenous people throughout Australia. An outdoor amphitheatre plays host to traditional dance performances, where local guides also play the didgeridoo and explain the story of its creation and significance. Cultural courses are offered, and a café on site serves bush-tucker food, so you can tuck into that side of roo or wallaby you've always wanted to.

The centre is an hour's drive west of Sydney and an hour's drive east of Katoomba.

artists, galleries, homeless people, bawdy pubs and classy hotels. Everyone seems to be smoking, growing a beard and wearing a beanie. And, despite its burgeoning tourist industry, it retains a friendly and other-worldly ambience.

Katoomba's big-ticket drawcard is **Echo Point**, where a series of sensational viewing platforms transport your gaze out over the Jamison Valley. The impressive Three Sisters rock formation towers over the scene. The story goes that the Three Sisters were turned to stone by a sorcerer to protect them from the unwanted advances of three young men, but the sorcerer died before he could turn them back into humans.

Echo Point draws profuse serenity-spoiling tourists and idling buses farting fumes – arrive early before they do.

To the west of town is **Scenic World** (☎ 4782 2699; www.scenicworld.com.au; cnr Cliff Dr & Violet St; cable-car return adult/child \$19/10; ☎ 9am-5pm), with a megaplex vibe and an 1880s railway descending the 52-degree incline to the valley floor. It also has a glass-floored **Scenic Skyway** cable car floating out across the valley.

## Information

There are numerous banks and ATMs on Katoomba St.

**Blue Mountains Accommodation Booking Service** (☎ 4782 2857; www.bluemountainsbudget.com; 157 Lurline St; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm) Free accommodation-booking service.

**Blue Mountains District Hospital** (☎ 4784 6500; fax 4784 6730; cnr Woodlands Rd & Great Western Hwy; ☎ 24hr emergency)

**Echo Point visitor centre** (☎ 4782 9865, 1300 653 408; www.australiablue-mountains.com.au; Echo Point)

**Katoomba Book Exchange** (☎ 4782 9997; katobookexchange@yelstra.com; 32 Katoomba St; per

30min/1hr \$4/7; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun & Mon) Internet access.

## Activities

### BUSHWALKING

Unless the weather is dire, a mountain bushwalk is mandatory. Head for Jamison Valley, south of Katoomba, or Grose Valley, northeast of Katoomba and east of Blackheath. The area south of Glenbrook is also worthwhile.

The Echo Point visitor centre (left) has information on short and day walks; the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre in Blackheath (p152) supplies longer walk details. It's rough, broken country and even experienced walkers get lost – get reliable information, walk with a friend and tell someone where you're headed. Take plenty of water or boil/treat what you collect (many local waterways are polluted). Mountain weather changes quickly, so bring warm clothes in all seasons.

Guided bushwalking or bushcraft tours can be arranged (see below); rates range from \$45 to \$150 per day.

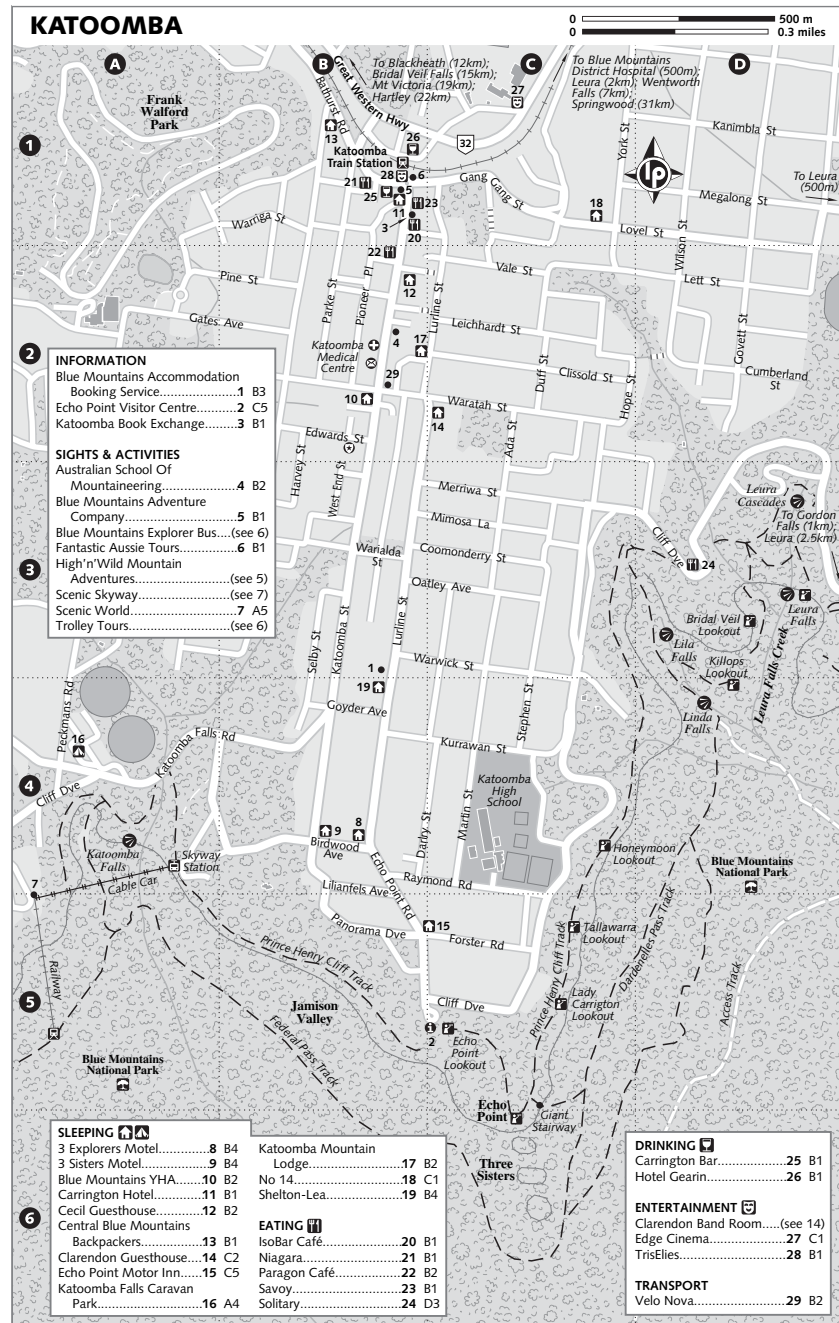
### ABSEILING, CANYONING & ROCK CLIMBING

The following offer climbing, hiking and cycling; prices indicate easy or beginner grades; more advanced = more dollars.

**Australian School of Mountaineering** (☎ 4782 2014; www.asmguides.com; 166 Katoomba St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) Full-day abseiling or canyoning (\$145), two-day bush-survival courses (\$325). YHA member discount.

**Blue Mountains Adventure Company** (☎ 4782 1271; www.bmac.com.au; Level 1, 84a Bathurst Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) Abseiling (from \$135), canyoning (from \$155) and rock climbing (from \$165).

**High'n'Wild Mountain Adventures** (☎ 4782 6224; www.high-n-wild.com.au; 3/5 Katoomba St; ☎ 9am-5pm)





Half-/full-day abseiling (from \$90/135), climbing (\$109/169) and full-day canyoning (\$150). YHA member discount.

## Tours

**Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (☎ 4782 4807; www.explorerbus.com.au; 283 Main St; adult/child \$32/16; ☎ 9.45am-5.15pm) Hop-on hop-off service on an hourly Katoomba/Leura loop, stopping at 30 attractions.

**Fantastic Aussie Tours** (☎ 4782 1866, 1300 300 915; www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au; 283 Main St; adult/child \$63/43; ☎ tours 11.15am-5.15pm daily, office 9am-5pm) Coach tours to the Jenolan Caves.

**HQ Tours** (☎ 9666 8433; www.hqtours.com.au; day tours \$79) Backpacker-friendly Blue Mountains tours, also departing Sydney.

**Oztrails** (☎ 9387 8390, 0411-288 805; www.oztrails.com.au; day tours \$85) Small-group tours from Sydney around the Blue Mountains sights, finishing with a ferry ride back to Circular Quay on the Parramatta River.

**Tread Lightly Eco Tours** (☎ 4788 1229; www.treadlightly.com.au; 2hr/day tours \$35/185) Eco-sensitive guided bushwalks and 4WD tours.

**Trolley Tours** (☎ 4782 7999, 1800 801 577; www.trolleytours.com.au; 285 Main St; adult/child \$15/12; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.45am-3.45pm Sat & Sun) A bus not-so-cunningly disguised as a trolley, with piped commentary.

## Festivals & Events

Every year between June and August, chilly Blue Mountains towns cheer themselves up with **Yulefest** (☎ 4782 9865, 1300 653 408; www.yulefest.com.au), an out-of-kilter Christmas celebration. Festivities reach a pagan peak at **Katoomba's Winter Magic Festival** (21 June), with a street parade, market stalls and general frivolity to welcome the winter solstice.

## Sleeping BUDGET

**Katoomba Mountain Lodge** (☎ 4782 3933; www.katoombamountainlodge.com.au; 31 Lurline St; dm/s/d from \$18/42/58; ☎ ) Hysterically uncool wallpaper and naff timber panelling are the price you'll pay for the best-value rooms in town. It's a cheerily run, 90-year-old house right in the middle of town, with astounding views from some of the top-floor rooms.

**No 14** (☎ 4782 7104; www.bluemts.com.au/no14; 14 Lovel St; dm \$22, d with/without bathroom \$66/59) Low-key with hippy overtones, this colourful hostel feels like a cheery share house. There are plenty of pockets for breathing space if you need it, and polished floorboards make a

pleasant change from festering carpets. Dorms have three beds; attic-style doubles are comfy and private.

**Central Blue Mountains Backpackers** (☎ 4782 9630, 1800 287 370; www.centralblue.com.au; 144 Bathurst Rd; dm/s/d/ff from \$22/50/65/120; ☎ ☎ ) Opened in 2005, this gargantuan hostel near the station has an industrial-sized kitchen, excellent security and clean rooms, but it feels nondescript in a nursing home kind of way. The fact that it used to be a nursing home may explain this.

**ourpick Blue Mountains YHA** (☎ 4782 1416; www.yha.com.au; 207 Katoomba St; dm/d/ff from \$24/73/116; ☎ ) The austere Art Deco exterior of this much-lauded hostel belies its cavernous, sparkling innards. Dorms and family rooms are spotlessly bright; common areas have more beanbags than bums. Highlights include a pinball machine, pool tables, open fires, a giant chess set, central heating, BBQs and curry nights. Hard to fault.

## MIDRANGE

**Clarendon Guesthouse** (☎ 4782 1322; www.clarendonguesthouse.com.au; 68 Lurline St; s with/without bathroom from \$65/45, d from \$90/130; ☎ ☎ ) The rambling old Clarendon is light on ceremony and heavy on character. Original rooms (with shared bathrooms) are charmingly old school; the newer motel extension is snazzier than its exterior suggests. Convivial vibes snake their way up the stairs from the atmospheric band room (opposite).

**Cecil Guesthouse** (☎ 4782 1411; www.ourguest.com.au/cecil.html; 108 Katoomba St; s with/without bathroom \$80/75, d \$84/106) Rakishly dilapidated in a *Fawlty Towers* kind of way, old Cecil has creaky floorboards, unrenovated walls and kooky lounge rooms – put character before ritz and you won't be disappointed. The dining room does breakfast and dinner.

**Shelton-Lea** (☎ 4782 9883; www.sheltonlea.com; 159 Lurline St; r incl breakfast \$110-170) Moss and maroon colours with a splash of Art Deco make this B&B a stylish choice. Three bedrooms each have their own sitting areas, plus classy touches like old radios and lead lighting by the kilo. Nicely romantic.

There are three affordable, ship-shape motels close to Echo Point. Their décor is nothing to write home about, but who writes letters these days?

**3 Sisters Motel** (☎ 4782 2911; www.threesistersmotel.com.au; 348 Katoomba St; s \$65-95, d \$90-120; ☎ ☎ ) Funky retro neon sign; serviceable rooms with less funk.

**Echo Point Motor Inn** (☎ 4782 2088, 1800 024 879; www.echopointmotel.com; 18 Echo Point Rd; s/d/ff from \$80/90/130) Rooms with and without views.

**3 Explorers Motel** (☎ 4782 1733; fax 4782 1146; 197 Lurline St; s/d/ff from \$79/90/155; ☎ ☎ ) Floral print proliferation; NRMA, RAC and AAA member discounts.

## TOP END

**Carrington Hotel** (☎ 4782 1111; www.thecarrington.com.au; 15-47 Katoomba St; d incl breakfast \$190-485) Katoomba's social and architectural high-water mark, the Carrington has been accommodating road-weary travellers since 1880. Every inch has been refurbished, but its historical character remains intact. The rooms are truly indulgent; the dining room and ballroom are utterly opulent.

## CAMPING

**Katoomba Falls Caravan Park** (☎ 4782 1835; www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au; Katoomba Falls Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$25/32, cabins from \$75) This park lacks atmosphere and gets mixed reviews from travellers, but it's Katoomba's only camping option.

## Eating

Most of Katoomba's eateries charge an extra 10% on Sunday.

**Paragon Café** (☎ 4782 2928; 65 Katoomba St; mains \$10-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) The heritage-listed 1916 Paragon is Katoomba's undisputed Art Deco masterpiece. Sampling coffee and chocolates in the salubrious surrounds is a compulsory Blue Mountains experience.

**Savoy** (☎ 4782 3845; 26-8 Katoomba St; mains \$11-19) The Savoy has booths (we love booths), perfect for day-time pastas, burgers, salads and perhaps a little footsie. At night the lights lower and the menu lifts – inventive dishes like pan-seared barramundi with lime and chilli, and kangaroo sirloin with roast zucchini, garlic and red-wine jus sufficiently distract even the most footsie-prone couples.

**Niagara** (☎ 4782 4001; 92 Bathurst Rd; mains \$13-26; ☎ lunch & dinner) High ceilings with ornate cornices, oversized tiles underfoot and large wooden booths embellish this gay-/family-/vegetarian-friendly diner. The food is fab too: gourmet burgers, pastas and salads with a twist during the day, scrumptious steaks and fish at night. Monthly dinner-and-show Cabaret Nights (\$55) are sequin-soaked spectacles.

**IsoBar Café** (☎ 4782 4063; 40 Katoomba St; mains \$17-23) Despite the hackneyed IsoBar name, this café hums with chilled vibes, ambient

tunes and moody lighting – about as funky as Katoomba gets. Tasty staples include Turkish toasties, burgers, stir-fries and salads.

**Solitary** (☎ 4782 1164; 90 Cliff Dr; mains \$26-33; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) To-die-for views, sublime food and inescapable romance are Solitary's stock in trade. Mains like venison and juniper sausages, and scallop and Moreton Bay bug ravioli are inventive; desserts are downright sexy. Reservations essential.

## Drinking

**Hotel Gearin** (☎ 4782 4395; www.gearinhotel.com; 273 Great Western Hwy; admission free; ☎ 7am-2am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) Gear up for a night at the Gearin, Katoomba's best watering hole. It's owned by actor Jack Thompson – a good enough excuse for a beer, a \$5 steak or a game of pool.

**Carrington Bar** (☎ 4782 1111; www.thecarrington.com.au; 10-16 Katoomba St; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-1.30am Mon-Thu, to 4.30am Fri & Sat, to 11pm Sun) The lowbrow wing of the upper-crust hotel, this is the place for shooters, schooners, pool tables and 'the Gunners' on the jukebox. There's a nightclub upstairs on Saturday night (admission \$5).

## Entertainment

**Clarendon Band Room** (☎ 4782 1322; www.clarendonguesthouse.com.au; 68 Lurline St; admission \$15-50; ☎ live music Thu-Sun night) When fine musos hit Katoomba, they usually strut their stuff here. Dinner-and-show tickets cost \$30 extra.

**TrisElies** (☎ 4782 4026; www.trisielies.com.au; 287 Bathurst Rd; admission free-\$15; ☎ 8pm-3am Thu-Sun) Jazz, reggae, DJs and ska in a blood-red-painted bunker at the top of the town.

**Edge Cinema** (☎ 4782 8900; www.edgecinema.com.au; 225 Great Western Hwy; adult/child \$13/9; ☎ 10am-late) A giant screen hosts mainstream flicks plus a 40-minute Blue Mountains documentary (adult/child \$15/10). Tuesday is 'Cheap-ass'.

## Getting There & Around

CityRail runs to Katoomba from Sydney's Central Station (one way adult/child \$12/6, two hours, hourly).

The Blue Mountains Bus Company (p146) services Katoomba en route from Mt Victoria to the north (one way adult/child \$7/4, 40 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday) and Springwood to the east (one way adult/child \$9/5, one hour, seven daily Monday to Saturday). The **Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (opposite)

and **Trolley Tours** (p150) trace circuitous routes through Katoomba and Leura.

**Velo Nova** (☎ 4782 2800; www.velonova.com.au; 182 Katoomba St; half-/full-day \$28/50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-4.30pm Sun) rents out hi-tech, 24-speed, all-terrain mountain bikes. Saturday morning group rides run along Cliff Dr, finishing up with a café coffee.

**Katoomba-Leura-Wentworth Falls Taxis** (☎ 4783 1311) service its monikers.

## BLACKHEATH AREA

The tourist crowds are thin in neat and petite Blackheath, but the calibre of dining, scenery and accommodation is substantial. It's also an excellent base for visiting the Grose and Megalong Valleys.

East of town are lookouts at **Govett's Leap**, **Bridal Veil Falls** (the highest in the Blue Mountains) and **Evans Lookout**. To the northeast, via Hat Hill Rd, are **Pulpit Rock**, **Perry's Lookdown** and **Anvil Rock**. There are steep walks into the Grose Valley from Govett's Leap; Perry's Lookdown is the start of the shortest route (five hours one way) to the magical **Blue Gum Forest**. From Evans Lookout there are tracks to Govett's Leap (1½ hours one way) and to **Junction Rock** continuing to the Blue Gum Forest (six hours one way).

To the west and southwest lie the **Kanimbla** and **Megalong Valleys**, with spectacular views from **Hargreaves Lookout**. Register your walk and get trail-condition updates from the **Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (☎ 02-4787 8877; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Govett's Leap Rd; ☎ 9am-4.30pm).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Gardners Inn** (☎ 02-4787 8347; www.gardnersinn.com; 255 Great Western Hwy; s/d incl breakfast \$45/80) Across from Blackheath Station, this is the oldest hotel (1832) in the Blue Mountains; the basic pub rooms upstairs hark back to the days of yore. Downstairs the swishy bistro (mains \$16 to \$20, open lunch and dinner) serves gourmet pub nosh.

**Jemby-Rinjah Eco Lodge** (☎ 02-4787 7622; www.jembyrinjahlodge.com.au; 336 Evans Lookout Rd; standard/deluxe cabins from \$150/199) These eco-cabins are lodged so deeply in the bottle brush you'll have to bump into one to find it. One- and two-bedroom vertical-weatherboard cabins are jauntily designed; the deluxe models have Japanese plunge-style spas.

**Vulcan's** (☎ 02-4787 6899; 33 Govett's Leap Rd; mains \$32; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) This exceptional

restaurant serves inventive fare laden with flavour. The kitchen takes centre stage. Bookings essential.

There are free camp sites at Perry's Lookdown and Acacia Flat, near the Blue Gum Forest in the Grose Valley.

Also available:

**Blackheath Caravan Park** (☎ /fax 02-4787 8101; Prince Edward St; unpowered/power sites \$23/28, cabins from \$45) Small, clean and good value.

**Altitude Delicatessen** (☎ 02-4787 6199; 20 Govett's Leap Rd; mains \$5-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Zingy deli sandwiches, fillos, antipastos, coffee and window seats.

## Getting There & Away

CityRail trains run to Blackheath from Sydney's Central Station (one way adult/child \$13/7, 2¼ hours, hourly).

The Blue Mountains Bus Company (p146) services Blackheath, Govett's Leap Rd, Evans Lookout Rd and Hat Hill Rd en route from Mt Victoria to the north (one way adult/child \$6/3, 15 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday) and Katoomba to the south (one way adult/child \$7/4, 25 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Friday, four Saturday, two Sunday).

## MEGALONG VALLEY

Unless you walk in or take Katoomba's Scenic Railway, the only way you'll see a Blue Mountains gorge from the inside is in the Megalong Valley. This is straw-coloured rural Australia, a real departure from the quasi-suburbs strung along the ridgeline. An amazingly well-surfaced road snakes down from Blackheath through pockets of rainforest. The 600m **Coachwood Glen Nature Trail**, 2km before Werribee, features dripping fern dells, stands of mountain ash and sun-stained sandstone cliffs.

The **Megalong Australian Heritage Centre** (☎ 02-4787 8188; www.megalong.cc; Megalong Rd; adult/child/family \$8/5/20; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a display farm agri-heaven for little tuckers – visitors can feed and pat sheep, ducks, ponies and alpacas. There's guided horse riding (per person \$45/85 for one/two hours), plus farm shows and activities during school holidays.

The **farm accommodation** (unpowered sites per 2 people \$24, dm \$20, d incl breakfast \$85, 4-bed cottages from \$195) comprises basic dorm beds, B&B guesthouse rooms and two self-contained cottages.

**Werribee Trail Rides** (☎ 02-4787 9171; www.australianbluehorserides.com.au; Megalong Rd; 30min/2hr rides \$30/78; ☎ 10am-5pm) offers horse-riding

packages to suit everyone. See the area pioneer-style by adding your weight to a two-day/one-night 'Pub Crawl' ride.

## MT VICTORIA & HARTLEY

☎ 02 / pop 900

National Trust-classified Mt Victoria, with its unadulterated village vibe, sits at 1043m and is the highest town in the mountains. Crisp air, solitude, towering foliage and historic buildings dominate.

Nothing is far from the train station, where the **Mt Victoria Museum** (☎ 4787 1210; Mt Victoria Railway Station; adult/child \$3/50; ☎ 2-5pm Sat & Sun) is chock-full of quirky Australian like old farm equipment, taxidermy and Ned Kelly's sister's bed. Other interesting buildings include the 1914 **Victoria & Albert Guesthouse**, the 1849 **Toll Bar Cottage** and the 1874 **St Peters Church**.

Inside an old public hall, **Mount Vic Flicks** (☎ 4787 1577; www.bluemts.com.au/mountvic; Hartley Ave; adult/child \$9/7; ☎ noon-10.30pm Fri-Sun, from 10am Thu) has ushers, a piano player, door prizes, and of course flicks.

About 11km past Mt Victoria, on the western slopes of the range, is the tiny, sandstone 'ghost' town of Hartley, which flourished from the 1830s but declined when bypassed by the railway in 1887. There are several historic buildings, including the 1837 court-house.

The **NPWS Information Centre** (☎ 6355 2117; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-4.20pm) is in the old **Farmer's Inn** (1845). You can explore Hartley for free or take a guided tour of the 1837 **Greek Revival Courthouse** (tours per person \$6; ☎ hourly 10am-3pm).

The best pub in the area by a mountain mile, the **Hotel Imperial** (☎ 4787 1878; www.hotelimperial.com.au; 1 Station St, Mt Victoria; dm \$25, d with/without bathroom incl breakfast from \$139/129) has budget and basic downstairs rooms and vintage-grand ones above. The bar has live music and log fires and the kitchen (mains \$16 to \$24) cooks solid pub grub.

The gracious **Manor House** (☎ 4787 1369; www.themanorhouse.com.au; Montgomery St, Mt Victoria; d incl breakfast \$155-230) B&B has lovely rooms and an intimate restaurant (mains \$24; open for lunch and dinner by arrangement, bookings essential).

CityRail trains run to Mt Victoria from Sydney's Central Station (one way \$14/7, 2½ hours, hourly). The Blue Mountains Bus

Company (p146) runs to Mt Victoria from Katoomba (one way adult/child \$6/3, 15 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday).

## JENOLAN CAVES

Southwest of Katoomba on the western fringe of Kanangra Boyd National Park, the troglodytic **Jenolan Caves** (☎ 02-6359 3911; www.jenolancaves.org.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; admission with tour adult/child/family from \$17/12/44; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm; Ⓟ) is one of the most extensive and complex limestone cave systems in the world. Named Binooema or 'Dark Places' by the Gundungurra people, the caves took shape 400 million years ago.

You must take a tour to see them; the most comprehensive tours include the 2½ hour ghost (per person \$32, at 8pm Saturday) and adventure (per person \$58, at 1.15pm daily) tours. Parking is available for \$5. **Classical concerts** (☎ 1300 763 311; www.georgcello.com; adult/child \$38/20; ☎ 4pm Sat twice monthly) in the caves are a sonic revelation.

The 42km Six Foot Track from Katoomba to the Jenolan Caves is a fairly challenging three-day hike. Consult the Echo Point visitor centre (p148) before you attempt anything.

**Jenolan Caves Cottages** (☎ 02-6359 3911; www.jenolancaves.org.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; cottages sleeping 6-8 people \$90-125, Bellbird Cottage \$145-180), about 8km north of the caves, offers four comfortable, self-contained cottages and the beautifully renovated 1930s Bellbird Cottage, all with bushy views.

Looking like something Jack Nicholson might take a Shining to, the fabulously eerie **Jenolan Caves House** (☎ 02-6359 3322; www.jenolan.caves.house.com.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; dm \$25, motel d \$95-185, guestroom d \$65-295) caters to all wallets and tastes.

The caves are 30km from the Great Western Hwy. The narrow Jenolan Caves Rd becomes a one-way system between 11.45am and 1.15pm daily, running clockwise from the caves out through Oberon.

## LITHGOW

☎ 02 / pop 21,000

In the western foothills of the Blue Mountains, Lithgow is famous for producing a whole lot of coal and Marjorie Jackson – aka 'the Lithgow Flash' – the 100m and 200m gold medallist at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. It's a sombre, agrarian working town with as many pubs as employment offices (a



**DETOUR: BELLS LINE OF ROAD**

This back road (Map p141) between Richmond and Lithgow is the most scenic route across the Blue Mountains. It's highly recommended if you have your own transport. There are fine views towards the coast from Kurrajong Heights on the eastern slopes of the range, there are orchards around Bilpin, and there's sandstone cliff and bush scenery all the way to Lithgow.

Midway between Bilpin and Bell, the delightful **Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens** (☎ 02-4567 2154; www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au; Bells Line of Rd; adult/child/family \$4/2/9; 🕒 10am-4pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr) is a cool-climate annexe of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. As well as native plants there are displays of exotic cold-climate species, including some magnificent rhododendrons. Parts of the park are wheelchair accessible.

North of Bells Line of Rd, and a 10-minute drive north of Mt Tomah, at the little town of **Mt Wilson** are formal gardens and the nearby **Cathedral of Ferns** – a wet rainforest remnant with tree ferns and native doves exploding from the foliage. It's an almost unbearably serene 10-minute stroll.

lot of each), but it makes a handy base for mountain biking or fishing in the surrounding hills. The helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 6353 1859; www.tourism.lithgow.com; cnr Coerwull Rd & Great Western Hwy; 🕒 9am-5pm) books accommodation and has free *Mountain Bike Riding in Lithgow* and *Lithgow Region Fishing Guide* pamphlets.

One for the train spotters, the **Zig Zag Railway** (☎ 02-6355 2955; www.zigzagrailway.com.au; Clarence Station, Bells Line of Rd; adult/child/family \$20/10/50; 🕒 11am, 1pm & 3pm), located 10km east of Lithgow, was designed to bring the Great Western Railway tracks down from the mountains into Lithgow. Gently zigzagging down the precipice, it is a 1½-hour return ride.

**Lithgow Valley Motel** (☎ 6351 2334; www.lithgowvalleymotel.com.au; 45 Coerwull Rd; s/d from \$55/66), about 3km from the town centre, has clean, old-style motel rooms with utterly splendid bedsreads. And it's good value.

The **Lithgow Tourist & Van Park** (☎ 6351 4350; www.lithgowcaravanpark.com.au; 58 Coerwull Rd; unpowered/power sites \$16/21, cabins from \$50) is opposite the Lithgow Valley Motel and has plenty of open space, effervescent bird life and the odd sheep promenading around the adjoining paddocks.

Though humble, **Papadino's Pizzeria** (☎ 6353 1455; 65 Main St; mains \$12-22; 🕒 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) bakes the kind of two-inch-thick, lead-weight pizzas the Italians never made and Australians haven't made since the '70s. One feed will last you a week.

CityRail trains run to Lithgow from Sydney's Central Station (one way adult/child \$18/9, three hours, hourly).

## NORTH COAST

The NSW coast tumbles north of Sydney in a ribbon of rugged headlands, separated by vast expanses of buttery beach and flanked by the peaks and troughs of national parks. Inland, green hummocks of farmland ripple at the edges of mountains and ancient rainforest in the beguiling hinterland.

The unfurling shoreline from Sydney to Tweed Heads is one of the most celebrated road trips in Australia, but the well-trodden tourist path concentrates itself on a select few urban centres. Elsewhere you'll find a utopian blend of sea and sand, shimmering lakes, sumptuous national parks, dolphins and whales, outdoor activities, and alternative lifestyles. Diversity reigns supreme here, from the vineyards of the Hunter Valley to the wilderness of remote national parks, and from the family fun of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour to the New Age, ecofriendly lifestyle of Byron Bay. No wonder then that freedom-seeking internationals and jaded Aussies flee to the region's welcoming milieu, where even the smallest towns are latent gems, winking at you with comely pubs, Mod-Oz cuisine and heritage housing. Regardless of your quest, make sure you fold the map away every now and then, take a few random right-hand turns and stop and smell the native flowers.

### SYDNEY TO NEWCASTLE

The central coast, between Broken Bay and Newcastle, combines splendid lakes, surf beaches, alluring national parks and the expected swaths of housing.

### Gosford & Around

The largest town in the area is hilly **Gosford** (population 154,000). The **Gosford visitor centre** (☎ 02-4323 2353, 1300 132 975; www.cctourism.com.au; 200 Mann St; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat) covers all of the central coast.

Southwest of Gosford there are trails rambling through rugged sandstone and between wildflowers at **Brisbane Water National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au). The **Bulgandry Aboriginal Engraving Site** is 3km south of the Pacific Hwy on Woy Woy Rd. CityRail trains stop at Wondabyne train station inside the park upon request. Southeast of Gosford, **Bouddi National Park** extends north along the coast from the mouth of Brisbane Water and has excellent coastal bushwalking and camping. The Gosford **NPWS Office** (☎ 02-4320 4200; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Suite 36, 207 Albany St North; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) provides permits for both parks.

The National Trust-classified township of **Pearl Beach**, on the eastern edge of Brisbane Water National Park, is a quiet enclave with a sweet beach set in bushland.

CityRail trains run from Sydney to Gosford (adult/child \$10/5, 1½ hours).

### Terrigal

☎ 02 / pop 6000

Clinging to the slopes of a rocky coastal gulch, Terrigal is a sometimes hectic social omelette of beach culture, alternative lifestyle and cosmopolitan café hobnobbery, but it manages to be trendy without too much pretentiousness. The **visitor centre** (☎ 4385 4430, 1300 132 975; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; Rotary Park, Terrigal Dr; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has good information.

### GREAT NORTH WALK

Ever considered walking from Sydney to Newcastle? The Great North Walk awaits! This 250km trail begins in central Sydney and, after a short ferry ride, follows natural bushland the entire way to Newcastle. While not strictly a wilderness walk, there's adequate greenery along the way and it can be tramped in any season.

The best track reference, *The Great North Walk* by walk originators Garry McDougall and Leigh Shearer-Heriot, is out of print, but libraries stock copies. The Department of Lands (see p101) produces maps of the route in 'Discovery Kit' form (\$11.30).

**Terrigal Beach Backpackers** (☎ 4385 3330; www.yha.com.au; 12 Campbell Cres; 4-/8-bed dm \$30/25, d/f \$65/99; 📺) is a roomy, slate-floored hostel close to Terrigal's cappuccino strip.

Ideal for groups, **Chalet Terrigal** (☎ 4733 4924, 0407-434 969; www.chaleterrigal.com.au; 84 Riviera Ave; 3-bedroom lodge \$95-180) is a stylish, self-contained timber lodge on a lofty backstreet.

**Supermex** (☎ 4384 6289; Level 1, cnr Church St & Campbell Cres; mains \$17-29; 🕒 dinner) infuses Terrigal's fish-and-chip morass with red-hot-chilli-pepper flavours, dishing up volcanic enchiladas, tacos, burritos and quesadillas.

**Busways** (☎ 4368 2277) buses run between Gosford Station and Terrigal (one way adult/child \$5/3, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

### NEWCASTLE

☎ 02 / pop 148,000

'You gotta love this city', the Whitlams' front man croons, and what's not to love? Outstanding heritage architecture in the CBD, a beautiful foreshore and some classy inner-city suburbs fashion a very comely package indeed, and Novocastrians know it.

Newcastle was settled in 1801 as a colony for the worst-behaved convicts. This past has tinged the surfing lifestyle with a hint of larrikin mischief and a 'no worries' attitude. The city is so laid-back that it's one of the few places in the developed world where you can grocery shop barefoot and no one blinks an eye.

Visit popular beaches and soak in ocean baths, dine at world-class restaurants, exhaust yourself courtesy of live and local music, and explore the innovative arts scene. Whatever you do, don't just pass through – Newcastle is easily worth a couple of days or more.

### Orientation

The city centre is bordered by the Hunter River and the sea.

The train station, post office and banks stand at the CBD's northeastern edge. The main street is Hunter St and it runs down the length of the peninsula parallel to King St.

### Information

There are ATMs and all your needs can be met in the Hunter Street Mall; however, most locals head to Charlestown Square (in Charlestown) for luxury items.

**John Hunter Hospital** (☎ 4921 3000; Lookout Rd, New Lambton) Has emergency care.

**Juicy Beans Café** (☎ 4929 4988; 365 Hunter St; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat; per 30 min \$2) Internet access.

**Newcastle Region Library** (☎ 4974 5300; Laman St; per half hr \$3) Internet access for emails.

## Sights

There are many vantage points across the city, but your first stop should be **Queens Wharf Tower** (Queens Wharf; admission free; ☎ 8am-dusk). It is 40.3m high, has 180 steps and is otherwise referred to by locals as the 'Giant Penis'.

Take to the city on foot and follow the **Bathers Way**, a 5km coastal walk stretching from the lighthouse at Nobbys Head to Glenrock Reserve. Or negotiate the **Newcastle East Heritage Walk**, a 3km walk that includes Fort Scratchley. Maps for both walks are available from the visitor centre.

## BEACHES

Right by the east end, **Newcastle Beach** sates the needs of surfers and swimmers, but if you're paranoid about sharks, the **ocean baths** are a mellow alternative, encased in wonderful, multicoloured 1922 architecture – there's a shallow pool for toddlers and a compelling backdrop of heaving ocean and chugging cargo ships. Surfers should goofy-foot it to **Nobbys Beach**, just north of the baths – the fast left-hander known as the Wedge is at its northern end.

South of Newcastle Beach, below King Edward Park, is Australia's oldest ocean bath, the convict-carved **Bogey Hole**. If your swimsuit is chafing you, scramble around the rocks and under the headland to the (unofficial) nude beach, **Susan Gilmour Beach**.

One of the more favoured surfing breaks is at **Bar Beach** (which has loads of parking), but **Dixon Park Beach** and Merewether are equally popular. **Merewether Beach** is the home of famous grommet Mark Richards, and the opening of the winter swimming season is heralded at its **ocean baths**, where blocks of ice are dumped into the water so that the cold-blooded freaks from the Merewether Mackerels Winter Swimming Club can strut their stuff. Frequent local buses from the CBD run as far south as Bar Beach, but only the 207 continues to Merewether.

## NOBBY'S HEAD

Nobby's was an island until it was joined to the mainland in 1846 to create a singularly pretty

(and long) **sand spit**; it was twice its current height before being reduced to 28m above sea level in 1855. The walk along the spit towards the lighthouse and meteorological station is exhilarating, as waves crash about your ears and joggers jostle your elbows.

## MUSEUMS

The **Newcastle Region Art Gallery** (☎ 4974 5100; www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/discover\_newcastle/region\_art\_gallery; 1 Laman St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a dynamic space featuring travelling shows and revered Australian masters (Drysdale, Olley, Whiteley). It has school-holiday workshops and a free kids' program weekends at 11am, where your tiny tots (ages three to 15) can create their own masterpieces.

The **Newcastle Regional Museum** (☎ 4974 1400; www.nrmuseum.com.au; 787 Hunter St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 5pm Mon school holidays; ☎), in a restored brewery, has a variety of exhibits including interactive science gadgets, an indigenous section and a shrine to local sports legends.

## WILDLIFE

The **Wetlands Centre Australia** (☎ 4951 6466; www.wetlands.org.au; Sandgate Rd, Sandgate; adult/child \$5/3, ☎ 9am-5pm) was born out of a desperate bid to stop the highway storming through the guts of this former rubbish tip. Now it's 45 hectares of swampy wonderland, home to over 250 wildlife species. Mosquitoes are plentiful, so best keep walking/canoeing (canoe hire \$8). The centre is a short walk from Sandgate train station.

Set in a bushland reserve, **Blackbutt Reserve** (☎ 4904 3344; www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au; Carnley Ave, Kotara; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a meeting place for koalas, wombats, emus, kangaroos, wallabies, quolls and picnicking bipeds. There are many walking tracks.

## Activities

**Fishers @ Honeysuckle** (☎ 4926 2722; Honeysuckle Dr; bike hire 1hr/2hr/day \$15/20/35) hires out bikes and buggies and is also a booking agent for several cruise companies in the area that specialise in drifting around the harbour, sauntering over to Stockton or floating as far afield as Morpeth.

## SURFING

Newcastle is riddled with good surf schools: **Newcastle Surf School** (☎ 0405-500 469; lessons \$30) Choose between Nobbys or the more private Cave's Beach.





## THE CAMPER VAN CRUISE

The east-coast run from Sydney to Cairns is one of the most popular camper-van routes in Australia. The Pacific and Bruce Hwys barrel up the coast, providing a continuous corridor of bitumen accessible to vehicles of all shapes and sizes. The opportunities for bush camping in national parks and more comfortable camping in private camping grounds is abundant, and you'll be hard pressed not to find either on a nightly basis. There are also wonderful, tarred diversions like the glorious Waterfall Way (p210). Off tributaries like this one there are dirt tracks into the hinterland and its national parks. These vary in condition, and the camping options become more rudimentary and less prolific. But that's no reason not to explore them; just seek local advice about the road conditions before heading right off the beaten track. And enjoy!

**Pacific Dreams** (☎ 4926 3355; 7 Darby St; day hire \$50) Rents secondhand fibreglass boards that hurt when they hit you in the white wash, but the pain is a small sacrifice for looking cool.

**Redhead Mobile Surf School** (☎ 4944 9585; lessons \$45, 2hr wetsuit & board hire \$25) A bit more personal with smaller groups.

**Surfnet Surf School** (☎ 0410-840 155; www.surfnet.surfschool.com; lessons \$25) Held at Nobbys Beach; buy four lessons and get one free.

## HANG-GLIDING

**Air Sports** (☎ 0412-607 815; www.air-sports.com.au; flights from \$165) Offers tandem hang-gliding flights.

## Tours

**Hades Day Tours** (☎ 4981 0100; per person incl lunch \$69) Tour the Lower Hunter vineyards.

**Heliservices** (☎ 4962 5188; scenic flights from \$69) Stuff the bus, take a chopper instead.

**Hunter River Cruises** (☎ 4958 7766; Queens Wharf; from \$37) Sail around the harbour or inland to Morpeth.

**Newcastle's Famous Tram** (☎ 4977 2270; Newcastle Station, Hunter St; adult/child \$12/6; ☎ 11am & 1pm) Take a 45-minute tour of the city's beaches and historic sites while receiving a running commentary and a little local gossip, delivered with typical Novocastrian zest.

## Festivals & Events

This town knows how to party and the list of festivals is endless.

**Surfest** (☎ 4929 5833) March. The longest-running professional surfing competition in Australia.

**Newcastle Jazz Festival** (www.newcastlejazz.com.au) Jam your horn in late August.

**Electrofringe** (www.electrofringe.org) Late September. Explores bleeding-edge electronic and digital realms: sound, video, online etc.

**Mattara – Festival of Newcastle** (www.mattara.festival.org.au) Early October. Newcastle's largest festival.

**Rainbow Festival** (www.rainbowvisions.org.au) An October festival celebrating Hunter gays and lesbians.

**Music and Moonlight Concert** (☎ 4914 5975) Treats Novocastrians to music from theatre in an outdoor setting every October.

**This Is Not Art Festival** (☎ 4927 0470) Young writers, artists and music-makers celebrate.

## Sleeping

**Terraces for Tourists** (☎ 4929 4575; www.terracesfor.tourists.com.au) rent, as the name suggests, terraces for tourists. Or find longer-term rentals at www.newcastle-real-estate.com.

## BUDGET

**Backpackers by the Beach** (☎ 1800 008 972, 4926 3472; www.backpackersbythebeach.com.au; 34-36 Hunter St; dm/d \$25/55; ☎) This one's in a terrific location, right near the beach and some excellent Hunter St eateries. It's bright, clean, modern and relaxed, and the staff hold court on Newcastle nightlife and surfing.

**Newcastle Beach YHA** (☎ 4925 3544; www.yha.com.au; 30 Pacific St; dm/s/d \$26/43/64; ☎) Residing in the old 'Gentleman's Club' building, it's lucky they're a dying breed and the space is now better utilised by backpackers. There are BBQs at the Brewery (opposite) Thursday night and a free dinner and plenty of craic at MJ Finnegans' Irish Pub (p160) Sunday to Tuesday nights.

## MIDRANGE

There are a string of motels along the Pacific Hwy at Belmont, which are great for exploring Lake Macquarie but not so much Newcastle proper.

**Travelodge** (☎ 1300 886 886, 4926 3777; www.travelodge.com.au; cnr King & Steel Sts; r from \$100; ☎) Unexceptional rooms are on offer here – no surprises or delights; just the cheapest en-suite room in town.

**Riverview Gardens** (☎ 4928 3048; www.riverviewgardens.com.au; 98 Fullerton St, Stockton; s/d incl breakfast \$130/150) Spend lazy afternoons watching coal

ships pass by the front door. The magical position gives some industrial insight to the harbour.

**Clarendon Hotel** (☎ 4927 0966; www.clarendonhotel.com.au; 347 Hunter St; r/st from \$130/150; ☎) In an old Art Deco building, the Clarendon is thickly atmospheric, with mod furniture and lighting, lavishly painted walls and stylish furniture; David Lynch (or James Ellroy) might feel at home here. There's a bar, a brasserie and lashings of conviviality downstairs.

## TOP END

**Harbour View Manor** (☎ 4927 1448; www.harbourviewmanor.com; 110 Church St; r incl breakfast \$175-300; ☎) Fantastic views over the harbour at the top of town. The perfect stay in a quiet old street whilst still being in amongst it. Closed Sunday.

## Eating

There are three strips of eating places in Newcastle: Beaumont St, Darby St and the Honeysuckle Boardwalk. Check out www.eatlocal.com.au for restaurant listings.

## RESTAURANTS

**Sticky Rice Thai** (☎ 4927 0200; 19 Scott St; mains \$11-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) Beach-style Thai – this is not quite what you find in Koh Samui, but it's close enough.

**Blue Water Pizza** (☎ 4929 5686; Queens Wharf; mains \$18-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just up from Scratchleys (below), this restaurant is a Newcastle institution.

**Scratchleys** (☎ 4929 1111; 200 Wharf Rd; mains \$20-40; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's fishy fresh and it's local and if king prawns aren't big enough, they have jumbo prawns here. There are non-seafood options also.

**Silo** (☎ 4926 2828; Honeysuckle Dr; mains \$27-38; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch & dinner daily) Laughter refracts from the red and white walls and ricochets off the glass chandeliers. Silo specialises in local produce and sports a tremendous selection of beers, cocktails, liqueurs and spirits in general. A DJ spins up a storm Friday and Saturday night (from 9.30pm) and lazy Sunday afternoon.

**Jonah's on the Beach** (☎ 4929 5181; cnr Shortland Esplanade & Zaara St; mains \$28-39) A concoction of contemporary Australian cuisine by the beach. Go for lobster and king-prawn fettuccini for dinner or champagne-battered fish with lime aioli for lunch.

## CAFÉS

**Last Drop** (☎ 4926 3470; 37 Hunter St; dishes \$7-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) A gem of a café, packing on the charm with terrific smoothies and gourmet wraps, radiant staff, and the comfy couch at the back.

**Estabar** (☎ 4927 1222; cnr Ocean St & Shortland Esplanade; light meals \$10) Enjoy espresso and gelati practically on the beach. The Spanish-style hot chocolates are popular with those who cringe at the scent of coffee.

**Bogie Hole Café** (☎ 4929 1790; cnr Hunter & Pacific Sts; mains \$18-24) Located at the top of Hunter St, it's just a hop, skip and jump to Newcastle Beach. The menu includes light summery meals like chicken and honeydew melon salad, and heavier options such as braised lamb shanks.

**Paymaster's Café** (☎ 4925 2600; 18 Bond St; mains \$20-28; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Wed-Sat) Wicker chairs, sea breezes, heritage surrounds and an Asian-influenced menu. If they have it, promise you'll try the *char sui* pork, with bok choy and udon noodles.

## QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

**Scotties** (☎ 4926 3780; 36 Scott St; mains \$9-15) A relaxed beach shack serving fish and chips and gourmet burgers with BYO.

Get groceries at the **Bi-Lo Supermarket**.

## Drinking & Entertainment

For a rundown of coming events, check out www.tin.org.au/gigguide/livemusic or pick up a copy of *Drum Media*.

**Beaches Hotel** (☎ 4963 1574; www.thebeachhotel.com.au; cnr Frederick & Ridge Sts, Merewether) There is only one place to be on a Sunday afternoon and that is at this beach-side pub.

**Civic Theatre** (☎ 4926 1289; www.civictheatrenwcastle.com.au; 375 Hunter St) The Civic hosts theatre, musicals, concerts and dance in a typically evocative Newcastle heritage building.

**Queens Wharf Brewery** (☎ 4929 6333; www.qwb.com.au; 150 Wharf Rd) Newcastle has always been good at utilising its views, and this place is a fine example. Pace yourself and try every local brew on tap.

**Cambridge Hotel** (☎ 4962 2459; 789 Hunter St) Block out the spewy scent saturating the carpet – by midnight you won't even notice. Renowned for secret gigs where big acts will rock up to do an unadvertised show.

**Vass O'Gowrie Hotel** (☎ 4962 1248; 14 Railway St, Wickham) Built in 1877, this is the oldest pub

in Newcastle and has been the heart of the town's music scene for the last 15 years. See local original acts here most nights.

**Greater Union Cinemas** (☎ 4926 2233; www.greaterunion.com.au; 183 King St) For a more subdued evening, head to the movies.

**MJ Finnegan's Irish Pub** (www.irishpub.com.au; 21-23 Darby St) It's thick with kitschy Irish-theme charm, but MJ Finnegan's is nonetheless a great spot for a Guinness or three and some heady socialising.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Newcastle's main **airport** (☎ 4928 9800; www.newcastleairport.com.au) is at Williamtown, about 15km north of the city. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38) fly to Brisbane and Melbourne, and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13) flies to Sydney as well. **Aeropelican** (☎ 13 13 13; www.aeropelican.com.au) and **Brindabella Airlines** (☎ 1300 668 824; www.brindabellaairlines.com.au) also fly here.

### BUS

All local and long-distance buses leave from Newcastle Station. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) goes to Byron Bay (adult/child \$84/69) and Sydney (adult/child \$39/32).

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) travels through to Brisbane daily for slightly less than Greyhound. **Port Stephens Coaches** (☎ 4982 2940) has daily services to Fingal Bay (adult/child \$11/6), and **Busways** (☎ 4983 1560) runs to Forster (adult/child \$31/16) and Sydney daily.

### CAR

Major companies with airport offices:

**Avis** (☎ 4965 1612)

**Budget** (☎ 13 27 27)

**Europcar** (☎ 4965 0162)

**Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39)

**Thrifty** (☎ 4965 1535)

### TRAIN

All CountryLink trains stop at Broadmeadow, just west of town, and run up and down the coast to Coffs Harbour (adult/child \$75/40). Change at either Casino or Grafton for Byron Bay (adult/child \$105/55). Trains also head inland to Tamworth (adult/child \$50/25) and leave directly from Newcastle Station for Sydney (adult/child \$30/15).

Plenty of CityRail trains head daily to Sydney and northwest to Maitland, Dungog and Scone.

## Getting Around

**Port Stephens Coaches** (☎ 4982 2940) runs to and from the airport almost hourly, with reduced trips at the weekend (per person \$6, 35 minutes). Otherwise, call a **cab** (☎ 4979 3000).

All travel on the blue and white buses around the city centre is free.

**Newcastle Buses & Ferries** (☎ 13 15 00) offers a 24-hour service (\$8/4 adult/child bus and ferry) around Newcastle and the eastern side of Lake Macquarie. Jump on the Stockton Ferry at Queens Wharf (one way adult/child \$2/1).

## LOWER HUNTER VALLEY

The Hunter Valley is the oldest wine region in Australia, best known for its Semillon and Shiraz varieties. It's incomparable to South Australia's Barossa Valley, so don't be a vino snob (it appears there are many in Australia) and try to play the two off.

Vines were first planted here in the 1820s; by the 1860s there were 20 sq km under cultivation. A Hunter sparkling wine made its way to Paris in 1855 and was favourably compared to the French product. However, most Hunter wineries gradually declined, and it wasn't until the 1960s that wine making again became an important industry; perhaps that's the root of all this tribal loyalty. Old perceptions die hard in Australia.

The Hunter has an important ace up its sleeve: these wineries are refreshingly attitude-free and welcoming of viticulturists and novices alike.

There are over 140 wineries in the total area, so it can be a little overwhelming. The rigid few will grab a copy of the *Hunter Valley Wine Country Visitor Guide*. The rest will get to know the biggies, and then go looking for the boutiques. 'Explore. Dream. Discover.'

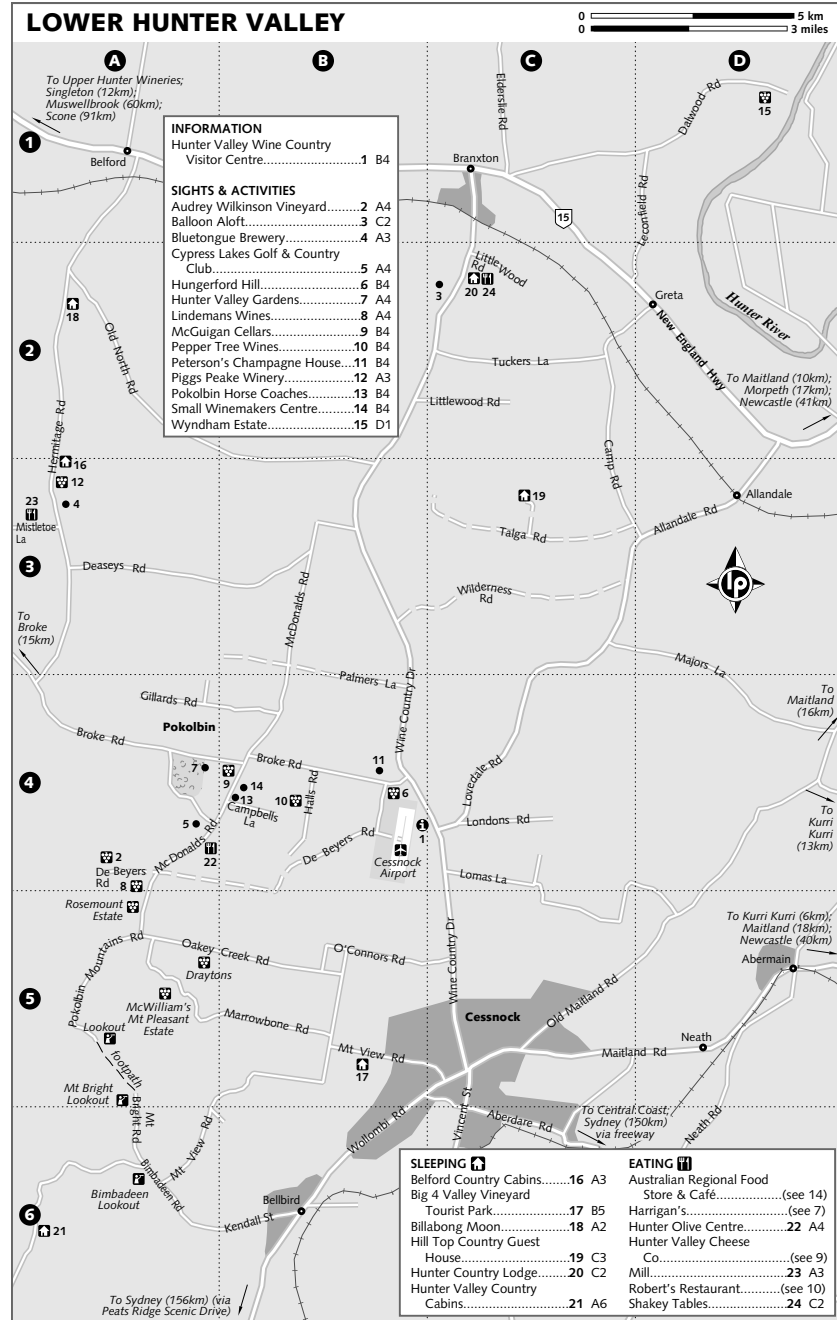
## Orientation & Information

Most of the Lower Hunter's attractions lie in an area bordered to the north by the New England Hwy and to the south by the Wollombi/Maitland Rd.

The **Hunter Valley Wine Country visitor centre** (☎ 4990 0900; www.winecountry.com.au; Wine Country Dr) will book accommodation as well as provide you with info. **Red Zebra Childcare Agency** (☎ 0419-411 636) is the holy grail.

## SEASONAL WORK

Grape picking starts in late January and continues through to late March. Contact the





**Hunter Valley Vineyard Association** (☎ 4991 4533) for seasonal-work information; otherwise, contact the vineyards individually in November and December.

## Sights

The most child-friendly destination in the vineyards, **Hunter Valley Gardens** (☎ 4998 4000; www.hvg.com.au; Broke Rd; adult/child \$20/10) has several cafés where young families can dine relatively cheaply. Visit the Hunter Valley Chocolate Factory (where they have chilli chocolate samples for unsuspecting chocoholic traditionalists).

## WINERIES

Visit the following by all means, but remember: all of the Hunter's wineries are welcoming and worthwhile. Even those with only a casual interest in wine should tour around – it's a lovely part of the state.

The single most beautiful vineyard in the valley, **Audrey Wilkinson Vineyard** (☎ 4998 7411; De Beyers Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) is home to the first grapes planted in Pokolbin. Marvel at the expansive view while enjoying a drop of red, even if the wine was designed by a teetotaler.

The **Hungerford Hill** (☎ 02-4998 7666; www.hungerfordhill.com.au; 1 Broke Rd, Pokolbin; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) winery is shaped like a big barrel, with its 'lid' permanently propped open – this commanding spectacle stands sentinel over the lakes and valleys below, and makes an excellent introduction to your winery tour.

The naturally grand **Lindemans Wines** (☎ 4998 7684; McDonalds Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm) with its amphitheatre of grapes is a cherished member of many families. Even though Linde is kept in a cask on the bottom shelf of the fridge.

**McGuigan Cellars** (☎ 02-4998 7400; www.mcguiganwines.com.au; cnr Broke & McDonalds Rds, Pokolbin; tours \$2; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, tours noon Mon-Fri, 11am & noon Sat & Sun) makes affordable wines. The proprietors are cheeky enough to quote Martin Luther for their *raison d'être*: 'Beer is made by men,' exclaimed Luther, 'wine by Gods!' There's an unpretentious atmosphere about the place that translates into very drinkable tipples.

**Pepper Tree Wines** (☎ 02-4998 7539; www.peppertreevines.com.au; Halls Rd, Pokolbin; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) is just about the pick of the bunch, set in gorgeous New England-style gardens. And the wine? It's won around 60 trophies and 500 medals. The fabulous Robert's restaurant (opposite) is on the property.

Self-deprecating and informal, **Piggs Peake Winery** (☎ 02-6574 7000; www.piggspeake.com; 697 Hermitage Rd, Pokolbin; ☎ 10am-5pm) produces limited-edition, unwooded wines to impress your mates back home. Where it all began back in 1828, **Wyndham Estate** (☎ 4938 3444; 700 Dalwood Rd, Dalwood; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) is the birthplace of Australian Shiraz. The 'Shiraz Experience' tasting plate is essential to your full understanding of the drop. Tours through the winery leave at 11am.

If the preceding wineries are 'major labels', then the **Small Winemakers Centre** (☎ 02-4998 7668; www.smallwinemakerscentre.com.au; McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin; ☎ 10am-5pm) is indie and proud, acting as a cellar door for 10 wine makers who don't have their own vineyards. Organic wines are among the booty on offer.

## BLUETONGUE BREWERY

The **Bluetongue Brewery** (☎ 02-4998 7945; www.hunterresort.com.au/bluetongue/index.htm; Hunter Resort, Hermitage Rd; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, tours 11am & 2pm) is something of a NSW institution as far as beer is concerned, with its creative, refreshing and exquisitely addictive brews. Try alcoholic ginger beer (great idea); the Premium Lager, malty and crisp; Hunter Bitter, with a caramel finish; Spring Cream Ale, creamy with more caramel; and Framboise, with raspberries added during fermentation. Sample them all using the brewery's patented Tasting Paddle.

Another recommendation is **Peterson's Champagne House** (☎ 02-4998 7881; www.petersonhouse.com.au; cnr Broke & Branxton Rds, Pokolbin; ☎ breakfast & lunch) with its lovely-jubbly bubbly and on-site restaurant.

## Activities

**Balloon Aloft** (☎ 1800 028 568, 02-4938 1955; www.balloonaloft.com; Branxton Rd, North Rothbury; flights \$280) Airborne tours of the vineyards.

**Cypress Lakes Golf & Country Club** (☎ 4993 1800; www.cypresslakes.com.au; cnr McDonalds & Thompsons Rds, Pokolbin; green fees \$84-98). Green fees include a motorised golf cart and the disapproval of wannabe Happy Gilmores.

**Hunter Valley Skydiving Centre** (☎ 02-4322 9884)

## Tours

There are abundant tours of the region; get a full list from the Hunter Valley Wine Country visitor centre (p160).

**Hunter Valley Day Tours** (☎ 02-4951 4574; www.huntertourism.com/daytours) Wine- and cheese-tasting tours; prices vary.

**Hunter Vineyard Tours** (☎ 4991 1659; www.huntervineyardtours.com.au) Day tours \$50, with lunch \$75.

**Pokolbin Horse Coaches** (☎ 02-4998 7305; www.pokolbinhorsecoaches.com.au; 426 McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin; from \$45) Day tours in a quaint, open-air carriage.

**Tumbleweed Trike Tours** (☎ 4938 1245; 1st hr \$150, thereafter \$50; ☎ weekends only)

**Vineyard Shuttle Service** (☎ 02-4998 7779; www.vineyardshuttle.com.au; tours per person from \$38)

## Festivals & Events

See www.winecountry.com.au/events for a full listing.

**Jazz in the Vines** (www.jazzinthevines.com.au)

Food, wine and jazz all in the one place at the end of October. **Lovedale Long Lunch** (www.lovedalelonglunch.com.au) A progressive lunch held at the end of May.

**Opera in the Vineyards** (www.wyndhamestate.com)

Plenty of throat lubrication needed for this one, also run in October.

## Sleeping

At the weekend you will find it hard to get a bed in the valley (especially for one night), so booking is essential. For budget or midrange accommodations it's best to base yourself at Cessnock.

**Hill Top Country Guest House** (☎ 02-4930 7111; www.hilltopguesthouse.com.au; 81 Talga Rd, Rothbury; d from \$90; ☎ ☎) Hill Top offers great views, horse riding, in-house massage, canoeing, a pool, self-drive buggies, wildlife safaris, double spas, a grand piano, cattle mustering and a billiard room. And you thought you were here for the wine.

**Belford Country Cabins** (☎ 02-6574 7100; www.belfordcabins.com.au; 659 Hermitage Rd, Pokolbin; d from \$100; ☎ ☎) Choice accommodation in bushland, among kangaroos, possums and ironbark trees. The sense of space and the great outdoors on your doorstep are almost worth the price alone; added to that are the roomy and cosy cabins. Children are welcome (cots, high chairs and so forth are available), and there's a pool, BBQs and a games room.

**Hunter Country Lodge** (☎ 02-4938 1744; Wine Country Dr; s/d incl breakfast Mon-Thu \$100/140, Fri-Sun \$145/200; ☎ ☎) Whitewashed walls, fresh air and a seat out on the veranda in the morning sun. This lodge has simple rooms next door to Shakey Tables restaurant.

**Billabong Moon** (☎ 02-6574 7290; www.billabongmoon.com.au; 393 Hermitage Rd; cottages midweek \$200-220, weekends for 2 nights \$530-540; ☎ ☎) These self-contained cottages have original artworks,

spas and four-poster beds. The bush setting is juxtaposed by a somewhat Roman feel.

**Hunter Valley Country Cabins** (☎ 02-4990 8989; www.huntervalleycabins.com.au; 1329 Mt View Rd; d incl breakfast Sun-Thu \$259, weekends for up to 4 adults \$559; ☎ ☎) Oh-so-secluded wooden cabins with a seductive slow-combustion fire in winter. Your hosts offer vineyard tours and transfers to and from local restaurants.

**Big 4 Valley Vineyard Tourist Park** (☎ 02-4990 2573; Mt View Rd; powered sites \$24, deluxe cabins \$60; ☎ ☎)

A spacious, orderly park with a pool and an on-site Thai restaurant. It's ideally placed for the wineries.

## Eating

Many wineries have restaurants or picnic tables and BBQs. If you're strapped for fine-dining time head to Pokolbin Village for cheaper (but still gourmet and local) cuisine.

**Australian Regional Food Store & Café** (☎ 4998 6800; McDonalds Rd; mains \$14-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Sample the wines inside the Small Winemakers Centre, then stock up on regional produce – you won't get the indie, organic goodies here in any supermarket.

**Shakey Tables** (☎ 4938 1744; Wine Country Dr; mains \$36; ☎ lunch Sun, dinner daily) Two A3 pages compose the wine lists alone! Multi-award winning, funky and stylish, promoting atypical eating in the vineyards: for example, pork belly and black truffle potato mash.

**Robert's Restaurant** (☎ 4998 7330; Halls Rd; mains \$37-40; ☎ lunch & dinner) Try the tasty twice-roasted duckling with bok choy, pear and marmalade. But duck also when entering the doorway of the restored 130-year-old settler's cottage.

**Hunter Olive Centre** (☎ 4998 7524; Pokolbin Estate Vineyard, McDonalds Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm) The olives are roasted, they're marinated, and they are virgin (bless). There are bush-tucker sauces, tapenades, and wine jellies and jams (and it's all local).

**Hunter Valley Cheese Co** (☎ 4998 7744; McGuigan Complex, McDonalds Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) The McGuigan winery doesn't just do cheese; there's gourmet produce like organic pickled walnuts, and the alcoholic's favourite...whisky marmalade, plus tastings at 11am daily (\$6). Watch your girth.

Also available:

**Harrigan's** (☎ 4998 4000; Broke Rd; mains \$16-35) Global beers, but ho-hum food.

**Mill** (☎ 4998 7266; Mistletoe Lane; mains \$31-33) Great tapas.

**KNOCK IT BACK...HAVE ANOTHER ONE?**

Before embarking on your voyage of the senses, keep in mind that drink-driving regulations are heavily enforced in NSW. If you are driving, know that to stay under the blood-alcohol limit of 0.05, the average man can have two standard drinks in the first hour and one every hour afterwards. Most women can have one standard drink per hour. Wineries offer 20mL tastes of wine – five of these equals one standard drink. Other ways to minimise the damage: choose a designated driver, buy a bottle to take with you, use the spittoons provided, take a tour if you can, or give up the demon drink.

**Getting There & Around**

**Rover Coaches** (☎ 1800 801 012) runs a coach from Sydney daily (adult/child \$40/30) with drop-offs in Cessnock and throughout the Lower Hunter Valley vineyards. It also has multiple daily services to Maitland (adult/child \$9/4.50) and Newcastle (adult/child \$12/6). Buses leave from the Hunter Valley Wine Country visitor centre (p160). CityRail runs trains from Newcastle to/from Maitland (\$4.40, 30 minutes).

**UPPER HUNTER VALLEY**

Rugged granite outcrops loom over the Upper Hunter's classic vineyard landscapes. If you've already toured the Lower Hunter Vineyards... so what, the wine tastes different here. Also, this region sees just a trickle of customers midweek, so if you don't like crowds, get on your horse.

A great route into the Upper Hunter from Sydney follows the very winding Putty Rd from Windsor to Singleton, passing through some of the most breathtakingly scenic parts of Wollemi and Yengo National Parks.

**Sights****WINERIES**

They specialise in Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz; forget Merlot, but do dabble in the Verdelho and Chardonnay.

**Arrowfield Estate** (☎ 02-6576 4041; Golden Hwy, Jerry's Plain; ☎ 10am-5pm) enjoys a loyal clientele, not only for its stellar wines but also for its super location: it's the only winery in the Hunter Valley actually located on the Hunter River.

**Cruikshank Collatoota Estate** (☎ 6547 8149; Wybong Rd, Wybong; ☎ 9am-5pm) is unique in that it is family run and absolutely everything takes place on the property, from grape pressing through to marketing. A favourite is the Velvet Cabernet.

Situated in a beautiful valley 18km west of Denman, **James Estate** (☎ 02-6547 5168; www.jamesestatewines.com.au; 951 Rylstone Rd, Sandy Hollow; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) is the quintessential independent wine maker. Try the White Sylvaner, an aromatic European drop unique to the Hunter Valley.

**Yarraman Cellar Door** (☎ 6547 8118; Yarraman Rd, Wybong; ☎ 10am-5pm) has a broad selection of wines, including some less familiar varieties (yes that's wine speak) such as Chambourcin. There is a BBQ and an outdoor area, so collect your carnivorous snacks from Robert's Meats in Denman before heading out.

**GOULBURN RIVER NATIONAL PARK**

You'll spot wallabies and wallaroos dining on the grassy banks in amongst the oaks along this park's namesake river. Keep an eye out for Aboriginal rock paintings on the Narrabeen sandstone outcrops, a favourite canvas used by Aborigines who travelled along here. And head to **Mt Dangar** for sweeping views over the Hunter Valley.

Go by 4WD along **Big River Trail** or canoe down the river, but you may get lodged on a rock if there hasn't been heavy rain. The park is 35km southwest of Merriwa, and access is from the road running south to Wollar and Bylong; all roads in the park are dry-weather roads only.

There are several (free) camping options. Try White Box Camp, but Spring Gully and Big River Camp are right on the river. Mudgee **NPWS** (☎ 6372 7199; Shop 1, 160 Church St, Mudgee) and **Mudgee visitor centre** (☎ 1800 816 304, 02-6372 1020; www.mudgee-gulgong.org; 84 Market St, Mudgee; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3.30pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun) have information.

**BURNING MOUNTAIN**

Off the New England Hwy, 20km north of Scone, is an underground **coal seam** that's been smoking for over 5000 years. A steep 3.5km-return walking track leads up through the nature reserve to puffing vents. The unusual nature of this area seems to uphold all kinds of biblical prophecies for deeply religious folk; it's undeniably mysterious.

**Festivals & Events**

Held in the second week of May, the **Scone and Upper Hunter Horse Festival** (www.sconehorsefestival.com) celebrates all things equine. The highlight for lonely lads and ladies is the B&S Ball.

**Sleeping**

**Airline House Motor Inn** (☎ 6545 1488; www.airlinehouse.com.au; 229 New England Hwy; r \$82-99, ste from \$140; ☎ ☎) Built in 1895, this old building was once the town doctor's residence. Stay in the hotel rooms or in a studio-type apartment.

**Morna May Cottage** (☎ 02-6547 2088; www.mornamay.com.au; 310 Rosemount Rd, Denman; s/d from \$85/120; ☎ ☎) Both of these light, bright bungalow-style cottages have their own kitchen; one has two bedrooms. They're the last word in classy vineyard accommodation – interiors are plush, and you have the opportunity to relax in a claw-footed bathtub, looking out over remote wineries through huge windows.

**Belltrees** (☎ 6546 1123; www.belltrees.com; Gundy Rd, Scone; cottages incl breakfast \$218-380) First established in 1831, the wealthy estate once had 64 buildings, including a store, a post office, church and a school. The cottages are suitably quaint and very agreeable.

**Denman Van Village** (☎ 6547 2590; www.denmanvanvillage.com.au; 10 Macauley St, Denman; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/20, cabins \$40-85; ☎ ☎) This beautifully green plot is at the quiet end of an already quiet town.

**Sandy Hollow Caravan Park & Country Cottages** (☎ 6547 4575; www.users.hunterlink.net.au/~mbbph; Golden Hwy; sites \$16-22, d cottages \$78-160, cabins \$68-88; ☎ ☎) This park is an ideal low-cost base for the vineyards, and if you have a bike it's even better as numerous rides depart from the caravan park.

**Getting There & Around**

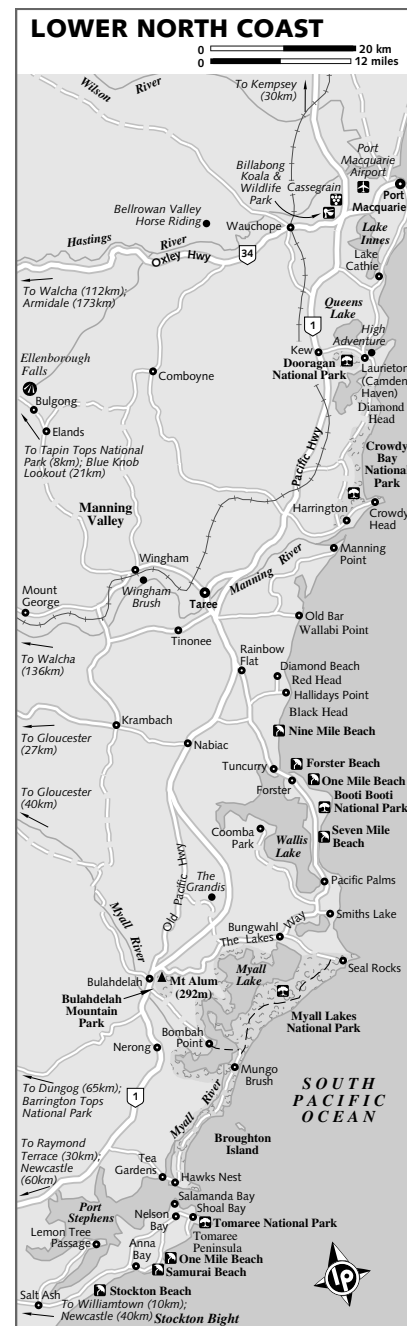
**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) has daily bus services between Scone and Sydney (adult/child \$72/60) and Newcastle (adult/child \$50/41). **Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) also runs between Scone and Sydney (adult/child \$48/24).

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has daily train services between Scone and Sydney (adult/child \$55/35).

**NEWCASTLE TO PORT MACQUARIE**

**Port Stephens**  
☎ 02 / pop 63,580

This stunning sheltered bay incorporates a string of coastal towns populated by welcoming locals with a passion for their local





environment. About an hour's drive north of Newcastle, it occupies a submerged valley that stretches more than 20km inland. It's a popular boating, fishing and family holiday spot and home to some 160 resident dolphins and the odd passing whale. The area offers all kinds of adventure activities and several near-deserted beaches fringed by bungalows. Nelson Bay is the unofficial capital of Port Stephens.

### INFORMATION

**CTC @ Tea Gardens** (☎ 4997 0749; Shop 4, Myall Plaza, Tea Gardens; per hr \$10) Internet access.

#### Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre

(☎ 1800 808 900; www.portstephens.org.au; Victoria Pde, Nelson Bay) Near d'Albora Marina.

**Visitor Information Centre** (☎ 4997 0111; Myall Rd, Tea Gardens)

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the mouth of the Myall River, opposite Nelson Bay, are the small, pretty towns of **Tea Gardens**, on the river, and **Hawks Nest**, on the beach. **Jimmy's Beach** at Hawks Nest fronts a glasslike stretch of water, while **Bennett's Beach** has great views of Broughton Island.

On the southern side of the Tomaree Peninsula, **One Mile Beach** is a gorgeous semicircle of velvety sand and crystalline water, favoured by surfers, beachcombers and idle romantics...some of whom are nude by the time you reach **Samurai Beach**.

Further south, you can hang loose at the surfside village of **Anna Bay**, another small town that has both surf and bay beaches. It's backed by the incredible **Stockton Bight**, the longest moving sand dunes in the southern hemisphere, stretching 35km to Newcastle. The tourist board refers to the dunes as *Mad Max*-style, but if you want to talk films, think *Lawrence of Arabia* – more Sahara than outback. In the heart of it, it's possible to get so surrounded by shimmering sand that you'll lose sight of the ocean and the townships. Other cultural reference points to help you paint a visual picture: an early Tintin book; a well-known Salvador Dali painting; one Pink Floyd album in particular – it's incredibly evocative, in short. At the far west end of the beach, the wreck of the *Sygnia* languishes in the water.

About half an hour by boat from Nelson Bay, **Broughton Island** is uninhabited except for muttonbirds, little penguins and an enormous

diversity of fish species. The diving is great and the beaches are incredibly secluded.

The restored 1872 **Inner Lighthouse** at Nelson Head has a small **museum** with displays on the area's history and a **tea room**. The views of Port Stephens are suitably inspiring.

Back on the highway, a few kilometres before the turn-off to Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest, is the **Rock Roadhouse** – a replica of Uluru (Ayers Rock). This place is a marvel of...something. Inside, there are shops, a café and a Big Foot (although no-one seems to know what it does). It's Australian at its finest and is highly recommended, even if your tank is full and your cynicism is in the red.

Activities available through the visitor information centre include fishing, helicopter rides, and tours of Barrington Tops National Park, Hunter Valley wineries and Maitland architecture.

Try the following:

**Hawks Nest Dive Centre** (☎ 4997 0422; Hawks Nest; www.hawksnestdive.com.au) Snorkelling and diving.

**Pro Dive Nelson Bay** (☎ 4981 4331; D'Albora Marina, Nelson Bay) PADI course \$450.

**Sahara Trails** (☎ 4981 9077; Port Stephens Dr, Nelson Bay; 2hr ride \$90).

### TOURS

**Imagine Cruises** (☎ 4984 9000; www.imaginecruises.com.au; 123 Stockton St; 2hr cruise adult/child \$22/14)

Eco-certified dolphin- and whale-watching tours.

**Moonshadow Cruises** (☎ 4984 9388; www.moonshadow.com.au; adult/child \$60/20) Eco-certified dolphin-watching, whale-watching and dinner cruises. Big catamarans with a bar.

**Naturally Amazing** (☎ 0409-993 470; Hawks Nest; half-day tours per person from \$49) Small-group 4WD tours to Barrington Tops, Stockton Bight and more.

**Sand Safaris** (☎ 4965 0215; www.sandsafaris.com.au; 173 Nelson Bay Rd, Williamstown; tours from \$110) Eco-sensitive quad-bike forays out on the dunes.

**Tamboi Queen Cruises** (☎ 4981 1959; 1½hr cruises adult/child \$17/9) Dolphin-watching cruises.

### SLEEPING

In Nelson Bay, Government St – between Stockton and Church Sts – is lined with motels and hotels. Shoal Bay, virtually a suburb of Nelson Bay, mixes accommodation with stores and restaurants. Anna Bay is the closest hamlet to One Mile Beach.

**Winning Property** (☎ 4984 0100; www.kdwinning.com.au; 19 Stockton St, Nelson Bay) has prolific holiday-rental listings.

**Melaleuca Surfside Backpackers** (☎ 4981 9422; www.melaleucabackpackers.com.au; 2 Koala Pl, One Mile Beach; camping per person \$15, dm/d \$25/85) It's all mates and smiles at this excellent backpacker retreat, spread across a large green property. Camping is 'free range' on a grassy oval and cabins are made of glorious rust-red timber. It's wheelchair-friendly and the koalas dig it too.

**Tea Gardens Club Inn** (☎ 1800 635 790, 4997 0911; www.bestwestern.com.au/teagardens; Yalimbah St, Tea Gardens; r from \$90; ♿) Behind the Bowls Club, this sturdy motel has good-size rooms with creature comforts and spas. Some rooms have sliding doors right onto the bowling green – you can watch the greenkeepers battle with the birds in the morning.

**Leilani Haciendas** (☎ 4981 3304; leilani@hunterlink.net.au; Gowrie Ave, Nelson Bay; apt \$110-180; ♿ ♿) This cute block of units has more colour than a Wiggles convention. The one- and two-bedroom apartments, with sun-filled interiors and sliding doors onto the back patio, are ideal for families.

**Ocean Side** (☎ 4997 0941; www.oceansidehawksnest.com.au; Cnr Booner & Bennet Sts, Hawks Nest; apt \$140-180; ♿ ♿) Flashy and revamped, this place offers very comfortable apartments, some with spas, some with hot tubs (we'll let you spot the difference). All rooms have spiffy insides and the facilities are excellent.

**O'Carroll's Holiday Village** (☎ 4982 2801; www.ocarroll.com.au; 36 Eucalyptus Dr, One Mile Beach; d from \$160; ♿ ♿) A dishy eco-resort, O'Carroll's scatters its eight cabins throughout a mini forest, complete with ponds, bird life, grunting koalas and frogs. Digs have mezzanine bedrooms and five-star energy ratings (meaning minimal energy to heat and cool) and are wheelchair friendly.

**Shoal Bay Resort & Spa** (☎ 1800 181 810, 4981 1555; www.shoalbayresort.com; Beachfront, Shoal Bay; apt \$180-240; ♿ ♿) Praise be to the gods of pampering, they surely had a hand in this classy number. A range of rooms treat fussy tushes and if you really want to impress the missus, opt for a Heritage Suite with ocean views and décor to make her jealous.

Also recommended:

**Colonial Ridge Resort** (☎ 4982 0600; www.colonialridge.com.au; 4 Fleet St, Salamanda Bay; r from \$170; ♿ ♿) Kitsch and comfy cabins.

**Halifax Holiday Park** (☎ 4981 1522; Beach Rd, Nelson Bay; powered sites from \$32, cabins \$90-160; ♿) Excellent cabins and facilities.

**Hawk's Nest Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 1800 072 244; www.hawksnestcaravan.com.au; Booner St, Hawks Nest; camp sites/cabins \$31/77) Near a good surf beach.

### EATING

**Red Neds Gourmet Pies** (☎ 02-4984 1355; www.redneds.com.au; Shop 3, 17-19 Stockton St, Nelson Bay; pies \$4-5; ☎ 6am-5pm) The kangaroo teriyaki and two fat ladies seafood pies here will knock your socks off. There are over 70 versions on the menu (no ladies of any size are harmed in the making). See p168 for more info.

**Aqua** (☎ 4997 0966; Cnr Booner & Tuloa Sts, Hawks Nest; mains \$15-25) This eatery touts itself as a cosmopolitan café and it certainly brings home the bacon...alongside artichoke and hokkien noodle stir-fry or pesto-stuffed, free-range chicken roulade.

**E10 on the Marina** (☎ 4984 9700; Shop E10, d'Albora Marina, Nelson Bay; mains \$16-25) This sunny waterfront restaurant perfects casual dining with treats like Cajun-dusted calamari salad, mega-burgers and fresh fish and chips. The sultry breeze off the water goes nicely with a crisp Chardy.

**Zest** (☎ 4984 2211; 16 Stockton St, Nelson Bay; 2/3 courses \$55/65; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) Port Stephens's finest restaurant dazzles even the hardest gastronomes with prosciutto-wrapped rabbit with tapenade or seared baby squid on strawberry basil risotto. Dining is on an intimate deck with five-star service.

Also available:

**bite me now** (☎ 0411 747 249; cnr Donald & Stockton Sts, Nelson Bay; meals \$10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Healthy takeaway eats with attitude.

**Aqua Blu Bistro & Bar** (☎ 4984 9999; D'Albora Marina, Nelson Bay; mains \$20) Cosmopolitan bistro.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Port Stephens is an area, not a town, so when driving follow the signs for Nelson Bay.

**Port Stephens Coaches** (☎ 4982 2940; www.psoaches.com.au) runs daily from all towns of Port Stephens to Sydney (\$32), and services the coast to Newcastle.

To drive from Nelson Bay to Tea Gardens, you have to backtrack to Raymond Terrace. Alternatively, **Port Stephens Ferry Service** (☎ 0412-682 117, 0419-417 689) departs Nelson Bay for Tea Gardens at 10am, noon and 3.30pm, returning at 10am, 2.30pm and 5pm (additional services over Christmas). The trip takes around an hour (return fare adult/child \$20/10).

## THE GREAT PIE WARS: BEST PIES ON THE COAST *Simon Sellars*

The Australian fetish for meat pies is legendary: Australians eat 260 million of them a year, around 13 per citizen. In the '70s, a song from a well-known TV commercial featured a continuous refrain: 'Football, meat pies, kangaroos and Holden cars' – everything that defined Australia at the time. Actually, it wasn't so long ago, before the current era of ultra-professionalism, that elite Australian sportsmen would turn up to training smoking a ciggy, drinking a beer and eating a pie (trailing their pet roo by a leash, no doubt). To sum up, pie crust in your moustache was a badge of pride – even if you were female.

Along the north coast, you're more likely to find kangaroo *in* your pie – this is Pie Country, make no mistake, and there's a lot of showmanship around that tries to convince us of that. There are plenty of one-horse towns in this neck of the woods that claim to make 'Australia's Best Pies', but often they were just the same old deal: insubstantial crust, watery filling, mystery meat.

If you're salivating already, make sure you visit the following three pie emporiums; all have won medals in the prestigious **Great Aussie Pie Competition** ([www.greataussiepiecomp.homestead.com/Page1.html](http://www.greataussiepiecomp.homestead.com/Page1.html)). Every pie they churn out is, truly, an enigma wrapped in a mystery wrapped in a crust: wondrous to behold and indisputably unquantifiable. It's not all about the flashy fillings, though: those creamy, flaky crusts are similarly breathtaking.

**Red Ned's Gourmet Pies** (☎ 02-4984 1355; [www.redneds.com.au](http://www.redneds.com.au); Shop 3, 17-19 Stockton St, Nelson Bay; pies \$4-5; ☎ 6am-5pm) Fifty different kinds, baked fresh daily – everything from your standard savoury mince to the lobster, prawn and barramundi pie (with coconut-cream sauce, leeks and celery, and topped with caviar, no less). Don't forget the Indian butter-chicken pies, either, or the kangaroo teriyaki, or the Thai satay vegetarian. Kingpin Pie King Barry Kelly learnt his trade in top-shelf international hotels and his philosophy is simple: he gets a kick out of watching people stare at his specials board, goggle-eyed (anyone for BBQ-bourbon-and-beef pie?).

**Pie Man** Tea Gardens (☎ 02-4997 1733; Shop 3, 17-19 Stockton St; ☎ 24hr); Raymond Terrace (☎ 02-4987 1912; 26 Sturgeon St; ☎ 24hr) Motto: 'I only have pies for you'. The variety isn't as bewildering as Red Ned's, but the quality is right up there. The Pie Man sticks to favourites including prime beef, beef Burgundy and Thai chicken pies, peppered with a few innovative variations like the incredible oyster Kilpatrick. The Pie Man himself, Randall Smith, grew up in Adelaide, home of the notorious pie floater – a meat pie floating in pea soup. Anyone who has tasted one of these horror shows will know why he's now obsessive about creating the perfect pie.

**Fredo Pies** (☎ 02-6566 8226; [www.fredopies.com.au](http://www.fredopies.com.au); 75 Madeay St, Frederickton; pies \$4-5; ☎ 7am-7pm) The Marilyn Monroe statues out the front will grab your attention, but the amazing pies will keep you here for evermore. 'Mrs Pie', Nola Turnbull, claims to have 160 recipes in her possession, with a rotating 50 made fresh daily. The emphasis is country-style, as witnessed by the superlative, never-to-be-matched lamb, mint and honey pie; and the rabbit mulligatawny; the emu; the ostrich... For vegos, the farmhouse potage is on a par, as is the asparagus, cheese and pasta pie and the vegetable mornay.

**Shoal Bay Bike Hire** (☎ 4981 9444; Cnr Shoal Bay & Government Rds, Shoal Bay) rents bikes to explore the good network of paths.

## Barrington Tops National Park

☎ 02

On top of the world – well, the Hunter – this park is a World Heritage wilderness lying on the rugged Barrington Plateau, which rises to almost 1600m. Northern rainforest butts into southern sclerophyll here, creating one of Australia's most diverse ecosystems, with giant strangler figs, mossy Antarctic beech forests, limpid rainforest swimming holes

and pocket-sized pademelons (note: it is illegal to put pademelons in your pocket).

Bushwalks, mountain biking, horse riding, canoeing, fishing and 4WDing are the order of the day here. The **Barrington Trail** is particularly popular for 4WDing, but it's closed during winter. Be prepared for cold snaps, and even snow, at any time.

**Barrington Outdoor Adventure Centre** (☎ 6558 2093; [www.boac.com.au](http://www.boac.com.au); 126 Thunderbolts Way; 1/2-day tours \$125/335) specialises in mountain-biking adventures with limited uphill legs. But if you would rather wrestle the rapids **Canoe Barrington** (☎ 6558 4316; [www.canoebarrington.com.au](http://www.canoebarrington.com.au);

744 Barrington East Rd, Barrington; 2hr hire \$40) hires canoes and kayaks.

Day tours to Barrington Tops can be organised through the Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre (p166)

Camping is possible throughout the park. The most popular grounds are at **Gloucester River** (\$8), but there's free camping at **Devils Hole**, **Little Murray** and **Junction Pools**, although you need a 4WD to get there.

Alternatively, **Barrington Wilderness Retreat** (☎ 6558 3048; [www.australianoutdooradventures.com](http://www.australianoutdooradventures.com); 535 Manchester Rd, Barrington; sites \$10, dm/s/d \$28/32/70) fronts 600m of rapids, known in kayaking and canoeing circles as 'The Steps', where you can raft by moonlight.

The park can be accessed from Scone, Dungog and Gloucester. For more information contact Gloucester **NPWS** (☎ 6538 5300).

## Myall Lakes National Park & Around

☎ 02

These stunning lakes form the largest natural freshwater system in NSW. Pooling in deep blue basins, they weave around clumps of forest and small settlements. **The Lakes Way** ribbons its way through the scenery and is a magnificent drive.

There are bushwalks through coastal rainforest and past beach dunes at **Mungo Brush** in the south, perfect for spotting wildflowers and dingoes.

The best beaches are in the north around secluded **Seal Rocks**, an idyllic cove embodying the Australian ideal of utopia – few people, magical views, great surf and little to do but swim and sit. The **historic lighthouse** here is well worth the walk to witness the rocks that have claimed many ships over the last 150 years.

The **Seal Rocks Camping Reserve** (☎ 1800 112 234, 4997 6164; [www.sealrockscampingreserve.com.au](http://www.sealrockscampingreserve.com.au); camp sites/cabins from \$25/70) has tidy cabins, a manicured-to-bowling-green-perfection lawn and a blissful location right on the beach.

Canoes, sailboards and runabouts are available at **Bombah Point**. Here you'll also find **Bombah Point Eco Cottages** (☎ 4997 4401; [www.bombahpoint.com](http://www.bombahpoint.com); 969 Bombah Point Rd; d per 2 nights \$440), which makes an environmentally friendly and romantic getaway.

Alternatively, **Eco Point Myall Shores Resort** (☎ 1300 769 566; [www.myallshores.com.au](http://www.myallshores.com.au); Myall Lakes National Park, Bombah Point; camp sites \$26, cabins \$95-260; ☎) has a huge range of cabins and villas.

There is a track from Bombah Point to Seal Rocks, but it's testing, even with a 4WD, and the park rangers are rather unsympathetic to over-ambitious drivers.

The **Bulahdelah visitor centre** (☎ 1800 802 692, 4997 4981; cnr Pacific Hwy & Crawford St) is just opposite the road to Myall Lake. Looming over the town is **Mt Alum**, the largest above-ground deposit of alum (a salt used in dyeing, medicine and manufacturing) in the world. Once mined, the mountain is now the **Bulahdelah Mountain Park**, with some walking tracks to historical sites. The entrance is a couple of blocks back from the highway, on the same street as the police station.

The tallest tree in NSW, the 400-year-old **Grandis**, towers over dense rainforest not far from Bulahdelah and is an awesome sight. To reach it, take the signposted turn-off 12km from Bulahdelah.

The **NPWS** (☎ 6591 0300; [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au); The Ruins Camping Ground, Booti Booti National Park, The Lakes Way, Pacific Palms) has information on the many local national parks, including **Booti Booti National Park** (per vehicle per day \$7). The view from Cape Hawke here is a 360-degree panorama of the confluence of lakes, ocean, forest and teeny towns.

## Forster-Tuncurry

☎ 02 / pop 18,000

These twin towns, separated by the sea entrance to **Wallis Lake**, are a great spot for water babies to wade a while, with a string of spectacular beaches providing unhurried and unpretentious coastline. In winter you can slip into the ether here without fear of tourist tack or prices, but summer sees the lakes come alive with water sports, screaming kiddies and sunburnt adults.

Forster (*fos-ter*), on the southern side of the entrance, is the big brother of the pair. The helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 6554 8799; Little St, Forster) is just beside the lake. There's internet access at **Leading Edge Computers** (☎ 6555 2065; Shop 3, cnr Head & Beach Sts; per hr \$6).

**Tobwabba Art** (☎ 6554 5755; [www.tobwabba.com.au](http://www.tobwabba.com.au); 10 Breckenridge St, Forster; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is owned by the Worimi people of the Great Lakes region. The centre exhibits their paintings and artefacts.

Beaches are of the highest quality in this area, with **Nine Mile Beach** the pick of the surf spots, **Forster Beach** a good family option with its swimming pools, and **One Mile Beach** also popular.



Activities include cruises and dolphin swims with **Dive Forster** (☎ 6554 7478; www.diveforster.com.au; Fisherman's Wharf, Forster; adult/child \$60/30), or small-group 4WD tours with **Boomerang Rainforest Tours** (☎ 6554 0757; per person \$80-95).

Catering to backpackers (well, the handful who come), families and the lone traveller, **Forster Dolphin Lodge YHA** (☎ 6555 8155; www.yha.com.au; 43 Head St, Forster; dm/d \$25/65) has snug common areas but friendly staff. Some rooms have en suites. A comfier option is **Barkley Inn** (☎ 6555 2552; www.barkleyinn.com; 38 Head St, Forster; s/d \$85/90; ♿), with neat and petite rooms and plenty of sunlight.

**Lakeside Escape Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 6557 6400; www.lakesideescape.com.au; 85 Green Point Dr; s/d incl breakfast \$135/165) is out of town but worth the trip for pleasant rooms with spas and gorgeous lake views.

**Forster Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 1800 240 632, 6554 6269; www.escapenorth.com.au/forstercaravanpark.htm; Reserve Rd, Forster; camp sites/cabins from \$22/55) is a sprawling but spick and span space, backed by the mighty breakwall.

**The Wharf Bar & Grill** (☎ 6555 7200; 1/32 Wharf St, Forster; mains \$26; ☎ lunch & dinner) whips up great grills like salt-and-pepper tempura whiting and prosciutto-wrapped chicken breast, stuffed with macadamias.

**Busways** (☎ 1300 555 611) runs down to Bulahdelah (\$30). **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32), **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) all stop in Forster-Tuncurry.

## Manning Valley

☎ 02

From Forster-Tuncurry the Pacific Hwy swings inland to riverside **Taree**, a large town serving the farms of the fertile Manning Valley. The **Taree visitor centre** (☎ 1800 182 733, 6592 5444; 21 Manning River Dr) is down the road from the **Big Oyster**, the weirdest car yard you'll ever see.

Further west up the valley, **Wingham Brush**, a patch of idyllic rainforest near the timber town of Wingham, is home to giant, otherworldly Moreton Bay figs and flocks of flying foxes. Its boardwalks are a thoroughfare from the town to the **Manning River**.

Near Wingham, **Tinonee** (population 670) is a tiny heritage town. It features a really unusual, multicoloured fish-shaped letterbox on its outskirts, 'prime horse poo' (according to roadside signs) and the 22-seat **Terrace Cinema** (☎ 6553 1428; hopkinsbird@tpg.com.au; 1 Mill St, Tinonee; adult/child \$10/9). This little gem is worth visiting

the town for. It's the world's second smallest cinema, set in a charming 1860s weatherboard house. Australian and Hollywood classics, art house and documentaries are screened; book ahead to avoid disappointment.

On the coast near Taree, the cute resort town of **Old Bar** has long, quiet beaches.

## The Coastal Way

This meandering route has sweet sleepy towns and good surf, particularly at **Old Bar**. Just south there's a lagoon for swimming at **Wallabi Point**.

Across the river – but a hefty drive because there is no bridge shortcut – is **Harrington**, a lovely sneeze of a town with another lagoon to take a dip in and respectable surf beaches nearby. The **Harrington Hotel** (☎ 6656 1205; 28 Beach St; mains \$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a beauty. The expansive bistro has glorious water views and upstairs there are wonderfully creaky old pub rooms (\$45).

**Crowdy Head** is the prettiest of the nearby settlements, with sweeping views from the 1878 lighthouse out to sea and overlooking Crowdy Head National Park.

You can take the unsealed but well-maintained road to **Diamond Head** through the **rainforest** and, if you desire, pitch a tent at one of the camp sites (\$6), but bring your own water.

Weged between Dooragan National Park and the ocean is **Camden Haven**, where quaint towns cluster around the wide sea entrance of **Queens Lake**. You can get a jaw-dropping eyeful of the scenery from Laurieton Lookout, inside **Dooragan National Park**, 5km up a winding wooded road.

Your final march up the coastline will take you past the biggest town, **Lake Cathie** (cat-eye), on a lake with safe beaches ideal for youngsters.

## PORT MACQUARIE

☎ 02 / pop 41,141

Port, as it's affectionately known, reclines over a spectacular headland at the entrance to the subtropical coast. It has a handsome shoreline and a placid ambience that belies its size. The palm trees, rolling parklands, hefty koala population and beach coves here do a good job of camouflaging swank restaurants and fine accommodation, and this balance of greenery and infrastructure makes it an ideal holiday destination.

**PORT MACQUARIE**

0 1 km  
0 0.5 miles

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Port Boat Hire.....12 A2	Ozzie Pozzie Backpackers.....24 A3
NPWS Office.....1 A6	Port Macquarie Cruise Adventures...13 A6	Port Macquarie Historical Society	Port Macquarie YHA Hostel.....25 B6
Port Surf Hub.....2 A6	Museum.....14 A6	Beach House.....26 A6	
Visitor Centre.....3 A3	Port Venture.....(see 13)	Cedro.....27 A6	
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	Sea Acres Rainforest Centre.....15 C5	Mike's Seafood.....28 A5	
Alma Doepel.....4 A5	St Thomas' Church.....16 A6	Rainforest.....(see 15)	
Breakwall.....5 B5	<b>SLEEPING</b> 🏠 📶	Splash.....29 A5	
Garrison Shopping Precinct.....6 A6	Beachcomber Resort.....17 B6	Town Green Inn.....30 A6	
Graham Seers Cyclery.....(see 12)	Flynns Beach Caravan Park.....18 C4	<b>DRINKING</b> 🍷	
Kooloonbung Creek Nature Reserve.....8 B3	Flynns Beach Resort.....19 C4	Attitude Nite Club.....31 A6	
Maritime Museum.....9 C6	Laing & Simmons.....20 B6	Beach House.....(see 26)	
Observatory.....10 B6	Mid Pacific Motel.....22 A6	Port Macquarie Hotel.....(see 30)	
Old Courthouse.....11 A6	Observatory.....23 B6	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
		Coach Station.....32 A6	
		Hertz.....33 A6	

**See Enlargement**

**SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN**

**0 500 m**  
**0 0.25 miles**

Port was founded in 1821 as a penal colony for slack convicts who found life in Sydney Cove too easy. The heavy-duty past is still visible in the frontier architecture (Port was the third town to be established on the Australian mainland), but these days idle Aussies choose to serve time here.

## Information

**NPWS office** (☎ 6586 8300; 152 Horton St)

**Port Surf Hub** (☎ 6584 4744; 57 Clarence St; per hr \$7; ☎ 9am-7pm) Internet access.

**Visitor centre** (☎ 1300 303 155; www.portmacquarie.info.com.au; cnr Gordon & Gore Sts) Excellent info on the greater Port Macquarie area.

## Sights

### MUSEUMS & HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Port's colonial past is apparent in the town centre, where you'll find the 1824, convict-built **St Thomas' Anglican Church**, the 1835 **Garrison shopping precinct** (cnr Clarence & Hay Sts), which now houses 21st-century shops and cafés, and the 1869 **old courthouse** (☎ 6584 1818; Clarence St; adult/child \$2/50c; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat).

The 1836 **Port Macquarie Historical Society Museum** (☎ 6583 1108; 22 Clarence St; adult/child \$5/4; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) has a rich stock of 19th-century household items, 1-tonne Victorian-era frocks and terrifying dentistry tools and baby dolls. Up on the point, the old pilot's cottage (1882) houses the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 6583 1866; 6 William St; adult/child \$4/2; 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) with wreck relics, photographs of early navigators and a room devoted to Matthew Flinders' cat, Trim.

The **Alma Doepel** (☎ 6581 8000; Lady Nelson Wharf; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 9am-4pm) is a resplendent three-masted trading vessel built in 1903, now spending its retirement as Port Macquarie's centrepiece.

### WILDLIFE & NATURE RESERVES

Port Macquarie shares its beautiful gum trees with one of Australia's icons, the koala. Unfortunately, people's housing needs have seen the little fellas' land rights diminish and, with them, their own homes. While searching for their lost oasis, many end up at the **Koala Hospital** (☎ 6584 1522; www.koalahospital.org.au; Roto House, Lord St; admission by donation; ☎ feeding time 8am & 3pm), which you can visit to cheer up the little battlers (no flash photography).

If handfeeding fighting-fit koalas, kangaroos and emus appeals, **Billabong Koala & Wildlife Park** (☎ 6585 1060; 61 Billabong Dr; adult/child \$12/8; ☎ 9am-

5pm) is a wonderful family experience. Patting times are at 10.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm.

The **Kooloonbung Creek Nature Reserve** (cnr Gordon & Horton Sts; admission free) encompasses 50 hectares of bush and is great for bird-watching. There are trails, a lake, boardwalks suitable for wheelchairs, and a cemetery.

**Sea Acres Rainforest Centre** (☎ 6582 3355; Pacific Dr; adult/child \$10/6; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) protects 72 hectares of coastal rainforest alive with birds, goannas, brush turkeys and, unfortunately, mosquitoes. There's a wheelchair-accessible boardwalk and excellent guided tours.

### BREAKWALL

It's the **People's Gallery**. Visitors have been painting the rocks of the breakwall, behind the Sun-downer Breakwall Tourist Park, for 10 years. The 'art' on display covers everything from beer cans and big-breasted women to Darth Vader. The accompanying texts range from touching eulogies and crappy poems about the pain of unrequited love to bad-ass odes to sex, drugs and rock and roll. There aren't many bare rocks left; brand yours while you can.

### OTHER SIGHTS

For those looking for answers beyond the horizon, sneak a peek through the telescope at the **observatory** (☎ 6583 1933; Rotary Park, William St; adult/child \$5/4; ☎ 7.15-9.30pm Wed & Sun, 8.15-10pm during daylight saving).

Several wineries are scattered around the Port Macquarie area. Its reputation as the region's pioneering vineyard has made **Cassegrain** (☎ 6582 8377; www.cassegrainwines.com.au; 764 Fernbank Creek Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm), 15km out of town, a favourite. **Ca Marche Restaurant** (☎ 6582 8320; mains \$30; ☎ lunch & dinner) here has won awards and is worth the trip.

**Timbertown** (☎ 6586 1940; www.timbertown.com.au; Oxley Hwy, Wauchope; entry by donation; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm) is a heritage theme park suited to families, with old dust-swept streets, intimate shops and the old (working) steam train. Admission is free, but you pay for rides.

### Activities

A walking track curls around the headland and offers splendid views with your morning exercise. There's also great swimming and surfing at several beaches, starting at Town Beach and running south.

(Continued from page 172)

You can get offshore with **Port Boat Hire** (☎ 6583 8514; Port Marina), which rents vessels from \$25 per hour for two people.

**High Adventure** (☎ 0429-844961; www.highadventure.com.au; 10 Rosewood Cr, Laurieton; tandem flight from \$110) delivers adrenaline and dramatic landscapes courtesy of hang-gliding.

Readers rave about **Bellrowan Valley Horse Riding** (☎ 6587 5227; www.bellrowanvalley.com.au; Crows Rd, Bellrowan Valley; 2hr per person \$75), which organises guided horse-riding trips in the hinterland, about 30 minutes' drive from Port Macquarie.

**Edge Experience** (☎ 0427-324 009; www.edgeexperience.com.au; full-day tours from \$85) offers adventure combo-tours that mix mountain biking and abseiling, as well as vineyard and jazz tours.

More active pursuits:

**Graham Seers Cyclery** (☎ 6583 2333; Port Marina; half-/full-day hire \$25/40) Bike hire.

**Port Macquarie Surf School** (☎ 6585 5453; www.portmacquariesurfschool.com.au; 2hr lessons per person from \$40)

**Scuba Haven** (☎ 6559 5530; www.scubahaven.com.au; PADI courses \$400)

### Tours

**Australian Wilderness Tours** (☎ 6587 7144; adult/child \$99/59) Small-group 4WD wilderness tours.

**Port Macquarie Cruise Adventures** (☎ 6583 8483, 1300 555 890; www.cruiseadventures.com.au; Town Wharf; 3½hr per person from \$35) Dolphin- and whale-watching, nature, and oyster-gobbling tours.

**Port Venture** (☎ 1300 795 577, 6583 3058; Town Wharf; 2hr cruise per person \$25) River cruises.

### Sleeping

For holiday apartment rentals, get in touch with **Laing & Simmons** (☎ 6583 7733; www.portrealstate.net; cnr William & Horton Sts).

### BUDGET

**Port Macquarie YHA Hostel** (☎ 1800 880 008, 6583 5512; www.yha.com.au; 40 Church St; dm/d \$23/55; ☎) Homier than nanna's spare room, this sunflower-yellow weatherboard has neat four- to six-bed dorms, a sociable lounge and an open kitchen. It's family friendly and the owners are charming.

**Ozzie Pozzie Backpackers** (☎ 1800 620 020, 6583 8133; www.ozziepozzie.com; 36 Waugh St; dm \$25, d with/without bath \$65/55; ☎) This small, charming and colourful hostel is just the ticket to make you feel like

one of the crew. Dorms with wide, steel-tubed bunks arrange themselves around a wee courtyard, with spotless bathrooms and a cosy TV room. **Flynn's Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 6583 5754; www.flynnbeachcaravan.com.au; 22 Ocean St; camp sites/cabins from \$30/90; ☎) In this thickly treed park, dappled sunlight filters through the eucalypt canopy, settling on tidy cabins, grassy camp sites and good amenities. Great urban-bush camping.

### MIDRANGE

**Mid Pacific Motel** (☎ 1800 024 894, 6583 2166; midport@bigpond.com.au; cnr Clarence & Short Sts; r \$110; ☎ ☎) An oldie but a goodie, this medium-rise motel sits right on the grassy esplanade and has vibrant little rooms with kitchenettes and lovely views. The staff are super friendly.

**HW Boutique Motel** (☎ 6583 1200; www.hwport.com.au; 1 Stewart St; apt \$125-165; ☎ ☎) A handsome full-service hotel, HW has renovated a dowdy shell and turned its units into chic and spacious rooms with gorgeous views. Rooms have wi-fi and broadband, and some have glossy spas.

**Beachcomber Resort** (☎ 6584 1881; www.beachcomberresort.com.au; 54 William St; apt from \$135; ☎ ☎) This low-rise condo-block has spiffy apartments with kitchenettes and bright, open living spaces. There's also a pool, a BBQ courtyard, and God's gift to parents – two old-school video-arcade games.

**Observatory** (☎ 1300 888 305, 6586 8000; www.observatory.net.au; 40 William St; apt from \$155; ☎ ☎) Oh so shmick, these as-new apartments are like showroom models. Soft colourings, sueded couches and glass doors that open onto balconies with huge ocean vistas make them extremely comfortable. The same-ness of them is a tad clinical, though.

### TOP END

**Flynn's Beach Resort** (☎ 1800 833 338; www.flynnbeachresort.com.au; cnr Pacific Dr & Ocean St; apt \$180-275; ☎ ☎) Holiday Inn meets boutique style in these two-bedroom apartments. Some have pool-and-tennis-court views, some have ocean outlooks, all have sleek kitchens, cheerful décor and oodles of room.

### Eating

**Mike's Seafood** (☎ 6583 7721; Shop 4, 13 Hay St; mains \$11; ☎ lunch & dinner) We love the slogan – 'It's all good!' And it is. This great little takeaway specialises in paper parcels of fishy goodness. Tuesday is 'buy one, get another for a buck' night.

(Continued on page 181)



**Cedro** (☎ 6583 5529; 70 Clarence St; mains \$10-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Punters sun themselves on the patio here while the kitchen whips up delectable Moroccan lamb or roast pumpkin, haloumi and pesto burgers. This spot begs you to stay for beautifully languid weekend brekkies.

**Beach House** (☎ 6584 5692; Horton St; mains \$18) Take in the water views from the sea of seats outside and launch into a lunch of salmon and Caesar salad, Malaysian curry or an overflowing fisherman's basket. Stick around for beer and a burger, oysters and wine or a gourmet pizza for dinner.

**Splash** (☎ 6584 4027; 3/2 Horton St; meals \$25-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) Does Port do Mod Oz? Oh yes it does! It goes something like seaweed-and-dashi-crust-ed yellowfin tuna with spiced vegetables and snow pea-leaf salad, and it's served at this intimate and uncomplicated restaurant.

Also recommended:

**Rainforest** (☎ 6582 4444; Sea Acres Rainforest Centre; mains \$15; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Beautiful leafy setting and fine café cuisine.

**Town Green Inn** (☎ 6583 1011; cnr Clarence & Horton Sts; mains \$15-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Stylish and bright bistro with cosmopolitan fare and DIY steaks.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Things can get rowdy at weekends, which is why there's a 2.30am lock-out policy on bars and clubs.

**Beach House** (☎ 6584 5692; Horton St) The enviable position right on the grassy esplanade makes this beautiful pub perfect for lazy afternoon drinks. As the wee morning hours draw near, folk fasten their beer goggles and mingle on black leather couches inside.

**Port Macquarie Hotel** (☎ 6583 1011; cnr Horton & Clarence Sts) The old man of Port's pubs, this place simmers with afternoon drinkers and picks up for live bands at weekends and trivia on Sunday.

**Attitude Nite Club** (☎ 6583 5466; Galleria Bldg, William St; admission \$5) Even a dress code doesn't prevent this meet-and-meet market from ending up loud, beery and sticky in the early morning.

## Getting There & Away

**Qantaslink** (☎ 13 13 13) flies to Sydney several times a day. **Brindabella Airlines** (☎ 1300 668 824; www.brindabellairlines.com.au) flies to/from Coffs Harbour.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 22 32) both run to Sydney (\$66) and Coffs Harbour (\$44). **Keans** (☎ 6543 1322) runs three times a week to Tamworth. The coach station is on the corner of Horton and Gordon Sts.

The Settlement Point ferry (per car \$3, passengers free) operates 24 hours. A 10-minute trip on a flat punt gives you access to the north beach and Pilots Beach. Four-wheel drives can drive to Point Plomer and on over unsealed roads to Crescent Head to the north.

**Hertz** (☎ 6583 6599; 102 Gordon St; per day \$50-100) is one of several rental-car agents in town.

Prefer to cycle? Head to Graham Seer's Cyclery (see p181).

## PORT MACQUARIE TO COFFS HARBOUR

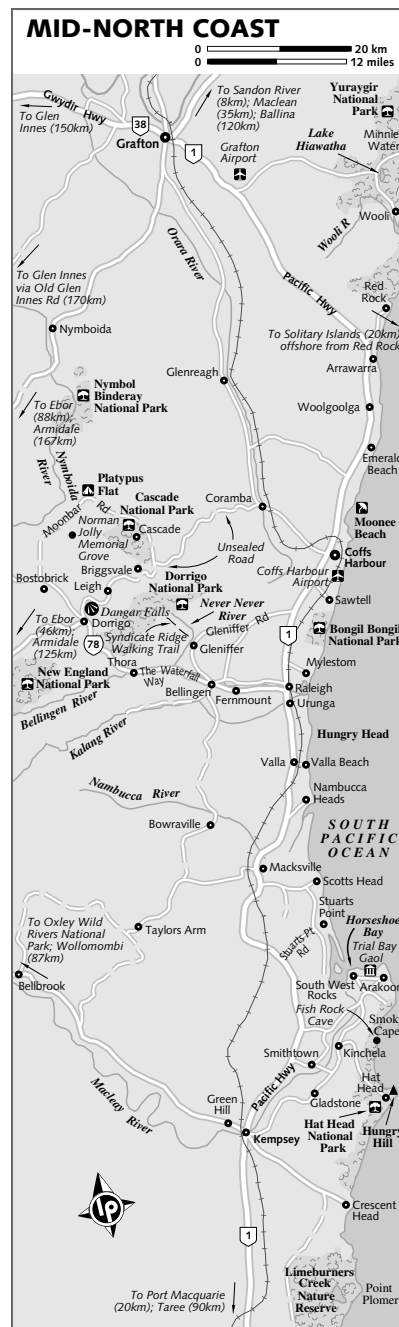
**Kempsey**  
☎ 02 / pop 11,000

About 45km north of Port Macquarie, Kempsey is the home of the fabled **Akubra hat** (www.akubra.com.au), the headwear of choice for a swag of Aussie icons – everyone from Paul 'Crocodile Dundee' Hogan and singer John 'Whispering Jack' Farnham to John 'Prime Minister' Howard (when he wants to bond with little Aussie battlers). Unfortunately, the factory is not open to the public. However, if you're curious as to why the Akubra was born here, remember that farmers like hats – and that Kempsey is a large rural town serving the farms of the Macleay Valley.

Country-music legend the late Slim Dusty (who also favoured an Akubra), was also born here. Thanks to John Howard's patronage (he must have been in a bonding mood), the wheels are in motion for the opening of a **Slim Dusty Heritage Centre** (☎ 6562 6533; www.slimdustycentre.com.au; Old Kempsey Showgrounds). The centre hasn't made it to the vertical stage yet, but you can give it a shove via a donation (along with every business within 100km it seems). For more on Slim, see p188.

The **Kempsey visitor centre** (☎ 1800 642 480, 6563 1555; Pacific Hwy) is at a rest stop on the south side of town, sharing space with a **sheepshearers museum** (adult/child \$4/2).

Just 6km north is Fredo Pies (see the boxed text, p168). Few cars manage to get past this place, and sometimes it's not because of the outstanding pies – standing guard outside are two life-size statues of Marilyn Monroe, one squatting uncomfortably on a pole.



## Crescent Head

☎ 02 / pop 1200

An intimate town on the coast 18km south-east of Kempsey, Crescent Head is the surf longboarding capital of Australia. This is where the Malibu surfboard gained prominence in Australia during the '60s, and today many come just to watch the longboard riders surf the epic waves of **Little Nobby's Junction** (there's also good shortboard riding off Plummer Rd).

The road to Crescent Head is near the Kempsey visitor centre. Alternatively, from the north take the very scenic Belmore Rd, which leaves the Pacific Hwy at Seven Oaks and follows the Belmore River.

For holiday rentals, try **Point Break Realty** (☎ 1800 352 272, 6566 0306; www.pointbreakrealty.com.au). For shorter stays, **Mediterranean Motel** (☎ 6566 0303; www.crescentheadaccommodation.com.au; 35 Pacific St; s/d \$110/130; ☺) is the best motel in town, offering comfy and spotless rooms in the main building. You could also stay in one of the cute 'surf shacks' out the back, sleeping up to eight. It also has a Mediterranean restaurant (mains \$20).

Right at the mouth of the river, **Crescent Head Holiday Park** (☎ 6566 0261; Pacific St; camp sites/cabins from \$30/115) is a lovely spot to pitch a tent.

The turn-off to Crescent Head is near the visitor centre in Kempsey. **Busways** (☎ 1300 555 611) runs to and from Kempsey.

## Hat Head National Park

This coastal park of 6500 hectares runs north from near Hat Head to **Smoky Cape** (south of Arakoon), protecting scrubland, swamps and some excellent beaches backed by significant dune systems. Bird life is prolific on the wetlands. Rising up from the generally flat landscape is Hungry Hill, near Hat Head, and sloping Hat Head itself, where there's a walking track.

Surrounded by the national park, the village of **Hat Head** is much smaller and quieter than Crescent Head. **Hat Head Holiday Park** (☎ 02-6567 7501; camp sites/cabins \$16/60) is close to a beautiful sheltered bay. You can camp (per person \$3) at Hungry Head, 5km south of Hat Head. There are pit toilets but no showers or water.

The park is accessible from the hamlet of Kinchela, on the road between Kempsey and South West Rocks.

## South West Rocks & Around

☎ 02 / pop 6000

Jutting into the sea on a hooked headland, South West Rocks is off the highway and the tourist trail. Crass commercial development has been capped in the rising folds of eucalypts and endless shoreline, and the housing boom is relegated to newer fringes. It's a great place to hunker down for a few days, and the spectacular beach here is one of the few places on the east coast where you can watch the sunset over the water.

The area west of the Pacific Hwy is a rich river flatland lined with dense vegetation, appealing old farmhouses and vintage shacks built on stilts. To fully appreciate the drive, leave the Pacific Hwy at Seven Oaks and take the 22km sinuous road along the Macleay River.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The area is great for divers, especially **Fish Rock Cave**, south of Smoky Cape. **South West Rocks Dive Centre** (☎ 6566 6474; 5/98 Gregory St) and **Fish Rock Dive Centre** (☎ 6566 6614; www.fishrock.com.au; 134 Gregory St) both offer two dives for around \$120.

Imposing and profoundly historic, Trial Bay occupies the west headland of the town and the **Trial Bay Gaol** (☎ 6566 6168; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) dominates the area. Pity (or perhaps envy) the wretched souls incarcerated here during the 19th century; they had to endure breathtaking views of the ocean, forests and freedom. Actually it's been mostly unoccupied, aside from a brief interlude in WWII when it housed Germans. Today it's a worthwhile museum.

The **Arakoon State Recreation Area** is behind the gaol, and the camp sites are basic but picturesque. Great food and views are on offer at the **kiosk** (☎ 6566 7100; Trial Bay; mains \$15; ☎ breakfast & lunch). From South West Rocks it's a pleasant walk to Trial Bay along the beach: look out for the **love shack**, formerly a fisherman's abode, about halfway between the two.

Nine kilometres southeast of South West Rocks, the **Smoky Cape Lighthouse** is a landmark that shouldn't be missed, perched high above the ocean on a bracingly breezy cape.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Horseshoe Bay Beach Park** (☎ 6566 6370; www.horsehoebaypark.com.au; Livingstone St; unpowered sites/cabins \$26/70) Planted a hop and a skip from the main

street and right on sheltered Town Beach, the 82 sites and 12 cabins at this fine caravan park are in understandably high demand during the summer holidays.

**Heritage** (☎ 6566 6625; www.heritageguesthouse.com.au; 21-23 Livingstone St; d incl breakfast from \$130; ☎) This renovated 1880s house has lovely, old-fashioned rooms, some with spas. Choose from the simpler rooms downstairs or the more lavish versions upstairs with ocean views.

**Rock Pool Motor Inn** (☎ 1800 180 133; www.rockpoolmotorinn.com.au; 45 McIntyre St; r from \$135; ☎) 'Motor Inn' usually summons visions of a tired structure with dated rooms, but this is actually a pleasant, four-star hotel. Fresh rooms contain contemporary colours, cable TV, kitchenettes and plush little bathrooms.

**Gepys** (☎ 6566 6169; cnr Livingstone & Memorial Sts; mains \$20; ☎ dinner) This cosmopolitan restaurant sizzles up Mod Italian with a splash of Mod Oz and a dash of Mod Asian; tuck into sashimi of yellowfin tuna with wasabi mayo or mud crab cooked in Singapore chilli. There's live jazz and blues on Wednesday night.

The **Riverside Tavern** (☎ 6566 5700; 92 New Entrance Rd; mains \$15-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) and **Seabreeze Hotel** (☎ 6566 6909; Livingstone St; mains \$8-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) both serve scrubbed-up pub nosh on pleasant decks.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Cavanaghs** (☎ 6562 7800) does two runs daily to and from Kempsey, leaving from the town bus stop at Horseshoe Bay.

### Nambucca Heads

☎ 02 / pop 8000

Spacious, sleepy and unspoilt, Nambucca Heads is strewn over a dramatically curling headland where estuaries from the Nambucca River interlace. It has beautiful buttery beaches and lucent water.

The Nambucca (which means 'many bents') Valley was occupied solely by the Gumbainggir people until European timber cutters arrived in the 1840s. There are still strong Aboriginal communities in Nambucca Heads and up the valley in Bowraville.

The very helpful **Nambucca Heads visitor centre** (☎ 6568 6954; cnr Riverside Dr & Pacific Hwy) doubles as the main bus terminal and has a nice spot on the estuary.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Of the numerous lookouts, **Captain Cook Lookout**, with its 180-degree vista best exploits the staggering views.

The only patrolled beach in town is **Main Beach**. **Beilby's** and **Shelly Beaches** are just to the south, closer to the river mouth – where the best surf is – and can be reached by going past the Captain Cook Lookout.

For boating enthusiasts, **Beachcomber Marine** (☎ 6568 6432; Riverside Dr) rents various vessels by the hour or day – call for rates.

The **V-Wall** is a clever snapshot of life; graffitied memoirs from newlyweds, newly borns and travellers who have left their colourful mark. For art of a similar genre, the **Mosaic Wall** (Ridge St) in the town centre was created by a local artist using materials such as tiles and broken crockery.

Worth a visit is the **Headland Historical Museum** (☎ 6568 6380; Main Beach; adult/child \$2/50c; ☎ 2-4pm Wed, Sat & Sun) with local-history exhibits, including a collection of over 1000 photos.

### SLEEPING

**Beilby's Beach House** (☎ 6568 6466; www.beilbys.com.au; 1 Ocean St; r incl breakfast \$70-110; ☎) The owners here speak English, French and German, but even if you don't want to test your linguistic mettle it's worth staying for the comfortable rooms. It's right near the beach, and a buffet breakfast is included in the tariff. Young takers welcome.

**Miramar Motel** (☎ 6568 7899; 1 Nelson St; s/d \$80/85; ☎) Above a plunging valley, this motel has breezy, generous rooms with leafy outlooks. It's clean, quiet and comfy.

**Nambucca Riverview Lodge** (☎ 6568 6386; www.here.com.au/riverview; 4 Wellington Dr; s/d \$90/115; ☎) What a humble moniker for Nambucca's oldest pub. Built in 1887, this double-decker hotel has eight unique rooms, all with balconies and views. Each is stuffed with charming furniture, plus TV, DVD, VCR and lounge.

**Headland Holiday Village** (☎ 6568 6547; www.headlandtouristpark.com.au; Liston St; unpowered sites/cabins \$19/85) Literally on the peak of the headland, this grassy knoll has an enviable position and infinite ocean vistas. It has clean and orderly facilities and decent cabins.

### EATING

**Starfish Café** (☎ 6569 4422; 5 Mann St; mains \$14-28) Starfish's modern menu of seafood, steaks and fusion specials complements the

gorgeous views from the back veranda. Live music occasionally tops the act.

**Blewater Brasserie** (☎ 6568 6394; V-Wall Tavern; Wellington Dr; mains \$18; ☎ lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sat & Sun) A legion of outdoor tables on the wide balcony at this tavern makes for long, easy boozy lunches and balmy dinners. There are salads, steaks and seafood on the menu, it's family friendly, and mums eat free every Monday.

**Fishbites Restaurant & Takeaway** (☎ 6569 4444; 1 Wellington Dr; mains \$23; ☎ lunch Tue, Fri & Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) This ambient, waterfront restaurant infuses local seafood with Asian flavours, like king-prawn tails in coriander batter. The attached takeaway serves fresh and unfussy fish and chips.

**On the Edge Restaurant** (☎ 6569 4494; Headland Dr; mains \$25; ☎ dinner Wed-Sat, brunch Sun) Hidden behind a simple frontage, this outstanding restaurant offers a powwow of full-bodied ingredients (try bacon-wrapped eye fillet with parsnip pudding), all served to candlelit tables.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nearly all southbound buses stop outside the visitor centre, northbound ones at the shopping centre nearby. **Keans** (☎ 6543 1322) runs three times a week to Tamworth (\$65). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) and **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) charge around \$70 to both Sydney and Byron Bay.

The train station is about 3km out of town. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 23) has trains to Coffs Harbour (\$4, 40 minutes) and Sydney (\$55, eight hours).

### Urunga & Mylestom

☎ 02 / pop 2380

About halfway between Nambucca Heads and Coffs Harbour, these unassuming towns are comely family retreats with coastal and river beaches, good fishing, and unaffected charm.

In Urunga, the **Bellingen Shire visitor centre** (☎ 6655 5711; Pacific Hwy) has the low-down on accommodation and activities, and you can set up camp at **Urunga Heads Holiday Park** (☎ 6655 6355; Morgo St; unpowered sites/cabins \$20/50; ☎), right next to the Urunga Lagoon in the centre of town.

In Mylestom, **North Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 6655 4250; Beach Pde; unpowered sites/cabins from \$20/40) is a family affair with clean facilities.



Near Myleston and just south of the Raleigh Bridge, **Raleigh Winery** (☎ 6655 4388; www.raleighwines.com; 36 Queen St, Raleigh; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) produces good dry whites, rosés and liqueurs.

## COFFS HARBOUR

☎ 02 / pop 68,400

Leaning gum trees dominate Coffs' skyline, and the city nestles delicately at their base. Hugely popular with families, owing to a string of fabulous beaches, Coffs Harbour has been working hard to tart up its image. Consequently, it has a good stab at appealing to everyone and settles successfully on the 'middle-Australian' market. Attractions swing heavily in favour of water-based fun, action sports, unabashed kitsch, and encounters with soft, fuzzy wildlife.

According to one website, the CSIRO has somehow scientifically declared Coffs Harbour's climate the best in Australia. No arguments here.

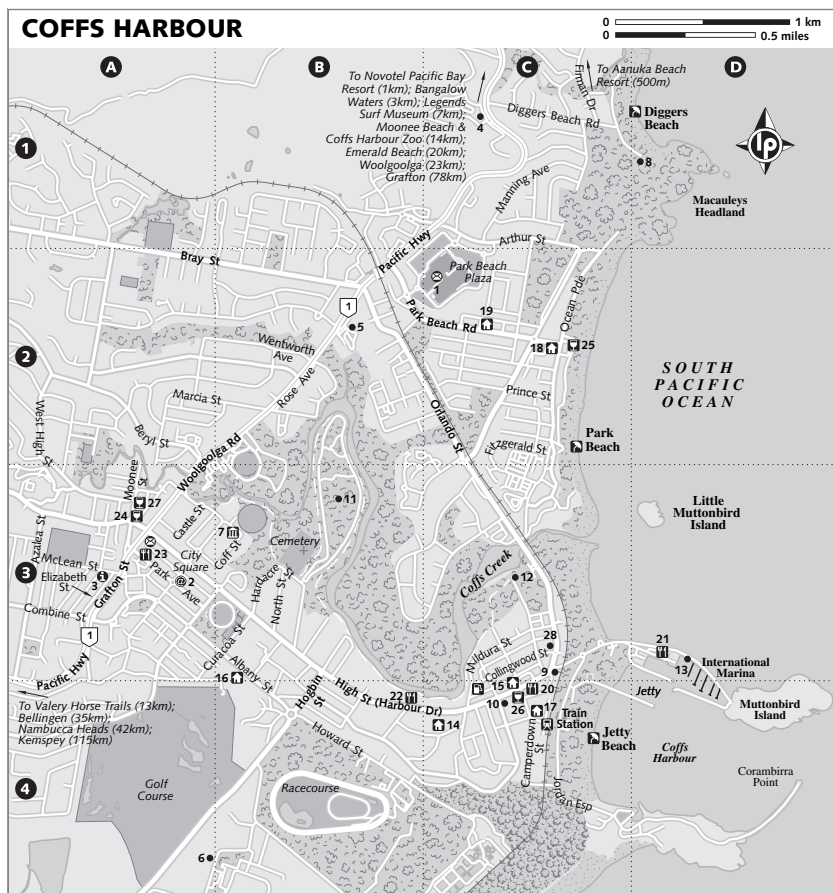
## Orientation

The town is split into three areas: the jetty (which isn't on the water), the town centre and beaches. The Pacific Hwy turns into Grafton St and then Woolgoolga Rd on its run north through town.

## Information

**Jetty Village Internet Shop** (☎ 6651 9155; Jetty Village, Harbour Dr; per hr \$6; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun) Internet access.

**Main post office** (Park Beach Plaza shopping centre)



**Planet Games** (☎ 6652 5188; Max Murray Mall, 20 Gordon St; per hr \$6; ☎ 10am-7pm) Internet access.

**Visitor centre** (☎ 1300 369 070, 6652 1522; www.coffscost.com.au; Pacific Hwy) Comprehensive information.

## Sights

Welcome to 'Bananas 101'. Lesson 1: as Monty Python was the first to discover, the earth is banana-shaped. Lesson 2: banana oil is actually made from petroleum. Lesson 3: bananas are, in fact, herbs. Lesson 4: former prime minister Paul Keating envisaged Australia as a 'banana republic'. Lesson 5: Coffs Harbour boasts a ferrous-concrete **Big Banana** (☎ 6652 4355; www.bigbanana.com; Pacific Hwy; ☎ 9am-4:30pm) that's hailed by many as a national icon. The adjoining park offers ice skating (\$12, without bananas) or tobogganing (\$5, not on a banana) among other attractions. Kids will love it, banana freaks will make a beeline for the over-stuffed gift store, while cynics and the easily bored will make like a banana and split. This joint, built in 1964, actually started the craze for 'Big Things' in Australia (just so you know who to blame or praise).

Clumps of indigenous scrub and rainforest mingle with foreign foliage at the **North Coast Botanic Gardens** (☎ 6648 4188; Hardacre St; entry by donation; ☎ 9am-5pm), which hugs a curve of Coffs Creek. Paths crisscross beneath the lush canopy, kookaburras laugh from up high, and there is a vast grassy lawn just begging for frisbee action. Passing by the entrance is the 6km **Coffs Creek Habitat Walk**, a gravel track utilised by dog-walkers and joggers. It starts opposite the council chambers on Coff St and finishes near the sea and provides the perfect opportunity to do as the locals do.

At the **Pet Porpoise Pool** (☎ 6652 2164; Orlando St; adult/child \$25/13; ☎ 9am-4pm), dolphins, penguins and sea lions all interact with the public during acrobatic shows at 10am and 1pm. It's a hit with all ages.

**Coffs Harbour Zoo** (☎ 6656 1330; Pacific Hwy; adult/child/family \$16/8/40; ☎ 9:30am-4pm) has koalas, pythons and echidnas on display. As far as zoos go, this one's pretty good.

The harbour's northern breakwall runs out onto **Muttonbird Island**, named for the more than 12,000 pairs of birds who migrate here from late August to early April, with cute offspring visible in December and January. It marks the southern boundary of the **Solitary Islands Marine Park**, where warm tropical currents meet temperate southern currents, attracting unusual varieties of fish and divers (look out for extremely rough conditions).

At the **Legends Surf Museum** (☎ 6653 6536; Pacific Hwy; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 10am-4pm), over 160 boards are on display as well as hundreds of surfing photos. It's 100m off the Pacific Hwy 10km north of Coffs; look for signs.

**Clog Barn** (☎ 6652 4633; www.clogbiz.com; 215 Pacific Hwy; adult/child \$5/4; ☎ 7:30am-5pm) is a bizarre miniature Dutch village with windmills, relentless polka music, and a clog barn with a ridiculously large range of collectable spoons. It makes the Big Banana look sophisticated. Kids will like it, adults will be bamboozled.

## BEACHES

Sweeping **Park Beach** attracts plenty of swell along with punters and lifeguards from October to April. **Jetty Beach** is just south and a safer option. **Diggers Beach** – to the north – is partly nudist and sensational (for the surf) and **Macauleys Headland** also offers good surf. **Moonee Beach** lies 14km further north and **Emerald Beach** is a further 6km.

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**DETOUR: THE PUB WITH NO BEER**

In 1957 Slim Dusty recorded a song that became a huge hit in England and the biggest-selling single in Australia, 'The Pub with No Beer'. This jaunty ditty concerns the Cosmopolitan – a pub in Taylors Arm, 25km west of Macksville – that somehow missed out on its quota of beer. The lyric relates how this 'dry spell' caused big men to cry, wild animals to howl and women to look on in bemusement.

Now officially known as the **Pub with No Beer** (☎ 02-6564 2100; Taylors Arm Rd; ☹ noon-late), the Cosmopolitan has since done everything possible to propagate its fame, with scores of billboards and countless brochures along the coast trumpeting this unlikely attraction. The pub does have beer, of course, as well as meals and Dusty souvenirs.

**GALLERIES**

The small but first-rate **Coffs Harbour City Gallery** (☎ 6648 4861; cnr Coff & Duke Sts; ☹ 10am-4pm Wed-Sat) embraces the work of regional artists as well as contemporary international pieces. The curatorship is thoughtful and doesn't shy from social themes.

**Activities**

**Valery Horse Trails** (☎ 6653 4301; www.valerytrails.com.au; 758 Valery Rd, Valery; 2hr ride \$45), has 60 'well disciplined horses' and plenty of acreage to explore the surrounding hills.

**Liquid Assets** (☎ 6658 0850; www.surfracting.com; 38 Harbour Dr; half-/full day per person from \$40/125) keeps thrill junkies giddy with surf or white-water rafting, river kayaking, and platypus spotting on the Nymboida River.

**Coffs City Skydivers** (☎ 6653 2067; www.coffscentral.dnet.tv/CoffsCitySkyDivers; Coffs Harbour airport; tandem jump \$320) obliges all urges to fling yourself from a plane.

More active options:

**East Coast Surf School** (☎ 6651 5515; www.eastcoastsurfschool.com.au; Diggers Beach; 2hr lesson per person from \$50) Adults' and kids' surf camps.

**Jetty Dive Centre** (☎ 6651 1611; www.jettydive.com.au; 398 Harbour Dr) PADI courses from \$215.

**Tours**

**Mountain Trails** (☎ 6658 3333; tours per person from \$65) Award-winning ecofriendly 4WD tours. A reader fave.

**Spirit of Coffs Harbour Cruises** (☎ 6650 0155; www.spiritofcoffs.com.au; International Marina; 2hr tours per person \$49) Whale watching.

**Festivals & Events**

**Gold Cup** (☎ 6652 1488) Early August. Coffs' premier horse race.

**Coffs Harbour International Buskers' Festival** (www.coffsharbourbuskers.com) Late September and not to be missed. Tattooed men balance precariously on a

unicycle while juggling bearded ladies and chainsaws with one hand and nonchalantly eating an apple and directing traffic with the other.

**Coffs Harbour Food & Wine Festival** Last weekend in October.

**Pittwater to Coffs Yacht Race** New Year. Starts in Sydney and finishes here.

**Sleeping**

**Pacific Property & Management** (☎ 1800 658 569; 6652 1466; www.coffsholidayrentals.com.au; 101 Park Beach Rd) has holiday-rental listings.

**BUDGET**

**Aussitel Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 1800 330 335, 6651 1871; www.aussitel.com; 312 Harbour Dr; dm/d \$22/60; ☹ ☹) This capacious brick house encloses a relaxed ambience, homely dorms and a shady courtyard. By night it brews a party atmosphere. Diving is offered (PADI courses from \$245), as are kayaking, skydiving and rafting.

**Coffs Harbour YHA** (☎ 6652 6462; www.yha.com.au; 51 Collingwood St; dm/d from \$24/70; ☹ ☹) Kudos to this hostel – it's a cut above. The staff are like family, dorms and en-suite doubles are spacious and modern, and the TV lounge and kitchen are immaculate. You can hire surf boards and bikes as well.

**Ocean Palms Motel** (☎ 6652 1264; www.oceanpalmsmotel.com.au; cnr Ocean Pde & Park Beach Rd; s/d \$65/70; ☹) Behind a high brush fence and towering palms, this cheerful motel has quiet rooms with kitchenettes and glass sliding doors. The central lawn and pool are family friendly.

**MIDRANGE**

**Caribbean Motel** (☎ 6652 1500; caribbean@stayincoffs.com.au; 353 High St; d \$90-200, f \$130-220; ☹ ☹) Close to the jetty and the marina, this motel complex has modern rooms, some with balconies or spas, plus great-value one-bedroom suites

with kitchenettes. All have enough space to swing numerous bunches of bananas.

**Bangalow Waters** (☎ 6653 7999; www.bangalowwaters.com.au; 95 James Small Dr, Korora; apt from \$130; ☹ ☹) The 12 mock-Balinese *bure* (bungalows) at this private retreat overlook a lagoon and have atmospheric interiors, two bedrooms and full kitchens. Some also have spas. Week-long stays attract significant discounts.

**Observatory Holiday Apartments** (☎ 1300 302 776, 6650 0462; www.theobservatory.com.au; 30-36 Camperdown St; apt from \$140; ☹) Some have window spas with ocean views, some have balconies, and some sleep up to six, but all the apartments at this quiet, compact block are bright and airy with sunny decor.

**Aanuka Beach Resort** (☎ 6652 7555; www.aanuka.com.au; 11 Firman Dr; r \$170, apt incl breakfast from \$215; ☹ ☹) Planted in luscious foliage, this classy resort has excellent studios and apartments, all with spas and dishy interiors. It sits right on a quiet neck of Diggers Beach and has a restaurant and tennis courts.

**TOP END**

**Novotel Pacific Bay Resort** (☎ 1300 363 360, 6659 7000; cnr Pacific Hwy & Bay Dr; r \$180-230; ☹ ☹) The colossal Novotel sprawls its way around a nine-hole golf course, and its restaurant is so big there are palm trees on the inside. Rooms are suitably fabulous and facilities include a day spa and a kids' club.

**Eating**

The Jetty and Marina boast the best dining options and at night there's no point eating elsewhere; most of the CBD closes down around 6pm. Kitchens start closing around 8.30pm, so come early and make a reservation if you have your heart set on a particular place.

**JETTY**

**Crying Tiger** (☎ 6650 0195; 384 Harbour Dr; mains \$10-20; ☹ dinner) Swimming in ambience and fragrant smells, the Crying Tiger keeps inquisitive diners happy with red-duck curry and king prawns in lime leaf and coconut. You can turn the chilli gauge as high or low as you like.

**Vibes at the Jetty** (☎ 6651 1544; 382 Harbour Dr; mains \$15-25; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This trendy restaurant nails Mod Oz with salt and pepper squid with raspberry vinaigrette and double-roasted duck with cumin and orange cognac glaze. The back courtyard is bliss on balmy evenings.

**Mangrove Jacks** (☎ 6652 5517; The Promenade Centre, Harbour Dr; mains \$25; ☹ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Overlooking a quiet bend of Coffs Creek, this restaurant serves sultry dinners like lamb shanks slow cooked in shiraz, honey seeded mustard and sun-dried tomatoes. Brekkie and lunch are far more casual.

**MARINA**

**Fisherman's Co-op** (☎ 6652 2811; 69 Marina Dr; meals \$7-10) The place to head for grilled or battered catch of the day in a cardboard box. Ask what's freshest – New Zealand 'fish' and southern seafood are sometimes served. You can also buy the goods uncooked.

**Tide & Pilot** (☎ 6651 6888; Marina Dr; mains café \$6-12, restaurant \$20-30) This cosmopolitan institution sizzles the who's who of the deep with finesse – herb and goat cheese-crusting swordfish on roast garlic for example. The casual 'lower deck' specialises in unfussy fish and chips.

**CITY CENTRE**

**That Fabulous Delicatessen & Café** (☎ 6652 5855; City Sq; mains \$8; ☹ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Yes, actually it is all fabulous at this European-style deli. Nibble on *dolmades*, dips and gourmet cheeses, or tuck into Turkish rolls stuffed with chilli-blasted chicken (ouch!).

**Starfish Café** (☎ 6651 5005; City Sq; mains \$8-13; ☹ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) The coffee and people-watching are first class at this popular café. Fresh quiches, pastas and salads are changed daily, but they all take second billing to delectable burgers – get a pumpkin, basil, sun-dried tomato, char-grilled zucchini and hummus one intoya.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

See Thursday's edition of the *Coffs Harbour Advocate* for live-music listings.

**Plantation Hotel** (☎ 6652 3855; Pacific Hwy) Don't let the neon lights, mirrored walls and colourful wedge seating fool you, the Plantation is still a pub at heart, so beer, live rock and the occasional 'Miss Indy' quest are still mainstays. It's a good spot to meet the young and local drinking constituency...or Miss Indy.

**Hoey Moey Pub** (☎ 6852 3833; Ocean Pde) The kind of place that may leave you deaf in one ear and with a layer of stick from the carpet on your shoes, the Hoey Moey isn't too proud to turn thongs away. Pool comps, live music and terrifying karaoke sessions are nightly norms.



More pub sessions and live music:

**Pier Hotel** (☎ 6652 2110; cnr Hood & High Sts) Unrenovated; grizzly regulars and cover bands. Pure Australian.

**Coffs Hotel** (☎ 6652 3817; cnr Pacific Hwy & West High St) Bands, several bars, DJs and mad Friday nights.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13) fly to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. **Brindabella Airlines** (☎ 1300 668 824; www.brindabellaairlines.com.au) flies to/from Port Macquarie.

### BUS

Buses leave from the visitor centre.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) stop in Coffs; fares include Port Macquarie (\$45) and Byron Bay (\$55).

**Keans** (☎ 6543 1322) has two services a week to Bellingen (\$15), Dorrigo (\$19) and Armidale (\$25). **Busways** (☎ 6652 2744) has three buses daily to Bellingen (\$8). **Ryans Buses** (☎ 6652 3201) runs to Grafton (\$20) twice daily.

### TRAIN

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) trains head to Grafton, Sydney and Casino.

## Getting Around

Hostel shuttles meet all long-distance buses and trains.

**Coffs Bike Hire** (☎ 6652 5102; cnr Orlando & Collingwood Sts; per day \$25) rents mountain bikes.

The major car-rental companies have offices in town and/or at the airport. **Coffs District Taxi Network** (☎ 13 10 08) operates a 24-hour cab service.

## COFFS HARBOUR TO BYRON BAY

With a nice beach in a deep cove, **Woolgoolga** (also known as Woopi; population 3800) is a less-developed coastal town just north of Coffs, known for its surf-and-Sikh community.

As you drive by on the highway you'll notice the impressive **Guru Nanak Temple**, a Sikh *gurdwara* (place of worship). Don't confuse it with the **Raj Mahal**, a decrepit, Indian-influenced concrete extravaganza that has two giant elephant statues out the front; it's actually an emporium of sorts, with arts and crafts, clothes, and a restaurant.

If you drive straight through town up to the point, you'll get a magnificent view of the **Solitary Marine Reserve**.

About 5km south of Woolgoolga and signposted off the Pacific Highway, the small **Lake Russell Gallery** (☎ 02-6656 1092; www.lakerussellgallery.com.au; 12 Smiths Rd, Emerald Beach; ☎ 10am-5pm) exhibits work by local artists and doubles as a B&B, with two private and very indulgent air-con cottages (doubles including breakfast are \$250). Alternatively, the **Woolgoolga Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 02-6654 1373; Beach St; unpowered sites/cabins from \$35/60) right on the beach can't be beaten on position.

The **Maharaja Tandoori Indian Restaurant** (☎ 02-6654 1122; 10-12 River St; mains \$26) opposite the temple gets into the spirit of things with a suitably authentic curry. On the beachfront, **Bluebottles Brasserie** (☎ 02-6654 1962; cnr Wharf & Beach Sts; mains \$23; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) serves fine seafood and vegetarian gems and hosts live jazz on sultry summer afternoons.

**Red Rock** (population 290), a sleepy village with a beautiful inlet and gorgeous surrounds, is a site sacred to the Gunawarri people. Soak up the sun or catch a fish while camping at **Red Rock Caravan Park** (☎ 02-6649 2730; 1 Lawson St, Red Rock; sites/cabins from \$12/65).

The 20,000-hectare **Yuraygir National Park** covers the 60km stretch of coast north from Red Rock. The beaches are outstanding and there are some bushwalking paths where you can view endangered coastal emus.

Walkers can bush camp and there are basic camping areas (\$5 per person) at **Station Creek** in the southern section; at the **Boorkoom** and **Illaroo** rest areas in the central section; on the north bank of the Sandon River, and at **Red Cliff** (Map p191) at the Brooms Head end of the northern section. These are accessible by car; there is also a walk-in camp site in the northern section at Shelly Beach.

Nearby **Wooli** (population 600) hosts the **Australian Goanna Pulling Championships** (☎ 02-6649 7575) over Easter. Rather than ripping the eponymous animal to shreds, participants, squatting on all fours, attach leather harnesses to their heads and engage in cranial tug-of-war. This sport was all the rage in the 19th century, until it was replaced in popularity by sheep worrying and dunny dodging.

The **Solitary Islands Marine Park Resort** (☎ 1800 003 031, 02-6649 7519; North St; sites/cabins from \$21/70) here has a mouthful of a name and lovely cabins in a scrubby bush setting.

The **Solitary Islands Marine Park**, a group of five islands, is the meeting point of warm tropical currents and cooler southern currents, which

makes for a wonderful combination of corals, reef fish and seaweeds.

## Grafton

☎ 02 / pop 18,500

Nestled into a quiet bend of the Clarence River, Grafton is a charming grid of wide streets awash with hanging evergreens, grand pubs and splendid old houses. Heritage buildings line the avenues, and an aimless wander is a delight in itself. In late October the town bursts with the amethyst litter of hundreds of Brazilian jacarandas.

The helpful **Clarence River visitor centre** (☎ 6642 4677; www.clarence tourism.com; cnr Spring & Charles Sts) is south of town. There's also an **NPWS office** (☎ 6641 1500; Level 3, 49 Victoria St).

There's an interesting arts scene, which manifests itself in the **Grafton Artsfest** (www.artsfestgrafton.com), held twice yearly with workshops and exhibitions.

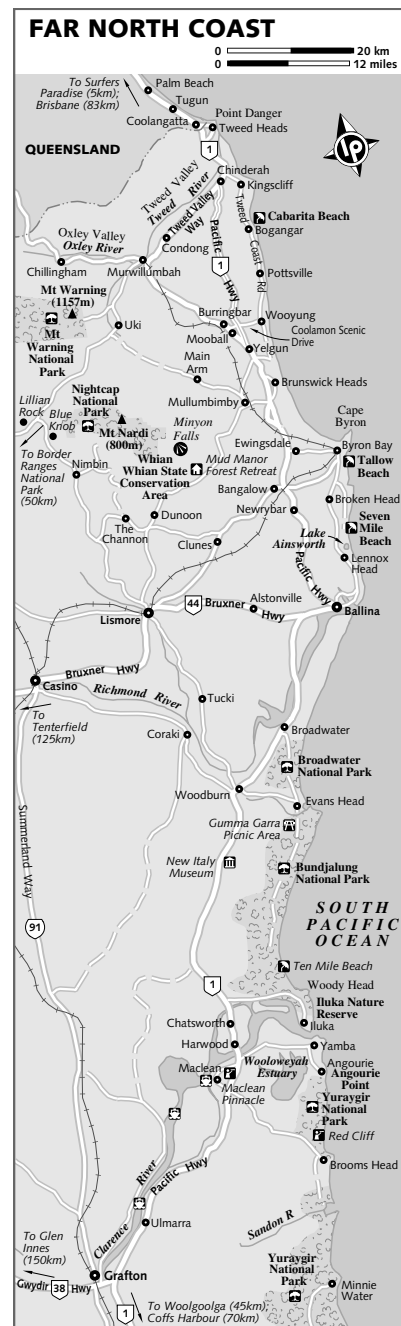
Victoria St is the town's historical focal point, providing fascinating glimpses of 19th-century architecture, including the **courthouse** (1862), the **Roches Family Hotel** (1870), and the **Anglican Cathedral** (1884).

The **Grafton Regional Gallery** (☎ 6642 3177; 58 Fitzroy St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) hosts quality works from galleries around NSW. Nearby, **Schaeffer House** (1903) is where you'll find the **Clarence River Historical Society** (☎ 6642 5212; 190 Fitzroy St; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 1-4pm Tue-Thu & Sun), which claims to have the largest public showing of Wedgwood in NSW.

**Susan Island**, in the middle of the river, is home to the biggest fruit-bat colony in the southern hemisphere. Their evening departure is a spectacular summer sight. Access to the river is by boat or canoe; you can hire a tinny from **Seelands Boat Hire** (☎ 6644 9381; 67 Old Punt Rd; per day \$60), 6km north of Grafton, or just sit on the banks and marvel.

Atmospheric accommodation in Grafton includes the historic **Roches Family Hotel** (☎ 6644 2866; www.roches.com.au; 85 Victoria St; s/d \$30/40), with spruced-up pub rooms, and **Grafton Meadow B&B** (☎ 6643 2331; www.graftonmeadow.com; 95 Crown St; s/d incl breakfast \$70/85), a modern homestead with horse paddocks to one side and lovely rooms.

Tucked behind a beautiful sandstone building, the **Courtyard Café** (☎ 6642 6644; 120 Fitzroy St; mains \$9-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) whips up innovative delights like seared lemon prawns with mint and ginger yogurt.



**Busways** (☎ 6642 2954) has several daily services to Yamba. **Ryans Buses** (☎ 6652 3201) has four buses daily to Coffs Harbour. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) stop at the train station and travel to Byron Bay (\$45) and Coffs Harbour (\$35).

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has trains to Sydney and Casino and buses to Coffs Harbour (\$13).

### Around Grafton

There's an interesting route from Grafton to Armidale via Nymboida and Ebor, passing turn-offs to Dorrigo and the New England and Cathedral Rock National Parks. Heading west to Glen Innes, the Gwydir Hwy passes through the superb Washpool and Gibraltar Range National Parks.

To the north, **Maclean** (population 3250) is a picturesque little town that takes its Scottish heritage seriously. It sweeps alongside a lazy sprawl of the delta in vaguely Celtic fashion and, true enough, with your Glenmorangie goggles (firmly) fastened, you might mistake the Clarence River for a highland loch.

The **Lower Clarence visitor centre** (☎ 02-6645 4121; Ferry Park, Pacific Hwy, Maclean), at the edge of town, can help with accommodation.

Maclean calls itself the 'Scottish Town in Australia' and suitably boasts a Scots information and souvenir shop. Haggis is available; street signs are bilingual (Gaelic and English); and there's a **Highland Gathering** every Easter, a **Scots Debutante Ball** every September and an **International Tartan Day** every July. Down the main street, there are also around 200 power poles painted with the tartans of various clans.

The locals are particularly friendly and love to tell the story of why the main street has a big curve in it (they reckon one of the first settlers, a stubborn Scot, refused to get out of the way of development, forcing the roadworks to go around him). They also love to tell the story of the cows that got drunk from drinking the water next to a leaking brewery.

The small but innovative **Witzig Gallery** (☎ 02-6645 2804; 80 River St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm) here is decidedly un-Scottish and specialises in contemporary works from Papua New Guinea and Australian surf art.

### Angourie to Ballina

**Angourie Point** is one of the coast's top spots for experienced surfers (the type who were born on a board, wear helmets and leap off

rocks) and has a spring-water quarry pool; good views beckon over the rocky shore from the small cliffs at the end of the road. Further north at the river mouth, east of the highway through cane fields and sprawling channels, the fishing town of **Yamba** (population 6500) has beaches on three fronts, a relaxed pace and a burgeoning café culture. Fishing rods in this town are a fifth appendage.

**Pacific Hotel** (☎ 02-6646 2466; 18 Pilot St; dm \$45, r with/without bath \$100/60) is a fabulous pub overlooking the ocean, with bright bunk rooms and handsome hotel rooms. Looking to indulge? **On the Rocks** (☎ 02-6646 1760; www.ontherocks.com.au; 6 Ocean St; r/apt 2 nights from \$370/400; ☎) offers genteel and romantic studios with million-dollar views that give any boutique Bondi abode a run for its money.

In laid-back surrounds, the **Caperberry Cafe** (☎ 02-6646 2322; 17 Yamba Rd; mains \$5-11; ☎ breakfast & lunch) serves heart-kicking coffee, a mean lamb burger and more Turkish toasties than the mother country.

A passenger-only ferry (adult/child \$5/3, four times daily) runs to Iluka, on the north bank of the Clarence River.

**Busways** (☎ 02-6642 2954) and **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32) buses go to Grafton (\$11), Lennox Head (\$14) and Byron Bay (\$15).

World Heritage-listed **Iluka Nature Reserve** is a short detour off the highway; it's the southern end of **Bundjalung National Park** (day-use fee per vehicle \$7). Created in 1980, the park is almost 4000 hectares of coastal land, with 30km of unspoilt beaches for surfing and swimming.

Stay at the Woody Head **picnic and camping area** (☎ 02-6646 6134; sites per person \$8, cabins \$55-77), which has rock pools. It's 6km north of Iluka.

No, it's not a mirage – the **New Italy Museum** (☎ 02-6682 2622; Pacific Hwy; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-3pm) actually exists. It's 19km north of the turn for Iluka and smack bang in the heart of Australiana. Here you'll find a folk museum devoted to Italy and a copy of Michelangelo's *David* that has suffered from serious fondling.

There's also an unusual exhibition that sheds light on this oasis, tracking the Marquis de Ray's ambitious plan to colonise the New Guinea island of New Ireland. Although the Marquis managed to exploit over 300 Italian sailors in the process, his plan was foiled when he was sent to a lunatic asylum. Many

of the sailors who survived settled around this area, and this compelling history was made into an opera, *The Mercenary*, in 2002, with music by Paul Grabowsky and a libretto by Janis Balodis.

There's also a **café** (☎ 9am-5pm) and an Aboriginal arts-and-crafts shop.

### Ballina

☎ 02 / pop 34,700

With Byron above and the idyllic fishing villages south of the Richmond River below, Ballina is planted somewhere between a commercial centre and a wannabe tourist lure. This is actually the town's saving grace, as it has maintained a coastal ambience without tarting itself up for the holiday bucks.

The **Ballina visitor centre** (☎ 6686 3484; cnr Las Balsas Plaza & River St) is at the eastern end of town. Sip a smoothie and surf the net at the **Ice Creamery Internet Café** (☎ 6686 5783; 178 River St; meals \$6-8; internet access per hr \$6 ☎ 8.30am-9pm).

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Behind the visitor centre, the **Naval & Maritime Museum** (☎ 6681 1002; Regatta Ave; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-4pm) has a remarkable collection of model ships including 2m replica aircraft carriers. There's also the remains of a balsawood raft that drifted across the Pacific from Ecuador as part of the Las Balsas expedition in 1973.

White and sandy, **Shelly Beach** is patrolled, and glassy **Shaws Bay Lagoon** is popular with families.

Just north of Ballina, the **Thursday Plantation** (☎ 1800 029 000; Pacific Hwy; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a tea-tree maze and specialises in high-quality therapeutic products.

The **Big Prawn** (Pacific Hwy) is beached unceremoniously next to a transit centre at the town's southern entry. Fabulously absurd, it exacts equal measures of fear and laughter. It could also be a pin-up for a campaign about the dangers of nuclear power.

Ballina is renowned for its great walking and bike tracks, so hiring a bike from **Sunrise Cycles** (☎ 6686 6322; Hogan St; per day \$20) or **Jack Ransom Cycles** (☎ 6686 3485; 16 Cherry St; per day \$17) is rewarding.

**Richmond River Cruises** (☎ 6687 5688; www.ballinaweb.com/rrcruises; Regatta Ave; 2hr tour adult/child \$24/10; ☎ 10am & 2pm Wed, 2pm Sun) is the most established cruise service and is wheelchair friendly.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Ballina Travellers Lodge YHA** (☎ 6686 6737; 36-38 Tamar St; www.yha.com.au; dm \$22, d \$55-65; ☎) In a quiet residential street, this lodge has a super-tidy setup with modern and airy motel rooms and an excellent hostel wing. Bikes and body boards can be hired.

**Ballina Lakeside Holiday Resort** (☎ 1800 888 268, 6686 8755; www.ballinalakeside.com.au; Fenwick Dr; sites/cabins from \$27/70; ☎) None-too-subtly disguised as a suburb, this park has roads, sparkling cabins and amenities, and a lakeside location. It *doesn't* have much privacy, particularly during school holidays.

**Ballina Heritage Inn** (☎ 6686 0505; www.ballinaheritageinn.com.au; 229 River St; s/d \$100/120; ☎) In the centre of town, this tidy inn has neat, bright and very comfortable rooms that are a significant leap in quality from the nearby motels.

**Ballina Manor** (☎ 6681 5888; www.ballinamanor.com.au; 25 Norton St; r from \$190; ☎) Ballina's best is a heritage-listed building filled to the hilt with restored 1920s furnishings, carpets and curtains. It's been beautifully maintained and, though antique in design, all rooms are indulgent.

**Shelly's on the Beach** (☎ 6686 9844; Shelly Beach Rd; mains \$15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This casual café dishes up sensational food and superb views. The bacon-and-egg-and-paper brigade fills the tables early on weekend mornings, but it's worth losing a sleep-in for.

**Wicked** (☎ 6686 2564; 37 Cherry St; mains \$24-30; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) Wicked focuses firmly on seafood and delivers it with international flair; think Mozambique *peri-peri* seafood, Boston clam chowder or Thai fish cakes.

Also available:

**Brundah** (☎ 6686 8166; www.babs.com.au/brundah; 37 Norton St; s/d incl breakfast \$135/185; ☎) Comely B&B with gorgeous en-suite rooms.

**Pelican 181** (☎ 6686 9181; 12-24 Fawcett St; mains \$10-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Fresh-cooked fish and chips and overflowing prawn baguettes.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38) all fly to/from Sydney.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) stops at the Big Prawn and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) stops at the Ampol Pied Pier. Both head to Brisbane (\$40), Coffs Harbour (\$45) and Sydney (\$97).



**Blanch's Bus Service** (☎ 6686 2144) operates a service to Lennox Head, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay and Bangalow. All stop on Tamar St.

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) buses head to Evans Head, Lennox Head, and Lismore (all \$6).

If you're driving to Byron Bay, take the coast road through Lennox Head. It's shorter and much prettier than the highway.

## Lennox Head

☎ 02 / pop 4000

Lennox Head, home to picturesque coastline, is a low-key, laid-back haunt of locals and surfers. It's a relaxing alternative to well-touristed Byron and has some of the best surf on the coast, including long right-hander breaks.

**Lake Ainsworth**, a lagoon just back from the beach, is made brown by tannins from the tea trees along its banks, which also make swimming here beneficial to the skin. If the wind's up, **Wind & Water Action Sports** (☎ 6686 9555; www.windwater.net; 1hr windsurfing lesson \$70, 3hr kite surfing lesson \$180) has good equipment to get active on.

For holiday rentals contact the **Professionals** (☎ 6687 7579; www.professionals.com.au/lennoxhead; 66 Ballina St).

The YHA-affiliated **Lennox Head Beach House** (☎ 6687 7636; www.yha.com.au; 3 Ross St; dm/d \$28/70) has immaculate rooms and a great vibe. For \$5 you can use the boards, sailboards and bikes.

**Lake Ainsworth Caravan Park** (☎ 6687 7249; www.bsccp.com.au/lakeains; Pacific Pde; unpowered/powerd sites \$25/30, cabins from \$78) sits on flat, green grass just opposite the beach.

The **Red Rock Café** (☎ 6687 4744; 3/60 Ballina St; mains \$10; ☎ breakfast & lunch; ☎ ) whips up a mean burger with homemade relish and tangy salads. **Café de Mer** (☎ 6687 7132; Ballina St; mains \$7-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) also serves good café fare.

**Ruby's by the Sea** (☎ 6687 5769; 17-19 Pacific Pde; mains bistro \$18, restaurant \$25; ☎ lunch & dinner) within the Lennox Point Hotel cooks up fantastic seafood like barbecued tiger prawn Caesar salad in the bistro or even finer fare like char-grilled cuttlefish with saffron in the balcony restaurant.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) stops here on request; pick up is from the CountryLink Coach Stop. **Blanch's Bus Service** (☎ 6686 2144) has services to Ballina, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby on a freedom pass (per day \$12).

## BYRON BAY

☎ 02 / pop 9000

OK, you've made it to the promised land. God's own earth, Byron is the region's most

celebrated haunt, a gorgeous town where the high green moguls of the northern rivers hinterland meet the coast in spectacular fashion. The aesthetics spin the mind, but it's the town's escapism that has become the honey to roving bees. Deflated swarms of them tumble in to get drunk on the trademark New Age, laid-back, organic-fusion lifestyle. They stay for a weekend, a week or for good (often in that order) to tune in, tune out, tone up and tan up.

Utopian visions aside, Byron is no secret. When it's good, it's unsurpassed: long days, balmy weather, endless beaches, delightful accommodation, delectable food, delirious nightlife and an ambling milieu. But when it's bad, let's just say it's very crowded. Despite this, the charisma and hospitality of the local community really make Byron what it is – an asset worth bottling in its own right.

## Information

**Accommodation booking office** (☎ 6680 8666; www.byronbayaccom.net) Run by the visitor centre.

**Backpackers World** (☎ 6685 8858; www.backpackersworld.com.au; Shop 6, 75 Jonson St) Info and tours for budget travellers.

**Byron Books** (☎ 6680 9717; 3/1 Marvell St) Byron's best bookshop.

**Byron Bus & Backpacker Centre** (☎ 6685 5517; 84 Jonson St) Low-down on transport, accommodation and activities.

**Global Gossip** (☎ 6680 9140; 84 Jonson St; per hr \$6) Internet access.

**Star Internet** (☎ 6680 8199; Suite 1, 9 Fletcher St; ☎ 9am-9pm; per hr \$5) Internet access.

**Visitor centre** (☎ 6680 9271; 80 Jonson St) A wealth of information.

## Sights

### CAPE BYRON

The grandfather of the 'mad, bad and dangerous to know' poet Lord Byron was a renowned navigator in the 1760s, and Captain Cook named this spot, Australia's most easterly, after him. (A star-struck clerk in Sydney thought the grandson was the one being honoured, and named the streets – and the town – after poets: Keats, Jonson, Shelley.)

The views from the summit are spectacular, particularly if you've just burnt breakfast off on the climbing track from Clarkes Beach. Ribboning around the headland, it dips and (mostly) soars its way to the lighthouse. The surrounding ocean also jumps to the tune of

dolphins and migrating humpback whales in June and July. Keep your peepers especially peeled: there's a whale they call Migaloo that's been known to be fond of Byron waters. He's the only known all-white humpback whale in the world.

Towering over all is the 1901 **lighthouse** (☎ 6685 6585; Lighthouse Rd; ☎ 8am-sunset), Australia's most easterly and most powerful lighthouse. The walking track descends around the northeastern side of the cape, delving into **Cape Byron State Conservation Park**, where you'll stumble across bush turkeys and wallabies. En route, photo-hungry walkers can work the lens at **Captain Cook Lookout**. The 4km round-trip track winds up at Lighthouse Rd. Be wary of hoofing it back to town after dark: the terrain is isolated and you'll be dodging unseen cars on the narrow roads. You can also drive right up to the lighthouse and pay \$6 for the privilege of parking (or nothing at all if you park 300m below).

## BEACHES

**Main Beach**, immediately in front of town, is terrific for people watching and swimming. At the western edge of town, **Belongil Beach** is clothing optional. **Clarkes Beach**, at the eastern end of Main Beach, is good for surfing, but the best surf is at the next few beaches: the **Pass**, **Watego's** and **Little Watego's**.

**Tallow Beach** is an amazing stretch that extends 7km south of Cape Byron to a rockier patch around **Broken Head**, where a succession of small beaches dot the coast before opening onto **Seven Mile Beach**, which goes all the way to Lennox Head.

The suburb of **Suffolk Park** (with more good surf, particularly in winter) starts 3km south of town.

**Kings Beach**, a popular gay beach, is just off Seven Mile Beach Rd near the Broken Head Holiday Park.

## Activities

Most activity operators offer free pick-up from local accommodation. It's cheapest to book through hostels.

**Kidz Klub** (☎ 0429-770 147; www.kidzklub.com.au) offers excellent activities, workshops and school-holiday programs for kids aged four and up, plus babysitting for all little tackers. Rates are variable.

Once upon a time you wanted to run away and join the circus. Then you figured it was

easier to just run away. But, as luck would have it, you can still show the folks you were serious by taking trapeze classes with **Circus Arts** (☎ 6685 6566; www.circusarts.com.au; 17 Centennial Circuit), about 2km west of town.

## ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Byron is alternative-therapy heartland. The *Body & Soul* guide, available from the visitor centre, is a handy guide to the host of therapies on offer.

**Ambaji** (☎ 6685 6620; www.ambaji.com.au; 6 Marvell St; treatments from \$65; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) Craniosacral balancing, aqua balance healing and more.

**Byron Ayurveda Centre** (☎ 6632 2244; www.ayurvedahouse.com.au; Shop 6, Middleton St; treatments from \$45; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Indian medicinal therapies.

**Buddha Gardens** (☎ 6680 7844; www.buddha gardens.com; 21 Gordon St, Arts Factory Village; treatments from \$80; ☎ 10am-6pm) Balinese-style day spa.

**Relax Haven** (☎ 6685 8304; Belongil Beachouse, Childe St; treatments from \$60; ☎ 10am-8pm) Flotation tanks.

**Shambala** (☎ 6680 7791; www.shambala.net.au; 4 Carlyle St; treatments from \$35; ☎ 9am-7pm) Massage, reflexology, acupuncture and more.

## DIVING & SNORKELLING

About 3km offshore, Julian Rocks Marine Reserve blends cold southerly and warm northerly currents, attracting a profusion of marine species and divers alike.

Reputable diving companies:

**Dive Byron Bay** (☎ 1800 243 483, 6685 8333; www.byronbaydivecentre.com.au; 9 Marvell St; PADI courses from \$350, snorkelling \$50)

**Sundive** (☎ 1800 008 755; www.sundive.com.au; Middleton St; PADI courses from \$350, snorkelling \$45)

## FLYING

**Byron Airwaves** (☎ 6629 0354; www.byronair.cjb.net) Tandem hang-gliding (\$110) and courses (from \$1050).

**Byron Bay Gliding** (☎ 6684 7572; www.byronbay gliding.com; Tyagarah Airport) Glider joy flights over the coast and hinterland for \$90 for 20 minutes.

**Skydive Byron Bay** (☎ 6684 1323; www.skydive byronbay.com; Tyagarah Airport) Tandem dives (\$275) and Australia's highest dive (14,000 feet; \$390).

## KAYAKING

Exhibitionist dolphins enhance scenic, half-day kayaking tours in and around Cape Byron Marine Park. Tours generally go for \$60 per person.

## BYRON BAY

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2 Byron Bay Writers Festival (see 5115)

3 Jim's Alternative Tours (see 7720)

4 Mountain Bike Tours (see 504)

5 East Coast International Blues & Roots Music Festival (see 8310)

6 Taste of Byron (see 8310)

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Beach Hotel.....(see 17)

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4 Mountain Bike Tours (see 504)

5 East Coast International Blues & Roots Music Festival (see 8310)

6 Taste of Byron (see 8310)

Cape Byron Kayaks (☎ 6685 4161)

Dolphin Kayaking (☎ 6685 8044; www.dolphinkayaking.com.au)

## SURFING

Byron Bay waves are often quite mellow. Most hostels provide free boards to guests.

**Blackdog Surfing** (☎ 6680 9828; www.blackdogsurfing.com; Shop 8, The Plaza, Jonson St; 3hr lesson \$60, 3 days \$135) Small-group lessons.

**Mojosurf Adventures** (☎ 1800 113 044; www.mojosurf.com.au; half-day lessons per person \$65) Highly recommended. There are also five-day, all-inclusive surf trips (per person \$635).

**Samudra** (☎ 6685 5600; www.samudra.com.au)

All-inclusive surf-and-yoga tours from \$630 per person for two days.

**Surfaris** (☎ 1800 634 951; www.surfaris.com) Five-day surf trips including camping and meals; Sydney–Byron Bay return trip \$549.

## Tours

The following offer small-group tours into the North Coast hinterland:

**Byron Bay Eco Tours** (☎ 6685 4030; www.byron-bay.com/ecotours; per person \$85) Excellent commentary.

**Jim's Alternative Tours** (☎ 6685 7720; www.jimsalternativetours.com; per person \$35) Entertaining tours (with soundtrack!) to Nimbin.

**Mountain Bike Tours** (☎ 1800 122 504, 0429-122 504; www.mountainbiketours.com.au; per person \$100) Environmentally friendly bike tours.

## Festivals &amp; Events

**East Coast International Blues & Roots Music Festival** (☎ 6685 8310; www.bluesfest.com.au)

Held over Easter, this international jam attracts high-calibre international performers and local heavyweights. Book early.

**Splendour in the Grass** (www.splendourinthegrass.com) Held in July, this indie music festival treats punters to funk, electronica, folk, rock, hip-hop and a host of other genres. Book early.

**Byron Bay Writers Festival** (☎ 6685 5115; www.byronbaywritersfestival.com.au) In late July/early August, this gathers together top-shelf writers and literary followers from across Australia.

**Taste of Byron** (www.atateofbyron.com) This celebration of produce from the Northern Rivers region rumbles the tummy in October.

## Sleeping

It's essential to book accommodation in advance for school holidays and summer, when rooms are full and tariffs increase by



around 30%. Useful contacts for holiday-house rental:

**Byron Bay Accommodation** (www.byron-bay.com/accommodation)

**LJ Hooker** (☎ 6685 7300; www.ljhooker.com; 4/31 Lawson St)

**Professionals** (☎ 6685 6552; www.byronbaypro.com.au; cnr Lawson & Fletcher Sts)

## BUDGET

**Main Beach Backpackers** (☎ 1800 150 233, 6685 8695; fax 6685 8609; cnr Lawson & Fletcher Sts; dm \$25, d \$55-60; ☑) It turns out size actually does matter. This small and personable hostel makes guests feel like more than a number with friendly staff, a sunny lounge, and dorms and doubles reminiscent of comfy bedrooms.

**Belongil Beachouse** (☎ 6685 7868; www.belongilbeachouse.com; 25 Childe St; dm/d from \$25/65; ☑) Tucked into a green pocket, this beachy warren has excellent self-contained cabins, clinically modern studio units and comfortable dorms. Pick of the bunch are the cosy, self-contained doubles.

**Cape Byron YHA** (☎ 1800 652 627; 6685 8788; www.yha.com.au; Cnr Byron & Middleton Sts; dm/d from \$26/70; ☑) This purpose-built hostel is one tidy ship and has five-bed, uncramped dorms with lockers and fans. The doubles and twins are also spacious, and one has an en suite. The kitchen and TV room are snug, but there's a sunny courtyard to compensate.

**Arts Factory Lodge** (☎ 6685 7709; www.artsfactory.com.au; Skinners Shoot Rd; dm/d from \$30/85; ☑) This celebrated complex embodies Byron at its alternative best. Guests nurture their inner hippie at didgeridoo, yoga and meditation workshops, and then bunk down in colourful six- to twelve-bed dorms. Couples can opt for 'cubes' (aptly titled) or pricier en-suite rooms.

Also recommended:

**Great Northern** (☎ 6685 6454; Jonson St; s/d \$55/65) Spartan rooms above this classic pub, where you could end up a groupie for the night.

**Clarkes Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 6685 6496; clarkes@bshp.com.au; unpowered sites/cabins from \$25/120) Tightly packed cabins and sites in a bush setting off Lighthouse Rd.

## MIDRANGE

**Amigos** (☎ 6680 8622; www.amigosbb.com; 32 Kingsley St; s/d from \$80/100) Soaked in south-of-the-border flavours, this cute B&B has three bedrooms with crisp white linen and South American

spreads. There's also a gorgeous cottage out the back with hammocks swinging nearby in the garden.

**Bamboo Cottage** (☎ 6685 5509; www.byron-bay.com/bamboocottage; 76 Butler St; s/d from \$90/118; ☑) Featuring global charm and wall hangings, Bamboo Cottage treats guests to enigmatic rooms with Asian overtones. Out the back is a semi-self-contained bungalow resembling the Taj's boudoir, complete with an elevated futon.

**Byron Bayside Motel** (☎ 6685 6004; www.byronbaysidemotel.com.au; 14 Middleton St; s/d \$110/115; ☑) So the interior aesthetics won't bowl you over (floral patterns and raw brick walls), but the spotless rooms have small kitchenettes and full laundries; for the central location, it's a steal.

**Oasis Resort** (☎ 1800 336 129, 6685 7390; www.byronbayoasisresort.com.au; 24 Scott St; apt from \$145; ☑) This compact resort is engulfed by palms and has sizable one- and two-bedroom apartments with big balconies. All units are immaculate and kitted out in cheery decor.

**Bay Beach Motel** (☎ 6685 6090; www.baybeachmotel.com.au; 32 Lawson St; r \$165-185; ☑) Have faith – 'motel' and 'dowdy' needn't be joined at the figurative hip. Standard motor-inn rooms here have been transformed into sharp and sassy bedrooms with sueded furniture, Asian-influenced bed spreads and contemporary bathrooms.

More midrangers:

**Wollongbar Motor Inn** (☎ 6685 8200; 19-21 Shirley St; r \$95-140; ☑) A fine motel with spotless rooms. Good disabled rooms.

**Byron Lakeside Holiday Apartments** (☎ 6680 9244; www.byronlakeside.com; 5 Old Bangalow Rd; r per 3-night stay from \$450; ☑) Stylish holiday village with superb apartments.

## TOP END

**Beach Hotel** (☎ 6685 6402; www.beachhotel.com.au; Bay St; r incl breakfast from \$250; ☑) This classy beach-front joint has 'Garden View Rooms' doused in forest greens and polished wood, with marble bathrooms and Thai silk cushions. Top of the food chain are the Ocean View Loft Rooms and the East Coast Suite.

More top enders:

**Seaview House** (☎ 6685 6486; www.seaviewbyron.com; 146 Lighthouse Rd; d \$250; ☑) Cushy B&B with Byron's best views.

**Rae's on Watego's** (☎ 6685 5366; www.raes.com.au; 8 Marine Pde, Watego's Beach; ste \$570-730; ☑) Superlative boutique hotel.

## Eating CAFÉS

Most of Byron's cafés close at 5pm.

**Twisted Sista** (☎ 6680 9100; Shop 1, 4 Lawson St; mains \$8-15; ☑) Breakfast & lunch) Gluttonous goodies such as oversized quiches, frittatas and salads tumble over each other in a mass of fabulous ingredients at this warm café. The sweets are too big for solo efforts.

**Succulent Café** (☎ 6680 7121; Marvell Lane; mains \$8-16; ☑) Breakfast & lunch) And succulent the steak sandwiches, grilled *mahi mahi* salads, and chilli-prawn linguini are! This narrow café packs plenty of flavour and ingredients plus great coffee onto its mosaic-tiled tables.

**Bay Leaf Café** (☎ 6685 8900; Marvell St; mains \$10-18; ☑) Breakfast & lunch) This teeny, bohemian café has a small but excellent menu that makes a task out of choosing. Soups, pastas and Turkish-bread sambos change daily, but expect the likes of chorizo and aioli linguini.

**Byron Orion** (☎ 6685 6828; 5/2 Jonson St; mains \$14-20) Orion's open-door policy stops passers by in their tracks. It could be the delicious red-vinyl walls and supper cocktails, but more likely the spicy scents courtesy of Gujarati beef, rogan josh and vindaloo. Breakfast is Aussie free-range eggs.

**Casa Pepe** (☎ 6685 7121; Shop 4, 14 Middleton St; mains lunch \$8-15, dinner \$18-26; ☑) Lunch daily, dinner Sat & Sun) It's strictly vegetarian, but this cosy restaurant is worthy of all dietary persuasions. Happy patrons sit in the sheltered courtyard and tuck into pizzas, pies, soups and tofu burgers for lunch and smart pastas for dinner.

## RESTAURANTS

**Balcony Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 6680 9666; cnr Lawson & Johnson Sts; mains \$20-30) Amid voyeuristic seating or cosy, obese cushions, the Balcony dishes up Ottoman overtones and fabulous fare like a curry-rubbed BLAT (bacon, lettuce, avocado and tomato ciabatta) for breakfast, fresh fish with crushed Jerusalem artichokes and citrus butter for lunch, and midnight tapas to soak up the cocktails.

**Fresh** (☎ 6685 7810; 7 Jonson St; mains \$20-27) Serving up Mediterranean salads, spicy nasi goreng and Sumatran lamb, Fresh is an adaptable eatery and a favourite stomping ground for locals.

**Dish** (☎ 6685 7320; cnr Jonson & Marvell Sts; mains \$27-35; ☑) Dinner) Ivy-clad walls and floor-to-ceiling glass create an atrium atmosphere at this dishy restaurant. The equally sophisticated cuisine

includes Bangalow pork scotch fillet with roasted pistachio, chorizo and apple puree.

**Fins** (☎ 6685 5029; Beach Hotel, Bay St; mains \$35; ☑) Dinner) Tucked behind the boisterous Beach Hotel pub, this elegant sibling serves fish tagine, Mauritian seafood sambals and Tiger Abalone. The marine mains are touted as the best on the coast and celeb chefs pop in for degustation nights.

**Rae's on Watego's** (☎ 6685 5366; 8 Marine Pde, Watego's Beach; mains \$36-46; ☑) Lunch & dinner) Exquisite Mod Oz cuisine on a terrace overlooking the ocean. With the sound of surf providing ambience, sample the Moreton Bay bugs or baby snapper for a meal beyond compare.

More fine dining:

**Olivo** (☎ 6685 7950; 34 Jonson St; mains \$20-30; ☑) Dinner) Chic and snug with global flavours from Europe to Asia.

**Boomerang** (☎ 6685 5264; Shop 5, 2 Fletcher St; mains \$40-60; ☑) Lunch Sunday, dinner daily) An inspired menu and wine list.

## QUICK EATS

Local takeaways litter Jonson St.

**Our pick: Orgasmic** (☎ 6680 7778; 11 Bay Lane; mains \$5-10; ☑) Lunch & dinner) Proving unequivocally that it's not the size of the wave but the motion of the spatula, even the 'half pockets' at this cosy hole-in-the-wall eatery satisfy voracious appetites. Alternative climaxes include kofta, schnitzels and sublime Middle Eastern dips.

**Cardamom Pod** (Shop 8, Pier Arcade, 7 Lawson St; meals \$7-14; ☑) Lunch & dinner) This teeny gem serves excellent subcontinent fusions such as salads, curries and samosas. The menu is vegetarian, and you can vacuum up your tofu and pumpkin salad here or get it to go.

More quick fixes:

**Byron Street Burgers** (☎ 6685 5234; Shop 8, Byron St; mains \$8-11; ☑) Lunch & dinner) Organic veggie and meat burgers.

**Earth 'n' Sea Pizza & Pasta** (☎ 6685 6029; 11 Lawson St; mains \$15-25; ☑) Lunch & dinner) Mind-blowing pizzas.

## SELF-CATERING

**Byron Farmers Market** (☎ 6685 9792; Butler St; ☑) 8-11am Thu & Sat) Great for picking up delicious local produce.

**Green Garage** (☎ 6680 8577; 68 Tennyson St; ☑) 7am-7pm) Organic goodies.

**Santos** (☎ 6685 7071; 105 Jonson St) Organic grocer.

**Woolworths** (☎ 6685 7292; The Plaza, Jonson St; ☑) 8am-9pm)

## Drinking

**Beach Hotel** (☎ 6685 6402; cnr Jonson & Bay Sts; ☎ 11am-late) The mother ship of all pubs draws everyone from grey pensioners and lobster-red British tourists to acid-soaked hippies and high-on-life earth mothers, beach bums and businessmen to Champagne Charlies and Hooray Henrys. It's so close to the main beach you'll get sand up your clacker, and it's shot through with a fabulously infectious atmosphere that makes everyone your best mate. There's live music and DJs some nights.

**Railway Friendly Bar** (☎ 6685 7662; Jonson St; ☎ 11am-late) This indoor-outdoor pub has a cosy interior and a front beer garden conducive to boozy afternoons. There's live music most nights, and the pub grub here is superlative.

**Great Northern** (☎ 6685 6454; Byron St) You won't need your fancy duds at this brash and boisterous pub. It's loud and beery most nights and even louder when hosting headline acts. Live music almost nightly.

**Buddha Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 6685 5833; Skinners Shoot Rd) The young and funky mingle on leather lounges beneath wickedly low lighting in Byron's sultriest drinking hole. A global soundtrack traipses from hip-hop to Latino, with jazz and electronic pit stops along the way. DJs and acoustic sets also get a go.

**Balcony** (☎ 6680 9666; cnr Lawson & Jonson Sts) A great restaurant and a fine bar. Drink in the view from stools, chairs or sofas while working through the long wine list.

More drinking:

**La La Land** (☎ 6680 7070; 6 Lawson St) Soft couches, sinful lighting, slinky young things.

**Dish Raw Bar** (☎ 6685 7320; cnr Jonson & Marvell Sts) Cocktails, sushi and plenty of style.

## Entertainment

Byron's nightlife is the best on the north coast. See (above) for info on live music at the assortment of pubs, and check the gig guide in Thursday's *Byron Shire News* and Bay 99.9 FM for various events.

**Cheeky Monkeys** (☎ 6685 5886; 115 Jonson St) A backpackers' bonanza – cheap food, cheap drinks and cheesy tunes. Expect (dodgy) table-top dancing, instant friends, long nights and easy sleazy fun.

**Cocomangas** (☎ 6685 8493; 32 Jonson St) Sure it's a little lacking in sophistication and style, but so are most of the patrons jumping to

their hearts' content on the dance floor. It's the stomping ground of twenty-somethings thrashing to indie rock, old school, techno and fusion.

**Lounge Cinema** (☎ 6680 9055; Skinners Shoot Rd; admission \$10) The Arts Factory's cinema screens Hollywood fodder as well as art-house flicks and classic reruns.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The closest commercial airport is at Ballina (p193), but most people use the larger Coolangatta airport on the Gold Coast (p336).

### BUS

Long-distance buses stop along Jonson St. Both **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have daily services to Brisbane (\$40), Coffs Harbour (\$55), and to Sydney (\$105).

**Kirklands** (☎ 6626 1499) has buses to Lismore and Coolangatta airport. **Blanch's Bus Service** (☎ 6686 2144; www.tropicalnsw.com.au/blanchs) runs daily to Ballina, Lennox Head and Mullumbimby for under \$10.

Shuttle services:

**Airlink Byron Bay Airbus** (☎ 6684 3232; www.airlinkbyronbay.com.au) Coolangatta airport (\$35), Lismore airport (\$40) and Ballina airport (\$15).

**Byron Bay Transport Services** (☎ 6685 5008; www.byronbaytaxi.com) Ballina airport (from \$15) and Coolangatta (\$36).

## Getting Around

**Byron Bay Bicycles** (☎ 6685 6067; The Plaza, Jonson St) Hires out mountain bikes for \$28 per day.

**Byron Bay Taxis** (☎ 6685 5008) On call 24 hours.

## BYRON BAY TO TWEED HEADS

The Pacific Hwy continues north to the Queensland border at Tweed Heads. The pretty Coolamon Scenic Dr leaves the highway just south of Brunswick Heads, passing through the town of **Mullumbimby** (Mullum; population 3200). This serene town is a coast-hinterland hybrid and sports a cosmopolitan spread of cafés, bistros and pubs. It's worth a look.

The sociable **Middle Pub** (☎ 02-6684 3229; fax 02-6684 3121; 46 Burringbar St; r with/without bath \$90/35; ☎) has clean and frugal rooms with fans and shared bathrooms, or quite fabulous hotel rooms with air-con. Alternatively, **Mullumbimby Motel** (☎ 02-6684 2387; www.mullumbimbymotel.com.au;

121 Dalley St; s/d/tw \$75/80/85; ☎) offers reliable motel rooms, and **Maca's Camping Ground** (☎ 02-6684 5211; Main Arm Rd; unpowered sites \$10-15), 1.2km north of town in **Main Arm** (head out of town on Burringbar St, then follow Main Arm Rd and the blue 'camping' signs), has basic camping facilities.

**Milk & Honey** (☎ 02-6684 1422; 59a Station St; mains \$15-20; ☎ dinner Wed-Sat) has divine wood-fired pizza. You can also tuck into fab pub grub at the Middle Pub, or chic and innovative fare at **Poiciana Café** (☎ 02-6684 4036; 55 Station St; mains \$8-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch).

**Blanch's Bus Service** (☎ 02-6686 2144) has daily services to Byron Bay (\$5.60), and **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has buses to Lismore (\$8.80) and Byron Bay.

Take the Chinderah Bypass to the legendary **Moo Moo Café** (☎ 02-6677 1230; Tweed Valley Way, Mooball; mains \$8-11; ☎ breakfast & lunch), halfway between Brunswick Heads and Murwillumbah in the town of Mooball. This famous café has a bovine obsession, with cow and farm memorabilia aplenty.

Fresh oysters and mud crabs call beautiful Brunswick Heads home, as do retirees and families who love the good beaches and fishing. The splendid **Hotel Brunswick** (☎ 02-6685 1236; www.hotelbrunswick.com.au; Mullumbimby St; s/d \$40/70) is a sight to behold and a destination unto itself. It has decent pub rooms, an eco-friendly bent and a magnificent beer garden that unfurls beneath flourishing poicianas. **The Bruns** (mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves great nosh, there's live music at the weekend, and every Wednesday night you can catch a flick.

**Chalet Motel** (☎ 02-6685 1257; www.brunswickvalley.com.au/chaletmotel; 68 Tweed St; r from \$85; ☎) is the pick of the motels in town, with a towering garden and cute and colourful rooms. Alternatively, the **Terrace Reserve Caravan Park** (☎ 1300 762 072, 02-6685 1233; terrace@bshp.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites from \$21/24, cabins \$85-170), on the banks of Simpson Creek, has plenty of sites and snazzy cabins.

**Tweed Heads** (population 56,000) marks the southern end of the Gold Coast strip. At Point Danger (named by Captain Cook to warn of the treacherous rocks and shoals), the towering **Captain Cook Memorial** straddles the state border. Tweed Heads accommodation options spill over into Coolangatta and up the Gold Coast, where there's more choice.

# FAR NORTH COAST HINTERLAND

Byron Bay is not the only jewel in this part of the world. The undulating landscape of the far north hinterland is a gorgeous tapestry of ecosystems. Native flora mingles with the Johnny-come-latelies of foreign soil. Orchards roll into farmland, and dry eucalypt forests converge in small clumps. The area's three national parks – Border Ranges, Mt Warning and Nightcap – are part of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves, which are World Heritage rainforests. Muddled in amid this stunning backdrop are organic markets, wilderness B&Bs and alternative lifestyles. This is far and away one of Australia's most desirable locales.

## BANGALOW

☎ 02 / pop 1230

A mere 14km from Byron Bay, beautiful Bangalow ascends along a character-laden main street, which is peppered with galleries, boutiques and fine eateries.

There's a good weekly **farmers market** (Byron St; ☎ 8-11am Sat) with top local organic produce on hand.

**Riverview Guesthouse** (☎ 6687 1317; www.riverviewguesthouse.com.au; 99 Byron St; r \$75-195) is a stately Victorian house and the stuff of B&B dreams. The antique-littered rooms are fine and the brekkies are gourmet.

**Ate** (☎ 6687 1010; 33 Byron St; mains \$16) whips up inventive dishes with plenty of passion along the lines of osso bucco with Middle Eastern spices. Upstairs, **Satiate** (degustation \$50; ☎ dinner Tue-St) does designer degustation and chic cocktails.

Gluten-free, organic and sublimely tasty café fare is up for grabs at **Utopia** (☎ 6687 2088; 13 Byron St; mains \$16-24) and **Urban Café** (☎ 6687 2678; 33 Byron St; mains \$12-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat).

## LISMORE

☎ 02 / pop 38,000

The hinterland's commercial centre is beautified by a liberal supply of heritage and Art Deco buildings and a thriving artistic community. Students from Southern Cross University add to the town's eclecticism, and there's a strong sense of individualism



## MARKETS OF THE HINTERLAND

### Weekly Markets

**Bangalow Farmers Market** (Byron St; ☎ 8-11am Sat)

**Byron Farmers Market** (Map pp196-7; Butler St; ☎ 8-11am Thu & Sat)

**Lismore Farmers Market** (Lismore Showground; ☎ 8am-noon Sat)

**Rainbow Region Organic Markets** (Lismore Showground; ☎ 8-11am Tue)

### First Weekend of the Month

**Brunswick Heads** (Memorial Park; ☎ Sat)

**Lismore Car Boot Market** (Lismore Shopping Centre; ☎ Sun)

### Second Weekend of the Month

**Alstonville Market** (Alstonville Showground; ☎ Sun)

**Channon Craft Market** (Coronation Park; ☎ Sun)

**Lennox Head Lakeside Market** (Lake Ainsworth Foreshore; ☎ Sun)

### Third Weekend of the Month

**Aquarius Fair Markets** (Nimbin Community Centre; ☎ Sun)

**Ballina Markets** (Circus Ground; ☎ Sun)

**Lismore Car Boot Market** (Lismore Shopping Centre; ☎ Sun)

**Mullumbimby Museum Market** (Stuart St; ☎ Sat)

**Uki Produce & Craft Market** (Uki Village Buttery; ☎ Sat)

### Fourth Weekend of the Month

**Bangalow Village Market** (Bangalow Showground; ☎ Sun)

**Evans Head Riverside Market** (Recreation Reserve; ☎ Sat)

### Fifth Weekend of the Month

**Aquarius Fair Markets** (Nimbin Community Centre; ☎ Sun)

**Lennox Head Lakeside Market** (Lake Ainsworth Foreshore; ☎ Sun)

here. Furthermore, the town's close proximity to rainforest, beaches and the Wilson River makes it an ideal base for visiting the hinterland.

The **Lismore visitor centre** (☎ 1300 369 795; nr Molesworth & Ballina Sts; ☎ 9.30am-4pm) has internet access and a rainforest display (\$1). Kids groove on the **Heritage Park** playground and skate park, next to the centre.

The diminutive **Lismore Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 6622 2209; 131 Molesworth St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat) has just enough space for two visiting exhibitions, but the curators do it justice by showing excellent works.

The **Koala Care & Research Centre** (☎ 6622 1233; Rifle Range Rd; admission free; ☎ 9.30-10.30am Sat) is home to recovering koalas and well worth a visit. To get a glimpse of platypuses, head to

the northern end of Kadina St and walk up to **Tucki Tucki Creek** at dawn or sunset.

You can also spot fuzzy grey bums-in-the-gums at **Tucki Tucki Nature Reserve** (☎ 6627 0200; Wyrallah Rd), about 16km south of town.

A pleasant walking track skirts the river. Along the way you'll pass a **bush-tucker garden**, nurturing the once daily diet of the Widjabal people, who are the traditional owners of the land.

### Sleeping

**Karinga Motel** (☎ 6621 2787; karinga@motorinn.net; 258 Molesworth St; s/d \$70/80; ☎) This central motel has a fancied-up façade and bright, clean and functional rooms.

**Melville House** (☎ 6621 5778; 267 Ballina St; s/d from \$90/120; ☎) Chequered tiles in the kitchen, antique clocks in the hall and cut glass on

the windows; this excellent B&B is a slice of vintage Australiana. The friendly owner also manages holiday-rental houses (for \$90 to \$160) in town – call for details.

**Lismore Palms Caravan Park** (☎ 6621 7067; 42-48 Brunswick St; unpowered sites/cabins from \$18/65; ☎) The nicest of Lismore's caravan parks has ordered cabins right on the river and pleasant sites.

### Eating

Lismore stages its **farmers market** (☎ 8am-noon Sat) at the showground, which is off the Nimbin Rd.

**Blue Tongue** (☎ 6622 0750; 43 Bridge St; mains \$8-11; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Sun) On the quieter side of the river in a wonderfully worn building, Blue Tongue whips up great BLATs, toasted Turkish sandwiches and fine coffee. There's a sunny courtyard out the back with anarchic foliage.

**Left Bank Café** (☎ 6622 2338; 133 Molesworth St; mains \$10-18; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) Attached to the gallery, this bright, open café serves artistic works of its own, like zucchini, mint and feta frittata. You can dine in the shaded courtyard or glassy interior.

**20,000 Cows** (☎ 6622 2517; 58 Bridge St; mains \$15; ☎ dinner Wed-Sat) This vegetarian restaurant delivers international flavours and one-for-all and all-for-one social messages. Tuck into Yemeni pastries, Lithuanian *kugelis* (baked potato pudding), Egyptian dips and warm vibes.

Also recommended:

**Caddie's Coffee** (☎ 6621 7709; 20 Carrington St; meals \$8-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Bohemian café with gluten-free goodies.

**Paupiettes** (☎ 6621 6136; 56 Ballina St; mains \$15-25; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Superb Mod Oz menu and local produce.

### Getting There & Around

**Regional Express** (☎ 13 17 13) flies to Sydney. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) has daily buses to Byron Bay (\$45), and **Kirklands** (☎ 6622 1499) also runs to Byron Bay (\$14). **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) buses head to Byron Bay and Murwillumbah. All leave from the transit centre.

There are also 24-hour **taxis** (☎ 131 008).

### AROUND LISMORE

The **Channon** is an intimate village between Nimbin and Lismore. Time your visit for the second Sunday of each month for the 'mother of all markets' (say the locals).

**our pick** **Eternity Springs B&B** (☎ 02-6688 6385; www.eternitysprings.com; 483 Tunttable Creek Rd; camping per person \$12, s incl breakfast \$50-100, d incl breakfast \$80-160) is one of the true eco-havens. This idyllic plot has cosy 'cubbies' with private verandas and shared bathrooms; en-suite doubles filled with impressive art; and the very stylish, self-contained, one-bedroom 'Lotus Room'. The real beauty of Eternity Springs, however, is the spring water, solar power, permaculture, flushing compost toilets, and organic breakfasts. At the back of the property there is a splendid, open-walled timber studio with views of the surrounding valleys; yoga workshops don't get any lovelier.

### NIGHTCAP NATIONAL PARK

This 8080-hectare park, south of Murwillumbah and north of Lismore, borders Nimbin and The Channon. It was World Heritage listed in 1989 and is home to diverse subtropical rainforests and many species of wildlife, notably the wompoo fruit dove and the red-legged pademelon. With NSW's highest annual rainfall, the park has spectacular waterfalls, gorgeous green gullies and sheer cliffs. The exposed rock pinnacles of the **Sphinx** can be seen from Lismore.

**Mt Nardi** (800m) offers a challenging climb, and the NPWS office in the visitor centre in Murwillumbah (p205) has information on walks and picnics.

The **Whian Whian State Conservation Area** adjoins the southeast side of the park and is home to the threatened spotted quoll and **Minyon Falls**, which plunge 100m into a rainforest gorge surrounded by a flora reserve with several walking tracks.

The historic **Nightcap Track** (16km long) passes through both the state forest and Nightcap National Park and was originally used by postal workers in the late 19th and early 20th century. **Rummery Park** is not far off the road down from the falls and is a well-provided picnic spot with BBQs and cold showers. **Peate's Mountain Lookout**, just on from Rummery Park, gives you a great panoramic view from Jerusalem Mountain in the north, to Byron Bay in the east.

Southeast of the forest, **Mud Manor Forest Retreat** (☎ 02-6688 2205; www.mudmanor.com; r from \$120; ☎) has a permaculture garden and rooms with hand-crafted luxuries, spas and large decks.

## NIMBIN

☎ 02 / pop 400

Landing in Nimbin can be like entering a social experiment, particularly at noon, when Byron day-trippers arrive en masse and find themselves hectored by dreadlocked, tie-dyed pot dealers on the main street. This is the stereotype, of course (not all the pot dealers wear tie-dye), and Nimbin's residents and culture are actually far more eclectic. A day or two here will reveal a growing artist community, a New Age culture and welcoming locals.

Nimbin the phenomenon started in 1973, when the Australian Union of Students staged an experimental 'Aquarius Festival' in the Nimbin Valley. The event was a great success, and some attendees stuck around, determined to turn the sleepy town into a permanent haven for like-minded souls.

### Information

**Nimbin Connexion** (☎ 6689 1764; www.nimbin.connexion.com; Cullen St; ☎ 9am-4pm) At the northern end of town; great info, bike hire (\$20 per day) and internet access (per hour \$6).

### Sights & Activities

The wacky and wonderful **Nimbin Museum** (☎ 6689 1123; 62 Cullen St; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) pays homage to crashed kombis in psychedelic garb and the pursuit of 'loving the child within yourself' and sticking it to 'the man'. Across the street, the **Hemp Embassy** (Cullen St; ☎ 9am-5pm) features none-too-subtle displays about hemp and marijuana, and might be banned under (more) despotic regimes. Smokers are welcome at the coffee shop next door.

The **Nimbin Artists Gallery** (☎ 6689 1444; 49 Cullen St; ☎ 10am-4pm) packs an eclectic collection into a modest space.

The **Djanbung Gardens** (☎ 6689 1755; www.earthwise.org.au; 74 Cecil St; admission free; 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sat) is a permaculture education centre, café and bookshop.

The **Rainbow Power Company** (☎ 6689 1430; www.rpc.com.au; 1 Alternative Way; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) designs and produces 'appropriate home-energy systems' that use nature's forces – the sun, wind and water – to generate electricity. The systems are exported to all corners of the globe.

At the old butter factory, the **Bush Theatre** (☎ 6689 1111) shows films several nights a week.

The colourful **Nimbin Market** is on the third and fifth Sunday of the month.

**Nimbin Mardi Grass**, held over the first weekend in May, showcases some of the country's finest endurance talent in the **hemp olympix**. The trick for competitors is to stay in their events rather than forget and stray into the hemp-themed street parades or assorted hemp-based discussions. On-the-spot training comes courtesy of more scoobs than a uni doss house.

Avid **Wwoofers** (Willing Workers on Organic Farms; www.wwoof.org.au) can lend a hand at one of Nimbin's numerous organic farms; Nimbin Connexion can point you in the right direction.

### Sleeping

**Nimbin Backpackers at Granny's Farm** (☎ 6689 1333; Cullen St; dm/d \$20/54; 🚻) The closest hostel to town offers warm and colourful doubles and dorms, with enough room to swing a tofu cow. Friendly drinking fests are a common nightly occurrence.

**YHA Nimbin Rox Hostel** (☎ 6689 0022; www.yha.com.au; 74 Thorburn St; dm/d \$24/56; 🚻) Tumbling down a landscaped native garden, this excellent hostel has clean and contemporary accommodation and spectacular national-park views. One dorm is suitable for wheelchairs. There are also safari tents.

**Grey Gum Lodge** (☎ 6689 1713; www.nimbinaustralia.com/greygumlodge; 2 High St; s/d from \$40/55; 🚻) The rooms at this beautifully worn and creaky house fit better than your favourite jacket, and the high, comfy beds are the snugly silver lining. The back veranda provides outstanding conversations and sunsets.

More options:  
**Rainbow Retreat Backpackers** (☎ 6689 1262; 75 Thorburn St; unpowered sites/dm/d \$10/15/40) Rudimentary and serene retreat.

**Nimbin Tourist Caravan Park** (☎ 6689 1402; 29 Sibley St; unpowered sites from \$19)

### Eating & Drinking

**Retro** (☎ 6689 0590; 76 Cullen St; mains \$8; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Tidy and private Retro does great roast-veggie wraps, frittatas, bakes, sambos and glutinous sweets.

**Rainbow Café** (☎ 6689 1997; 70 Cullen St; mains \$6-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Pack a healthy appetite for this Nimbin institution – the burgers, wraps, nachos and salads are generous and creative. The sunny courtyard is a time vacuum.

**Nimbin Hotel** (☎ 6689 1246; Cullen St; mains \$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Nimbin's local boozier dishes up hearty pub nosh and cold schooners on the back porch, where the views are stunning. At weekends it gets rolling with live music.

**Nimbin Trattoria & Pizzeria** (☎ 6689 1427; 70 Cullen St; mains \$10-20; ☎ lunch Thu-Sun, dinner daily) Outstanding pizzas worthy of gorging on and delicious pastas are churned out in ample supply at this toasty trattoria.

### Getting There & Away

The **Nimbin Tours & Shuttle Bus** (☎ 6680 9189; www.nimbintours.com) operates between Byron Bay and Nimbin (one way per person \$14).

You can also hitch a ride with **Wallers Bus Company** (☎ 6687 8550) to/from Lismore (per person \$10).

Jim's Alternative Tours (p197) is a long-running Byron outfit with a party bent.

### BORDER RANGES NATIONAL PARK

This 31,729-hectare World Heritage area covers the NSW side of the McPherson Range, with the park's wetter areas protecting large tracts of superb rainforest. It's estimated that a quarter of all Australian bird species can be found here.

The eastern section is the most accessible, via the gravel **Tweed Range Scenic Drive**, which begins at Barkers Vale, 40km southwest of Murwillumbah. The drive loops through the park from Lillian Rock to Wiangaree, through mountain forest most of the way, with steep hills and breathtaking lookouts over the Tweed Valley to Mt Warning and the coast.

There are basic **NPWS camp sites** (per person \$3) on the Scenic Dr: Sheepstation Creek, 15km north of the turn-off at Wiangaree, and Forest Tops, 6km further on. There's free camping at Byrill Creek, on the eastern side of Mebbin State Forest.

### MT WARNING NATIONAL PARK

Although only 2380 hectares, this is the most dramatic feature of the hinterland, with Mt Warning (1156m) towering over the valley. The peak is the first part of mainland Australia to be touched by sunlight each day. Over 60,000 people a year make the 4.4km, five-hour round-trip trek to the top from Breakfast Creek.

Mt Warning is known to the Bundjalung people as Wollumbin, meaning 'cloud catcher', 'fighting chief of the mountain' and

'weather maker'. Although everyone does it, you should be aware that, under Bundjalung law, only specifically chosen people are allowed to climb the mountain and consequently they ask you not to go, out of respect. The unnerving European name was given to the peak in 1770 by Captain Cook to warn seamen of the offshore reefs.

The **Mt Warning Caravan Park & Tourist Retreat** (☎ 02-6679 5120; www.mtwarningholidaypark.com; Mt Warning Rd; unpowered sites/cabins from \$18/55), on the Mt Warning approach road, has good kitchen facilities and a well-stocked kiosk.

**Wallers** (☎ 02-6687 8550) buses run from Lismore (\$20) to Dum Dum, the tiny town at the turn-off for Mt Warning.

**Uki (uke-eye)** is a cute town in the shadow of Mt Warning's dominating peak. It's got the laid-back alternative feel typical of the region, as well as the **Uki Café** (☎ 6679 5351; 1 Rowlands Creek Rd; mains \$7-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat), which serves good food on a sweeping veranda, or by a toasty potbelly stove inside.

### MURWILLUMBAH

☎ 02 / pop 7700

Sitting on the banks of the Tweed River and surrounded by the NSW-Queensland Border Ranges, Murwillumbah is a charming town and an agricultural focal point for the region. Peppered with heritage façades, its streets tumble on top of one another, with stunning views of Mt Warning peeking around every corner.

### Information

**Murwillumbah visitor centre** (☎ 6672 1340; www.tweedcoolangatta.com.au; cnr Alma St & Tweed Valley Way) National park passes, accommodation information, and a great rainforest display.

### Sights

The exceptional **Tweed River Art Gallery** (☎ 6670 2790; www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery; cnr Mistral Rd & Tweed Valley Way; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) is an architectural delight and home to some of Australia's finest in a variety of media. Temporary exhibits complement the permanent fixtures.

The small **Murwillumbah Museum** (☎ 6672 1865; 2 Queensland Rd; adult/child \$2/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Fri) is housed in a beautiful old building and features a solid account of local history and an interesting radio room.



Just north of town, **Tropical Fruit World** (☎ 6677 7222; www.tropicalfruitworld.com.au; Duranbah Rd; adult/child \$32/25; ☎ 10am-5pm) allegedly has the world's largest collection of tropical fruit. But it's overpriced, considering there's really only so much (PG) fun you can have with fruit.

## Sleeping

**Mount Warning–Murwillumbah YHA** (☎ 6672 3763; www.yha.com.au; 1 Tumbulgum Rd; dm/d from \$25/54) Bohemian cheer swims in this colourful waterfront house with eight-bed dorms. There's free ice cream at night plus canoe and bike hire, and four-night stays attract free tours.

**Imperial Hotel** (☎ 6672 2777; fax 6672 8188; 115 Main St; s/d with shared bath \$30/45, d \$55) These grand old pub rooms look like they haven't been altered since the opening ceremony – shabby chic without even trying. Snug interiors stock antique robes and floral bedspreads.

**Murwillumbah Motor Inn** (☎ 1800 687 224, 1800 023 105; www.murwillumbahmotorinn.com.au; 17 Byangum Rd; s/d \$84/96; ☎ ☎ ☎) They're a mite frumpy, but all rooms here have cable TV and microwave. There's also a pleasant courtyard out the back.

## Eating

**New Leaf Café** (☎ 6672 2667; Shop 10, Murwillumbah Plaza; meals \$5-10; ☎ ☎ ☎) The food here is creative and vegetarian, with plenty of Middle Eastern flavours and salads on offer. Dine inside, alfresco, or takeaway.

**Sugar Beat** (☎ 6672 2330; Shop 2, 6-8 Commercial Rd; mains \$10; ☎ ☎ ☎) Park yourself by the sunny window or settle into a corner of the long bench seating. Then tuck into tofu and veggie *gado-gado*, sesame chicken with Japanese dressing or an equally elaborate salad or burger.

**Imperial Hotel** (☎ 6672 2777; mains \$15; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Imperial's sprawling bistro has a short but snazzy menu, including tempura barramundi and gourmet bangers and mash.

## Getting There & Away

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 1499) and **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) have daily services to Coolangatta/Tweed Heads and Byron Bay (\$15). **Kirklands** (☎ 6626 1499) charges around the same for daily buses to Byron Bay and Brunswick Heads. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) buses run to Byron Bay, Tweed Heads and Brisbane.

# NEW ENGLAND

New England musters the best of inland NSW and flaunts it in vivid splendour. This patch of turf is one of the best in Australia to enjoy the colours of all four seasons. Their multihued effects complement the mottling of small country towns, perched on river banks or straddling the highways. Focused on a broad main street, they typically feature wide awnings reaching for oversized gutters and a couple of two-storey iron-laced hotels. It's unadulterated country Oz.

The showier of New England's big urban two is Tamworth, the heart of Australian country music and boot scooting. Swing your tassels here till they have almost fallen off, and then hop-skip it to the more conservative Armidale. This town simmers with a cosmopolitan energy and acts as a launching pad for a string of national parks to the east, with unforgettably deep gorges and waterfalls.

On the Fossickers Way you'll need to get out the shovel and dig a little deeper, as each town carries its own signature gem. Whether it be horse riding or an emerging arts scene, the towns in between are the essence of the New England tableland.

## TAMWORTH

☎ 02 / pop 37,120

Jackie Cole, Keith Urban, Slim Dusty...you get the pattern? Country music may not be everyone's cup of tea, but this fantastically friendly city has a vibrant nightlife and an emerging foodie scene, as well as the rather large golden guitar. So dust off your boots, oil up the chaps and get going to the country-music capital of Oz.

## Information

To get into the string of things, drop into the guitar-shaped **visitor centre** (☎ 6767 5300; www.visittamworth.com.au; cnr Peel & Murray Sts) and check out the **Walk a Country Mile Museum** (adult/child \$6/2). The **library** (☎ 6767 5457; 466 Peel St) has free internet access.

## Sights

The **Australian Country Music Foundation** (☎ 6766 9696; 93 Brisbane St; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) has a great Hall of Fame, but otherwise tassel and country-music phobes won't find it much of a display.

The **Big Golden Guitar Tourist Centre** (☎ 6765 2688; New England Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a café and a shop where you can stock up on all-important golden-guitar snow cones. When you've finished, check out the **Wax Museum** (adult/child \$8/4). It must be all right being a country-music star – just look at the smiles plastered across their chops.

By appointment only, **Lindsay Butler Studios** (☎ 6762 1104; ☎ 10am-5pm) will open its doors to visitors.

At the end of Endeavour Dr, **Oxley Marsupial Park** (Endeavour Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm) has overfriendly cockatoos and other native animals.

Grab a bottle of wine, the one you love (anyone will do), and follow jacaranda-lined White St to the very top, where you'll reach **Oxley Scenic Lookout** (Scenic Rd). This is the best seat in the house as the sun goes down over Tamworth and the surrounding Liverpool Ranges.

## Festivals & Events

Held at the end of January, New England's biggest annual party, the **Country Music Festival** lasts 10 days. There are over 800 acts, of which 75% are free. Or if you missed the big one in summer, get along to **Hats Off to Country Music** during the June Queen's Birthday long weekend.

## Sleeping

Unless you book years in advance, you'll be lucky to find a bed or camp site anywhere during the festival, when prices skyrocket. However, the council makes large areas of river land available to campers, where it's rough and rowdy but fun.

**Tudor Hotel** (☎ 6766 9564; 327 Peel St; s/d \$35/45) The pick of the pubs in terms of accommodation, the Tudor has a French Riviera feel, enhanced significantly after many alcoholic beverages, when the lift is much safer than the stairs.

**Jacaranda Cottage** (☎ 6766 4281; 105 Carthage St; r incl breakfast \$90-135) Built in the 1930s, this B&B is in a very peaceful street (despite the fire station next door). There are two rooms in the house and a self-contained loft out the back.

**Beethoven's** (☎ 6766 2735; 66 Napier St; r \$120-140) A lovingly restored building with four rooms including bathrooms and a magnificent open fire in the guest lounge. Conveniently opposite the bowling club.

**Quality Hotel Powerhouse** (☎ 6766 7000; www.qualityhotelpowerhouse.com.au; New England Hwy; r \$170-210; ☎ ☎ ☎) A large and comfortable hotel with wi-fi. The newer wing has some very posh apartments, good for long stays.

More options:

**City Sider Motor Inn** (☎ 6766 4777; 237 Marius St; d/ste \$89/120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Gaudy but cheap.

**Austin Tourist Park** (☎ 1800 826 967, 6766 2380; www.austintouristpark.com.au; 581 Armidale Rd; unpowered/power sites \$21/25, cabins \$52-87; ☎ ☎ ☎) Sleepwalkers beware – there's a river and a steep drop-off.

## Eating

**Old Vic Café** (☎ 6766 3435; 261 Peel St; mains \$10-18; ☎ ☎ ☎) breakfast & lunch, closed Sun) This spot imbues an earthy country feel; we're talking cheese-cloth and Betty Crocker rather than tassels and bow legs. Get anything from a sandwich to a rump steak.

**Tudor Hotel** (☎ 6766 2930; 327 Peel St; mains \$9-24; ☎ ☎ ☎) lunch & dinner) Elegantly decorated with romantic '80s tunes in the background, the two-storey Tudor dishes up a wide menu, with selections like garlic prawns and avocado.

**Vault** (☎ 6766 6975; 429 Peel St; mains \$9-26; ☎ ☎ ☎) breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Residing in an old heritage bank, Vault cooks up basic meals with a gourmet twist.

**Café Africa** (☎ 6766 9995; cnr Brisbane & Marius Sts; mains \$13-35; ☎ ☎ ☎) lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Herbivores stay away, you will be confused by the Kalahari Bushman Skewers and distraught by the Game of the Day. But carnivores, are you ready for the Massai Challenge? Eat two Massai 1kg rumps and get the third one free.

## Entertainment

As you'd suspect, Tamworth always has live country music in its pubs: check Thursday's *Northern Daily Leader* (the visitor centre keeps a copy all week). Dress codes are stricter in Tamworth than elsewhere in the region – after all, cowboys never go out smelling like cow poop.

**Imperial Hotel** (☎ 6766 2613; www.imperialhotel.com.au; cnr Brisbane & Marius Sts) This is where the young folk tend to hang out. It goes off on Thursday night, but you can catch local live acts most weekends in Studio 181.

**Central Hotel** (☎ 6766 2160; cnr Brisbane & Peel Sts) More of a laid-back affair, the Central Hotel pulls an older crowd and bands or a DJ on weekends. You'll make friends here whether you like it or not.

**Tamworth Hotel** (☎ 6766 2923; 147 Marius St) This place smacks of country club and so does the slightly conservative crowd drinking here. There are no loud bands, just the faint sizzle of steaks and the oh-so-subtle hint of pretension.

### Getting There & Around

**QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) has several daily flights to/from Sydney.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) has daily services along the New England Hwy to Armidale (adult/child \$40/35) and through to Sydney (adult/child \$90/75). **Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) runs to Armidale, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, and south to Scone.

**Tamworth Coaches** (☎ 6762 3999) operates extensively throughout town; stops are visible and obvious.

### AROUND TAMWORTH

If you like the Tamworth area then move there. OK, that's a bit extreme, but you can test the waters on a jackaroo or jillaroo course at **Leconfield Jackaroo & Jillaroo School** (☎ 6769 4328; 'Bimboola', Kootingal; 5-day course \$490), which will have you mustering, milking, shearing, shoeing and even lamb slaughtering (to sort the cowboys from the 'this-is-so-now boys') in no time.

About 45km southeast of Tamworth, **Nundle** is a charming town just off the Fossickers Way. There are a couple of decent museums and some cute little shops. And, like scores and scores of other country towns, it has a **Hanging Rock** you can climb for great views. The **visitor centre** (☎ 6769 3158; 96 Jenkins St) is part of Café Nundle, and you can hunker down in retro pub rooms after a slab of steak at the **Peel Inn** (☎ 6769 3377; www.peelinn.com.au; r incl breakfast \$35-70). Meals are \$10 to \$26, and the inn is open for lunch and dinner.

### THE FOSSICKERS WAY

You're now heading into gemstone territory, and this thread of towns is known as the **Fossickers Way**. Australia's **national paragliding championships** are held in February and March at **Manilla**, 44km north of Tamworth. **Godfrey's Manilla Paragliding** (☎ 02-6785 6545; www.flymanilla.com) offers tandem flights from \$120. The town itself is a glimmer of its former glory, but the three remaining pubs stand defiantly on the main street, and the area is also a fisherman's utopia. Grab your bait and licence,

and a greasy takeaway from **North Manilla Store** (☎ 02-6785 1900), just north of the bridge, before heading to **Lake Keepit** (☎ 02-6769 7605) or north to Warrabah National Park for the big bites.

Settled in the 1830s, **Barraba** was put on the map during the gold-fever days of the late 1800s. But the old wide streets and elegant awnings now foster an underbelly centred on music. The **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6782 1255; www.barraba.org; 116 Queen St) has a leaflet detailing a Heritage Walk that trundles past the oldest buildings throughout town. It can also advise where to purchase a gold pan. Travel 3km out of town, turn right onto Woodsreef Rd, go 14km more and you will come to Ironbark Goldfield and Woodsreef Reserve, where you can get cracking with the shovel, pick and pan.

**Andy's Backpackers** (☎ 02-6782 1916; www.andysbackpackers.com.au; 98 Queen St; dm \$20) has 'spasmodic' work available in return for free board. Meals are available by donation. Andy can organise bushwalking, horse-riding and fossicking tours.

Otherwise, stay at **Barraba Caravan Park** (☎ 02-6782 1818; www.baraba.org; Bridge St; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/18, cabins \$30-55).

**Bingara**, a small town straddling the Gwydir River, is a nice place to stop over on your way to or from Tamworth. The **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6724 0066; www.bingara.nsw.gov.au; Roxy Theatre, 74 Maitland St) is situated in the Roxy, a Greek-influenced, refurbished Art Deco cinema. It is still used today for films, concerts and theatrical pursuits in general.

There are 3000 acres of horse riding in the area, but most people want to swim with the horses at **Gwydir River Trail Rides** (☎ 02-6724 1562; gwydirrides@northnet.cm.au; 17 Keera St; 2½hr trail ride \$55, canoe hire \$30). For fair-dinkum Aussie-ness, complete the five-day Jackaroo/Jillaroo Adventure (\$350). You will come back able to ride a horse, crack a whip and brand cattle among other things. All meals and accommodation are included.

The **Fossickers Way Motel** (☎ 6724 1373; www.bingaramotel.com.au; Finch St; r \$60; ☺) has a tidy appearance and a very quiet setting on the edge of parkland, just across the road from the Gwydir River.

### URALLA

☎ 02 / pop 2500

This enticing little town is one for the history buffs. Bushranger Captain Thunderbolt (see the boxed text, p210), whose six-year career

included several episodes of holding up Uralla publicans and then spending the proceeds on beer, was killed here in 1870. Paul at the **visitor centre** (☎ 6778 4496; www.uralla.com; 104 Bridge St) can point you in the right direction for fossicking around town.

An old flour mill, the **McCrossin's Mill Museum** (☎ 6778 3022; cnr Bridge & Salisbury Sts; adult/child \$4/2; ☹ 12am-5pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun), is where you can view Captain Thunderbolt's muzzle loader and revolver and learn about the Evolution of the Cricket Bat.

Uralla has three of Australia's best antiquarian bookstores, the anchor of which is **Burnet's Books** (☎ 6778 4682; 46 Bridge St; ☹ 9am-6pm).

An interesting loop goes southeast from Uralla to **Gostwyck**, an Australian sheep station that looks like an English country squire's hamlet, complete with photogenic vine-covered chapel. From there, go via **Dangar Falls** up to Armidale.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Coachwood & Cedar Motel/Hotel** (☎ 6778 4110; www.toppuburalla.com.au; Bridge St; s \$35-55, d \$70) Stay the night in a cheaper pub room or in the mini-motel out the back. With enormous, bold bathrooms and funky paintwork, these are some of the trendiest rooms in New England.

**Top Pub** (☎ 6778 4110; Bridge St; mains \$17-30; ☹ lunch & dinner) At the top of the main street, this popular drinking hole dishes up everything from Thai curry to kangaroo fillet in the fabulous 'Funk Lush Room' outside.

### Getting There & Away

**Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) travels to Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Tamworth. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) travels to Tenterfield (adult/child \$60/50), Tamworth (adult/child \$40/32) and Sydney (adult/child \$100/85). **Edwards** (☎ 6772 3116) heads to Armidale on weekdays only.

### ARMIDALE

☎ 02 / pop 25,000

The New England regional centre of Armidale is famous for its spectacular autumn foliage and heritage buildings. It is a university town, but even the hundreds of virile students don't seem to soften the pensive mood here. SAD (seasonal affective disorder) or not, the town's history and culture shine through, courtesy of museums, markets and bewitching surrounds.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 627 736, 6772 4655; www.armidaletourism.com.au; 83 Marsh St) is at the bus station. **AMAC Digital Products** (☎ 6771 1287; 209 Beardy St) and the **library** (Faulkner St; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) have internet access.

### Sights & Activities

There are some elegant old buildings around the town centre. Pick up the heritage walking-tour pamphlet from the visitor centre.

At the southern edge of town, the **New England Regional Art Museum** (☎ 6772 5255; Kentucky St; admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), has a sizable permanent collection and good contemporary exhibitions.

Next door, the **Aboriginal Cultural Centre & Keeping Place** (☎ 6771 3606; 128 Kentucky St; art exhibit \$2; ☹ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) will broaden your perception of indigenous art, and enable the kids to make their own priceless piece with the help of the resident artist.

Free **heritage tours** (☹ 10am) of Armidale depart from the visitor centre. It also has details of heritage walks around town.

Better still, get on a bike from **Armidale Bicycle Centre** (☎ 6772 3718; 244 Beardy St; per hr \$5.50).

### Sleeping

There are motels around the visitor centre and on Barney St. Head out of town on the Glen Innes Rd to find doubles under \$60.

**Cameron Lodge Motor Inn** (☎ 6772 2351; cnr Dangar & Barney Sts; s/d \$65/72; ☺) Conveniently located just one block from the main strip, this spot offers good value and faux-fur bedspreads – very Miami Vice...or perhaps more '80s porn.

**Quality Inn Regency Hallmark** (☎ 6772 9800; 208 Dangar St; r \$105-130, ste \$175; ☺) A touch of luxury, this hotel has bland but very comfortable rooms and a confused French restaurant featuring overpriced French cuisine and Asian dishes.

**Lindsay House** (☎ 6771 4554; www.lindsayhouse.com.au; 128 Faulkner St; d incl breakfast from \$165) The antique-filled rooms here house lavish four-poster beds, and some overlook the immaculate gardens and Central Park. It's beautifully cosy on a cold winter's day.

Also available:

**Pembroke Tourist & Leisure Park** (☎ 6772 6470; 39 Waterfall Way; unpowered/powerd sites \$19/24, dm \$24, cabins from \$56; ☹) Friendly and leafy.

**Smith House** (☎ 6772 0652; www.smithhouse.com.au; 100 Barney St; s/d incl breakfast \$40/50; ☹) Great facilities.



## Eating & Drinking

**Goldfish Bowl** (☎ 6771 3271; Dangar St; mains \$6-9; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Are Aussies really ready for proper espresso, and, although everyone wants to be Italian, do we really need to hover over our coffee? Yes, yes we do, and the baristas here make the best coffee in town.

**Caffinds** (☎ 6772 0277; Beardy St Mall; mains \$9-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Tuck into basic through to gourmet sandwiches, salads, pizzas, laksa, nachos and even steak! A real mixed bag to suit every tastebud.

**Red Grapevine Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 6772 2822; 1st fl, 113 Jessie St; mains \$19-26; ☺ dinner Tue-Sat) It arrives hot, hearty, rich and filling – chorizo, tomato and cannellini bean is what soup was always meant to be. This restaurant is simply a fantastic Italian dining experience. BYO bottled wine only.

**Wicklow Hotel** (☎ 6772 2421; cnr Marsh & Dumaresq Sts) The Wicklow pours 20 local and imported beers on tap, and you can dump the young folk in the Kids' Club while you get busy socialising.

## Getting There & Around

The airport is 5km southeast of town. **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) has three to four flights a day to Sydney.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) runs twice daily to Glen Innes (adult/child \$44/36) and Tamworth (adult/child \$40/32). One daily service departs Armidale for Sydney (adult/child \$100/82). **Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) runs to Coffs Harbour (adult/child \$37/20).

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) goes daily to Tamworth (adult/child \$20/10), Broadmeadow-Newcastle (adult/child \$75/35) and Sydney (adult/child \$95/50).

**Edwards** (☎ 6772 3116) runs a local bus service about town. For taxi services, call **Armidale Radio Taxis** (☎ 6771 1455).

## THE WATERFALL WAY

A spectacular set of World Heritage-listed national parks lines the Waterfall Way from Armidale to Dorrigo and Bellingen, near Coffs Harbour. The entire area is full of magnificent gorges and waterfalls; in summer the road is lined with yellow paper daisies. You can easily drive the 168km to the coast in a day but, as this is one of the loveliest parts of NSW, why not take a few?

From Armidale, the road heads east 40km to **Wollomombi Falls**, one of Australia's highest. Tame paths lead to nearby lookouts and

### THUNDERBOLT *Wendy Kramer*

Born to an Irish convict in 1835, dead by 36 – a typical timeline for your average Aussie bushranger. Supported by the poorer locals, bushrangers left legends that still ignite a 'them-and-us' sense only possible in a population grown from a convict state. This one, whose real name was Frederick Ward, inspired the public imagination even further by escaping the inescapable Cockatoo Island Gaol in Sydney Harbour not once but twice. Swimming to shore in Balmain, he survived during the next six years by intercepting and robbing wealthy aristocrats as they travelled past his hideouts throughout the Hunter Valley and New England.

more strenuous multi-day tracks head down into the wilderness gorges of **Oxley Wild Rivers National Park**. At the southern edge of the park is **Apsley Falls**.

**New England National Park** (Map p183), 11km off the Waterfall Way and on a good gravel road, is home to platypuses and glider possums and is one of the few core refuges in the world for the very rare, 80-million-year-old Antarctic Beech tree. Over 20km of bushwalking trails mostly begin from wheelchair-accessible **Point Lookout**, where there are views that surpass its mundane name by an order of magnitude. There are nearby **cabins** (\$55-90), and sites at **Thungutti camping area** (adult/child \$3/2). Bookings are handled by the Dorrigo **NPWS office** (☎ 02-6657 2309).

**Cathedral Rock National Park** has huge boulders that precariously balance (like sumo wrestlers attempting the Kama Sutra), and wetland swamps perfect for bird watching. **Camping** (adult/child \$3/2) is also available. Near Ebor township, **Ebor Falls** is a spectacular part of **Guy Fawkes River National Park**, deep in gorge country that's popular for canoeing and bushwalking. Access is from Hernani, 15km northeast of Ebor, then it's another 30km to Chaelundi rest area for **camping** (adult/child \$3/2) and trailheads. There are great views from Misty Creek Lookout, or stop to have a look at the little old **graveyard** nearby.

### Dorrigo

☎ 02 / pop 1000

The winding road from Bellingen to Dorrigo is less than 30km but reveals as dramatic a

mountain pass as you'll find in NSW. In parts the northern side opens up to reveal thick-cut valleys cloaked in rainforest. Dorrigo itself is a small and traditional T-junction of a country town, preserved beautifully by cool air and affable locals.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6657 2486; 36 Hickory St; ☺ 10am-4pm) is run by helpful volunteers. The town's main attraction is **Dangar Falls** (Map p183), which cascade over a series of rocky shelves before plummeting into a pristine gorge. A lookout provides Kodak moments, and you can swim beneath the falls if you have a yen for glacial bathing.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Dorrigo Hotel** (☎ 6657 2016; fax 6657 2059; cnr Cudgery & Hickory Sts; r hotel/motel \$55/65) The charm of this almighty pub's exterior is somewhat withered on the inside, and the hotel rooms with shared bathrooms have a slightly smoky ambience. But no one's arguing with the price. The bistro (mains \$8 to \$14; open lunch and dinner) whips up tasty pub nosh.

**Gracemere Grange** (☎ 6657 2630; www.dorrigo.com/gracemere; 325 Dome Rd; s/tw/d incl breakfast from \$35/70/80) Oz hospitality doesn't get any warmer. Cosy bedrooms upstairs have slanted, attic-style roofs, and the en-suite double has a skylight for views of the twinkling canopy. The owner is a gem.

### A THESPIAN LEGACY *Justine Vaisitis*

'He's nicked off,' said the waiter of the chef. Under different circumstances I might have found this disconcerting, but I'd just packed an entire steak (medium rare) into my belly and there was barely room for coffee. It was well past dining hour and the handful of other patrons appeared to be in similar states of cuisine-coma. Truth be told, I had actually seen the chef scamper across the road throughout the evening, but small Australian towns are cauldrons of eccentricity, and I just let it slide. Turns out it was the eve of opening night, and the mad dashes were to final rehearsals at the tiny theatre across the road. Chef was one of the leads in the latest production from the **Dorrigo Drama Club** (☎ 6657 2243).

Dorrigo's population simmers beneath 1000, but the aptitude of its drama club proves that great things do come in small packages. This theatrical troupe has entertained audiences for almost a century and performs once or twice a year at the Old Gazette Theatre opposite Misty's (see above). Fortunately, the key players have changed numerous times, so their rendition of *Hamlet* doesn't include an uncomfortable authenticity. The club's long-time patron, Ralda Nash, strutted the boards reciting the Bard in London for decades before overseeing things in Dorrigo. All the performers are local, competition is tight and the calibre of talent is high. Hang around town for a few days and you'll discover that beneath Romeo, Horatio or Lady Macbeth lies a publican, a chef or perhaps a mechanic. It's a lucky dip with the emphasis on lucky – for the audience, that is. If you get the opportunity to see the Dorrigo thespians in action you will find yourself witnessing one of those rare treats of Australian that make TV producers green with envy. You may want to book an early dinner, though.

**Misty's** (☎ 6657 2855; www.dorrigo.com/mistys; 33 Hickory St; r incl breakfast \$95) Misty's self-contained cottage dates from the 1920s and has a gorgeous antique kitchen and bedroom. Breakfast comes in the form of a generous hamper. The main event, however, is Misty's restaurant (mains \$26; open for lunch on Sunday and dinner Wednesday to Sunday), where culinary delights such as grilled salmon with saffron and vanilla cream are matched by flawless presentation and service. Even more impressive is the fact that it's a two-man show – one's front of house and the other does all the cooking.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Twice a week **Keans** (☎ 6543 1322) heads to/from Bellingen, Coffs Harbour and Armidale.

### Dorrigo National Park

The most accessible of Australia's World Heritage rainforests, this **national park** (Map p183) is simply stunning, encompassing around 120 bird species and numerous walking tracks. The turn-off to the park is just south of Dorrigo. The **Rainforest Centre** (☎ 02-6657 2309; Dome Rd; ☺ 9am-5pm), at the park entrance, has information about the park's various ecosystems and can advise which walk to conquer given the weather and time of year. The **Skywalk**, an elevated walkway in front of the rainforest

centre, sits above the rainforest canopy and provides jaw-dropping views. It's well worth making the drive down to the **Never Never rest area** in the heart of the national park, from where you can walk to waterfalls or begin longer walks.

## Bellingen

☎ 02 / pop 2500

Scattered around the banks of the Bellingen River, this charming hill town has an ever-green hue, tempered by seasonal colours. Thick with gourmet cuisine and accommodation, Bellingen has a confident, laid-back personality, and artistic and alternative lifestyles are the norm.

The valley was part of the extensive territory of the Gumbainggir people until European timber cutters arrived in the 1840s.

### INFORMATION

**Bellingen Book Nook** (☎ 6655 9372; 25 Hyde St)

Glorious for avid bookworms.

**Technicality** (☎ 6655 1121; 7d Church St; per hr \$6) Internet access.

**www.bellingen.com** The excellent community website.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

To get a feel for the place, head to the magnificent **Hammond & Wheatley Emporium** (Hyde St), formerly an old department store. It's been beautifully restored and now houses a shop selling very stylish duds, as well as an art gallery and café.

The historic **Old Butter Factory** (☎ 6655 2150; 1 Doepel Lane; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) houses craft shops, a gallery, opal dealers, a masseur and a great café.

From December to March a huge colony of flying foxes descends on **Bellingen Island**.

**Bellingen Canoe Adventures** (☎ 6655 9955; 4 Tyson St, Fernmount; day tours per adult/child \$77/39) operates wonderful guided canoe tours on the Bellingen River, including full-moon tours (per adult/child fully clothed \$20/15).

**Heartland Didgeridoos** (☎ 6655 9881; 2/25 Hyde St) sent the first 'didg' into space. The indigenous owners also know a thing or two about quality, with a growing international reputation.

On the second Saturday of the month the **Natural Produce Market** holds court at the Bellingen Showground. On the third Saturday of the month the **Community Market** does the same at Bellingen Park.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Stamping Ground** (www.stampingground.com.au) A festival of international dance performances in January.

**Bellingen Jazz & Blues Festival** (www.bellingenjazzfestival.com.au) Features a strong line-up of jazz names in late August.

**Global Carnival** (www.globalcarnival.com) A multi-cultural mix of music and performances in early October.

### SLEEPING

**Bellingen YHA** (☎ 6655 1116; www.yha.com.au; 2 Short St; dm/d \$24/60; ☎) Bellingen's award-winning YHA attracts backpackers via the grapevine and then keeps them here with a tranquil, engaging atmosphere inside a renovated weatherboard house.

**Maddefords Cottages** (☎ 6655 9866; www.maddefordscottages.com.au; 224 North Bank Rd; d \$135; ☎) These polished mountain cabins have cosy interiors with country furnishings and big, sunny windows. Timber balconies overlook a private valley tumbling below, and your first night includes a sizeable brekkie hamper.

**Rivendell Guest House** (☎ 6655 0060; www.rivendellguesthouse.com.au; 10-12 Hyde St; d incl breakfast \$140; ☎) Right in the thick of things, Rivendell has three large en-suite rooms and a twin with its own bathroom across the hall. All rooms have French door access to a shady veranda and in winter the open fire is deliciously toasty.

More options:

**Casa Belle Country Guest House** (☎ 6655 0155; www.casabelle.com; 90 Gleniffer Rd; r incl breakfast \$185; ☎) Lavish Tuscan villa.

**Koompartoo Retreat** (☎ 6655 2326; www.koompartoo.com.au; cnr Rawson & Dudley Sts; d \$145; ☎) Delightful chalets.

### EATING & DRINKING

There are plenty of excellent options to choose from in this hedonistic town.

**Boiling Billy Coffee House** (☎ 6655 1947; 7 Church St; mains \$7-14; ☎) breakfast daily, lunch Mon-Sat) Gourmet sandwiches, Moroccan tagine and spicy Bombay curries are dished up amid terracotta hues and a beautifully blithe atmosphere.

**Relish Bar & Grill** (☎ 6655 1003; 77 Hyde St; meals \$8-15; ☎) lunch & dinner) Within the heritage-fronted Federation Hotel, this chic bar and grill serves tasty pub nosh. The side veranda hosts live music and happy punters when the sun's out.

**Riverstone Cafe** (☎ 6655 9099; Shop 3, 105-109 Hyde St; mains \$14-18) Suck in the scent of fresh coffee while you pore over artsy tomes; this café-

### DETOUR: MOONBAR RD

Northwest of Dorrigo, the rippled landscape is quilted in farmland and a medley of gold and green. Just past Bostobrick, Moonbar Rd (Map p183) is a dirt track veering off to the north. It navigates old-growth forests and pockets of three national parks. About 8km in, a sign directs you to take a track to the left to the Norman Jolly Memorial Grove, where an 800m walking trail meanders through 600-year-old tallowwood trees. Some 5km further north, Moonbar Rd will place you at Platypus Flat in the Nymbol Binderay National Park, with remote and basic camping.

Moonbar Rd continues to loop its way around the two-house settlements of Cascade and Briggsvale and through Cascade National Park. It then heads south again to skirt Junuy Juluum National Park and finishes at Dangar Falls.

Moonbar Rd is almost 45km long and traverses rugged and ancient forests. It's a bumpy ride in parts and best travelled in a 4WD in wet weather, but a 2WD will be fine otherwise.

cum-bookstore-cum-music-store scintillates the tastebuds with creative fare like sake lamb with shiitake mushrooms.

**No 2 Oak St** (☎ 6655 9000; 2 Oak St; mains \$32; ☎) dinner Tue-Sat) Housed in a timber cottage, this award-winning restaurant specialises in Mod Oz with a French twist – think slow-braised duck leg with caramel pears, button mushrooms and roast pumpkin.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Keans** (☎ 6543 1322) has twice-weekly services to/from Coffs Harbour, Dorrigo and Armidale.

### Around Bellingen

There are some beautiful spots waiting to be discovered in the surrounding valleys. The most accessible is the hamlet of **Gleniffer** (Map p183), 10km to the north and clearly signposted from North Bellingen. There's a good swimming hole in the **Never Never River** behind the small Gleniffer School of Arts at the crossroads. Then you can drive around Loop Rd, which takes you to the foot of the New England tableland – a great drive that words don't do justice to.

If you want to sweat, tackle the **Syndicate Ridge Walking Trail** (Map p183), a strenuous 15km walk from Gleniffer to the Dorrigo plateau following the route of a tramline once used by timber cutters. There's a very steep 1km climb on the way up. To get to the start, take the Gordonville Rd, turning into Adams Lane soon after crossing the Never Never River. The walking track commences at the first gate.

### NORTH OF ARMIDALE

**Glen Innes** (population 6250), is obsessed with Scotland, and businesses with names like Glen This and Wee That are thick as whiskey after

the haggis has fallen into the barrel. The **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6730 2400; www.gleninnestourism.com; 152 Church St) is on the New England Hwy.

Frustrated by the lack of pagan activity back in the Stone and Bronze Age, the town went about erecting its own **Standing Stones**, off the eastern end of the Gwydir Hwy. They look strangely powerful among the gum trees.

The town centre is full of **heritage buildings**. The **Land of the Beardies History House** (☎ 02-6732 1035; cnr West Ave & Ferguson St; adult/child \$6/1; ☎) 10am-noon & 1-4pm) fills an old hospital to bursting with eclectic artefacts of old Glen Innes. If you're around on a weekend, take a **pub crawl on horseback** (☎ 02-6732 1599; www.pubcrawlsonhorseback.com.au; Bullock Mountain Homestead; horse riding per hr from \$30, weekend ride \$375).

The **Australian Celtic Festival** (www.theaustraliancelticfestival.com), held at the end of April each year, features many grown men in medieval dress poking each other with big sticks (in the jousting competition). But the **Beardies Festival** (www.beardiesfestival.com) is where you will see the beard-growing competition, a popular event open to both men and women.

There are several motels along the highway. **Ramona's** (☎ 02-6732 2922; 160 Church St; mains \$24-29; ☎) dinner) serves fabulous cuisine focusing on organic and local produce.

Dramatic, forested and wild, **Gibraltar Range & Washpool National Parks** lie south and north of the Gwydir Hwy, about 80km east of Glen Innes on the road to Grafton. Walking tracks lead to camping areas (per person \$5). Washpool has some beautiful swimming holes amid the cool, quiet World Heritage-listed rainforest.

**Inverell** is not about to win any awards for character, but it's refreshingly not driven by the tourist dollar and is within cooe of the



**Kwiambal National Park** and the very empty **Copeton Dam** (at just 23% of capacity at the time of writing). You can pick up a map of the area's fossicking sites at the **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6728 8161; [www.inverell-online.com.au](http://www.inverell-online.com.au); Campbell St). An ideal outing for car enthusiasts is the **Transport Museum** (☎ 02-6721 2270; Taylor Ave; adult/child \$6.60/4.40; ☎ 10am-4pm; ♿), which features some rare and exotic automobiles that can only be viewed here in Inverell.

One of the more popular fossicking reserves around town is **Billabong Blue Sapphire Fossicking Park** (☎ 02-6728 8161; Woodstock Rd; adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun). However, prospective individuals may want to check out **7 Oaks** (☎ 6725 1582; Rickey's Lane) as well.

If you're feeling fishy, the **Great Inland Fishing Festival** is held at Copeton Dam in December. It is a catch-and-release comp where you score points depending on what you have hooked.

Built on an extinct volcano, **Blair Athol Estate** (☎ 02-6722 4288; [www.babs.com.au/blairathol](http://www.babs.com.au/blairathol); Warialda Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$100/120) has stunning grounds peppered with a rich mix of flora from Himalayan cedars to boabs.

**Copeton Dam** (☎ 02-6723 6269; Gumflat Rd; per car \$8, boat hire per hr \$20, bike hire \$14) offers a number of activities from water-skiing and sailing to golf, although the kangaroos don't appear to take their game too seriously. Be careful of these fellows on the road – they're bloody big.

**Graman Pub** (☎ 02-6725 6482; Yetman Rd, Graman; ☎ lunch & dinner), about 100km northwest of Glen Innes, is one of the most authentic pubs in NSW. Craig is the pubman and what you see is what you get, which is always lots of laughs. Expect to meet brilliant characters and have a wonderful time.

Further northwest, **Kwiambal National Park** (high-*am*-bal) sits at the junction of the Macintyre and Severn Rivers. Largely undiscovered (admission free), it is an important conservation area for the tumbledown gum and Caley's ironbark.

## TENTERFIELD

☎ 02 / pop 3300

At the junction of the New England and Bruxner Hwys, Tenterfield is the birthplace of both Federation (thanks to a speech given in town by 19th-century NSW premier Henry Parkes) and the flamboyant 'boy from Oz', Peter Allen. Regardless of how much your baby smiles this place will never resemble Rio, but you can

have fun wandering around historic buildings and getting into the gourmet cuisine.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6736 1082; [www.tenterfield.com](http://www.tenterfield.com); 157 Rouse St) has bushwalking guides and can book tours to nearby national parks.

There is plenty of work fruit picking on farms near town from October through to May. Pick stone fruit, cherries, tomatoes and grapes. Contact Barbara at **Tenterfield Lodge & Caravan Park** (☎ 6736 1477; [tenterfieldlodge@ozemail.com.au](mailto:tenterfieldlodge@ozemail.com.au)) for further information.

The **Tenterfield Saddler** (☎ 6736 1478; High St; ☎ 10am-4pm) celebrated by Peter Allen in his eponymous song is still open for business. About 12km outside town on the road north to Liston lies **Thunderbolt's Hideout**, where bushranger Captain Thunderbolt did just that. On your way there check out the **Tenterfield Weather Rock** near the baths.

The king of 4WD parks is **Rover Park** (☎ 6737 6862; [www.roverpark.com](http://www.roverpark.com); Rover Park Rd; sites \$30, on-site vans \$55, bunkhouse \$60); it's best you don't drive a hatchback in if you have some pride. The park is 35km east of Tenterfield on Casino Rd and has over 300km of 4WD tracks to traverse.

**Bald Rock National Park** (per person \$7) is 29km northeast of Tenterfield. You can hike to the top of Australia's largest granite monolith (which looks like a stripy little Uluru) and **camp** (adult/child \$5) near the base.

Motels line Rouse St leading south out of town. **Peter Allen Motor Inn** (☎ 6736 2499; 177 Rouse St; s/d from \$70/80; ♿) has spotless rooms with flamboyant-coloured bathroom tiles. **Tenterfield Lodge & Caravan Park** (☎ 6736 1477; [tenterfieldlodge@ozemail.com.au](mailto:tenterfieldlodge@ozemail.com.au); 2 Manners St; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/19, dm \$25, cabins \$45-65; ♿) is a friendly place with a range of accommodation.

Buses leave town from the Community Centre on Manners Street. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) runs to Tamworth (adult/child \$63/52) and Sydney (adult/child \$105/86). **Kirklands** (☎ 6626 1499) runs to Lismore (adult/child \$30/15).

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has bus services south to Glen Innes (adult/child \$16/8) and to Armidale (adult/child \$35/18), where you can change for Sydney (adult/child \$62/52).

## TENTERFIELD TO CASINO

The exceedingly twisted road to Casino leads through the quietly beautiful Upper Clarence cattle country. The rolling hills are easy on the eyes, even if dinner time isn't easy on the grazing inhabitants.

**Clarence River Wilderness Lodge** (☎ 02-6665 1337; [www.clarenceriver.com](http://www.clarenceriver.com); Paddy's Flat Rd; sites \$4-8, cabins \$100) is a long way from anywhere up a rough but scenic road (30km from Tabulam). This rustic lodge is in a beautiful river gorge with great swimming. There's also bushwalking, platypus-spotting, canoe and kayak expeditions, and gold fossicking. Lights are solar-powered, hot water is heated with a wood fire, and guests need to bring bedding, food and drinks.

**Richmond Range National Park** contains some of the best-preserved old-growth rainforest in NSW. The 15,712-hectare park is part of a World Heritage-listed preserve and offers an array of chances to see what this part of Australia looked like before settlement. There is a good two-hour circular walk through the foliage from the Cambridge Plateau picnic area (some sections are steep). There are basic camp sites at **Peacock Creek** (per person \$5). The park is 45km west of Casino via the Bruxner Hwy (which goes to Tenterfield); turn north onto Cambridge Plateau Dr.

**Casino** (population 11,900), celebrates its **beef festival** in late May and early June, but otherwise it's really just a useful transport hub.

## CENTRAL WEST

Stretching 400km inland from the Blue Mountains, NSW's central west gradually shifts from rolling agricultural heartland into vast plains and finally the harsher outback soil of the far west. It was gold that began this region, and its legacy lingers in the fascinating towns throughout. Steeped in bushranger and gold-rush history, they're lined with stately buildings, parks, and vivid and well-tended English gardens.

These days the region is all 21st-century agribusiness, and it has consequently developed into something of a foodie centre. Having cultivated their own atmosphere, the diverse towns are destinations in themselves: choose from the university city of Bathurst, the public-service enclave of Orange, the thrusting new small businesses of Mudgee, tourist towns like Wellington and Parkes, and Dubbo with its Western Plains Zoo.

## BATHURST

☎ 02 / pop 37,100

There are dinosaurs in Bathurst, but even though it's Australia's oldest inland settlement, it's no dinosaur of a town. Boasting European

trees, a cool climate, formidable Victorian buildings and leafy, manicured parks, it's redolent of days gone by. But Bathurst also makes its 21st-century mark as the bastion of Australian motor sport, hosting numerous events.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6332 1444; Kendall Ave; [www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au)) is particularly helpful. Internet access is free at the **Bathurst Library** (☎ 6332 2130; 70-78 Keppel St), part of the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.

## Sights & Activities

See *Tyrannosaurus rex*, Australia's only complete skeleton, at the **Australian Fossil & Mineral Museum** (☎ 6331 5511; 224 Howick St; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sun). You'll also see the internationally renowned Somerville Collection and over 6000 fossils from every period of the earth's history. It's fantastic.

The **Bathurst Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 6331 6066; 70-78 Keppel St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has a dynamic collection of work, featuring local artists as well as exciting touring exhibitions.

The **courthouse** (1880), on Russell St, is the most impressive of Bathurst's historical buildings and houses the small **Historical Museum** (☎ 6332 4755; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun).

Ben Chifley, Prime Minister from 1945 to 1949, lived in Bathurst, and the modest **Chifley Home** (☎ 6332 1444; 10 Busby St; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 11am-3pm Sat-Mon) is on display. The Chifley government's initiatives in welcoming European refugees as immigrants were important to Australia's cultural and economic development.

Rev-heads will enjoy the **National Motor Racing Museum** (☎ 6332 1872; Pit Straight; adult/child/family \$7/5/16; ☎ 9am-4.30pm). The 6.2km **Mt Panorama Motor Racing Circuit** is the venue for one of Australia's most popular car races, the Bathurst Motorsport Spectacular in October. You can drive around the circuit, but only up to an unthrilling 60km/h.

## Sleeping

**Commercial Hotel** (☎ 6331 2712; 135 George St; [www.geocities.com/commercialhotelbathurst](http://www.geocities.com/commercialhotelbathurst); dm/s/d \$20/29/49) This quaint old pub has a cosy bar downstairs and small but inviting rooms upstairs, opening onto a veranda.

**Accommodation Warehouse** (☎ 6332 2801; [www.accomwarehouse.com.au](http://www.accomwarehouse.com.au); 121a Keppel St; s/d \$60/80) This soaring brick building with its arched

windows and Juliet balconies has lovely self-contained apartments, or stylish rooms with shared kitchen.

**Blackdown Estate** (☎ 6331 7121; www.blackdownestate.com.au; 90 Eleven Mile Drive; queen d/ste \$150/170; ☼) The majestic rooms at this dreamy retreat have claw-footed bathtubs and views across the historic outbuildings and lakes to the low ranges.

**Bathurst Panorama Holiday Park** (☎ 6331 8286; www.bathurstholidaypark.com.au; Great Western Hwy; powered sites/cabins from \$26/60; ☼) This well-equipped park is the main caravan and camping option, but during race periods other areas are opened.

## Eating

**Guan Yin Vegetarian** (☎ 6332 5388; 166A William St; mains \$10-14; ☼ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Wed-Fri) This cosy restaurant serves 'I can't believe it's not meat' dishes where vegetarian Mongolian beef is the order of the day.

**Ellie's Café** (☎ 6332 1707; 108 William St; mains \$11-15; ☼ breakfast & lunch Sun-Wed, dinner Thu-Sat) Ellie's has a popular courtyard and serves a great range of hot meals, like fish with tomato-and-olive tapenade, or delicious crepes.

**Crowded House** (☎ 6334 2300; www.crowdedhousecafe.com.au; 1 Ribbon Gang Lane; mains \$16-30; ☼ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) From a restored 1850s church with soaring ceilings, the restaurant spills out onto a medieval courtyard off William St and serves fabulously elegant fare.

More eats:

**Bernard's Bakery** (☎ 6331 2042; 81 George St; meals \$7; ☼ breakfast & lunch) Crusty rolls and pies.

**Restaurant 92** (☎ 6332 1757; 92 Bentinck St; mains \$8-15; ☼ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Upmarket deli-cum-wine bar.

## Getting There & Away

**Selwood's Coaches** (☎ 6362 7963) runs to Orange (\$9, 45 minutes) and Sydney (\$30, four hours).

The **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) XPTs (express trains) stop here on the daily Sydney (\$34, 3½ hours) and Dubbo (\$31, 1½ hours) service.

## AROUND BATHURST

About 70km south of Bathurst, along awesomely windy roads, are the famous **Abercrombie Caves** (☎ 02-6368 8603; www.jenolancaves.org.au; self-guided/guided tours \$13/16; ☼ 9am-5pm). The complex has one of the world's largest natural

tunnels, the Grand Arch. There's **accommodation** (☎ 02-6368 8603; camp sites per person/family \$7.50/18, cabin standard/de luxe \$50/90) near the cave, with good facilities nearby.

**Sofala**, Australia's oldest surviving gold town, a quaint little place, has some unusually well-preserved timber buildings. The films *The Cars That Ate Paris* and *Sirens* were shot here.

Some 35km northwest of Sofala, pretty **Hill End** was the scene of an 1870s gold rush, then it became an artists' colony. The **NPWS office** (☎ 02-6337 8206; Hospital Lane; ☼ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm), inside the old hospital, is where you can book the two **NPWS camping grounds** (powered sites per adult/child \$7.50/4, unpowered sites \$5/3). The dusty **Royal Hotel** (☎ 02-6337 8261; Beyers Ave; r \$35-90) is the only pub that remains of the initial 28 and has seemingly held onto some original locals.

## ORANGE

☎ 02 / pop 39,000

There are pears, apples and stone fruits aplenty in the surrounding orchards, but you'll find nary an orange. The town is actually named after Prince William of Orange. Banjo Paterson was born here (with no orange-related claim to fame). With four distinct seasons, the city's parks and gardens are a kaleidoscope of colours throughout the year, and cold winters bring occasional snowfalls.

## Information

**DNA Coffee** (☎ 6363 1400; Orange City Centre, Anson St; per hr \$5; ☼ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Wed, to 11pm Thu-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun) Internet access.

**Orange visitor centre** (☎ 6393 8226; www.orange.nsw.gov.au; Byng St)

## SEASONAL WORK

The autumn apple-picking season lasts for about six weeks. **Octec Employment Service** (☎ 6362 8169; www.octec.org.au; 247 Anson St) can help you find work. Some orchards have accommodation.

## Sights & Activities

Next to the visitor centre, the **Orange Regional Gallery** (☎ 6393 8136; Civic Sq; admission free; ☼ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) has an ambitious, varied program of exhibitions and some Australian masters.

The **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 6361 5186; Kearneys Dr; admission free; ☼ 7.30am-dusk) were established in 1982 to preserve the native woodlands of the

area. They're on Clover Hill (with good views between the trees), 2km north of the city.

Orange has a reputation for distinctive cool-climate wines, with many award-winning vineyards around the town. The *Cellar Doors of Orange* booklet from the visitor centre provides a map and summary of each vineyard.

Australia's first real gold rush took place at **Ophir**, 27km north of Orange along mostly unsealed roads. It's still popular with fossickers today.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Duntryleague Guesthouse** (☎ 6362 3822; www.duntryleague.com.au; Woodward St; s/d \$110/135; ☼) This grand mansion (1876) is now run B&B style and has capacious rooms, four-poster beds and the Orange golf course right there in the grounds.

**Aranca Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 6365 3305; www.arancia.com.au; Wrights Lane; s/d \$145/185; ☼) The rooms are luxurious, the views are stunning and the breakfast is delicious. It's set amid rolling hills close to the wineries and golf courses.

**Colour City Caravan Park** (☎ 6362 7279; kpratt@orange.nsw.gov.au; cnr Margaret St & Leeds Pde; sites \$19, cabins s/d \$44/52; ☼) This lovely park is squeaky clean and grassy.

**Belgravia @ Union Bank** (☎ 6360 0495; cnr Sale & Byng Sts; mains \$18; ☼ lunch & dinner) This fabulous cellar door and wine bar has a range of tapas and other tasty snacks, excellent service, and weekly live music and movies.

**Selkirks** (☎ 6361 1179; 179 Anson St; 2/3 courses \$66/77; ☼ dinner Tue-Sat) In a lovely old sandstone house, this superlative restaurant boasts a passionate chef, the very best local, seasonal produce, and a blissful wine and dessert list.

## Getting There & Away

**Regional Express Airlines** (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13) flies to Sydney daily. The airport is 13km southeast of Orange.

**Selwood's** (☎ 6362 7963; www.selwoods.com.au) buses leave daily for Sydney (\$39, 4¼ hours) and Bathurst (\$9, 45 minutes) from the train station. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) trains go to Sydney (\$41, five hours) and Dubbo (\$20, 1¼ hours).

## COWRA

☎ 02 / pop 13,150

Ever since August 1944, when 1000 Japanese prisoners broke out of a POW camp here (231 of them died, along with four Australians, in

the ensuing melee), Cowra has aligned itself with Japan and the cause of world peace.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6342 4333; www.cowratourism.com.au; Olympic Park, Mid Western Hwy) shows an unusual holographic film about the break-out.

## Sights

Built as a token of Cowra's connection with Japanese POWs (but with no overt mention of the war or the break-out), the **Japanese Garden** (☎ 6341 2233; Binni Creek Rd; adult/child \$8.50/5; ☼ 8.30am-5pm) and the attached cultural centre, with its collection of *ukiyo-e* paintings depicting everyday events in pre-industrial Japan, are well worth visiting. A **sakura** (cherry-blossom festival) is held around the second weekend in October.

The Australian and Japanese **war cemeteries** are 5km south of town; many of those who died were very young. A nearby **memorial** marks the site of the break-out, and you can still see the camp foundations.

One of the darkest places for stargazing in all of Australia is **Darby Falls Observatory** (☎ 6345 1900; Mt McDonald Rd; adult/child \$10/7; ☼ 7-10pm, 8.30-11pm during daylight saving). From town, follow Wyangala Dam Rd for 22km and turn onto Mt McDonald Rd, then follow the signs.

**The Mill** (☎ 6341 4141; www.windowrie.com.au; 6 Vaux St; ☼ 10am-6pm) is Cowra's oldest building, where its millstone first turned in 1861. Now it's a well-regarded winery – try the region's famous Chardonnay.

The small town of **Canowindra**, 32km north of Cowra, has a heritage-listed main street and is (allegedly) the ballooning capital of Australia. **Aussie Balloontrek** (☎ 02-6364 0211; www.aussieballoontrek.com.au; Nanami Lane, Canowindra; 30min/1hr flights from \$160/280) can get you high with a BBQ and champagne breakfast.

## Tours

**Ideal Tours** (☎ 6341 3350; www.australianacornor.com; 1 Kendal St) runs tours of wineries and other local attractions.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Breakout Motel** (☎ 6342 6111; www.breakoutmotel.com.au; 181 Kendal St; s/d \$88/98; ☼) This is a modern and quite delightful place, right in the centre, with atmospheric slate, blue and beige decor.

**Vineyard Motel** (☎ 6342 3641; vineyard@dodo.com.au; Chardonnay Rd; s/d \$90/100, d incl spa \$110; ☼)



Located 4km from town, this place overlooks the lush Lachlan Valley and fields of grapevines. It's secluded and romantic.

**Cowra Van Park** (☎ 6340 2110; Lachlan St; camp sites \$22, cabins standard/de luxe \$60/70) Shady and green, and overlooking the lovely Lachlan, this is handy to everything.

**Naked Lady** (☎ 6341 1455; mains \$9-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This cheery eatery dishes up gourmet delights, like lamb kofta skewers with baba ganoush, amid waterfalls and statues.

**Neila** (☎ 6341 2188; 5 Kendal St; mains \$29; ☎ dinner Thu-Sat) This small gem on Cowra's main drag fuses regional goodies with Mod Oz creativity – try the caramelised pork hock with green papaya and cashew-nut salad.

## Getting There & Away

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has daily services to Sydney (\$58, 5½ hours).

## YOUNG

☎ 02 / pop 11,957

Colourful hills of cherry orchards, pink, red and green, tell you you're coming into Young, Australia's 'cherry capital' on the edge of the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range. Prunes are also an important local industry, but 'prune capital' doesn't have quite the same ring.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6382 3394; 2 Short St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) is near the creek as you enter town and has a list of orchards where you can pick your own fruit. The cherry harvest is in November and December. In January other stone fruits are harvested and in February the prune harvest begins. The **Ready Workforce office** (☎ 6382 1403; 187 Boorowa St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) can help you find fruit-picking work.

There are about 15 small vineyards in the area producing award-winning cool-climate wines, including the excellent **Lindsay's Woodongia Hill** (☎ 02-6389 2972; 1101 Cowra Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm), northeast of Young, and **Chalkers Crossing** (☎ 02-6382 6900; www.chalkerscrossing.com.au; 387 Henry Lawson Way; ☎ 10am-4pm).

The **Lambing Flat Folk Museum** (☎ 6382 2248; Campbell St; adult/child \$4/1; ☎ 10am-4pm) displays artefacts from the goldfields, including the remarkable 'Roll Up' banner carried by European miners in protest against the Chinese in 1861. The Sydney Chinese community raised money to build the **Chinese Tribute Garden** (Pitstone Rd; admission free; ☎ daily), a tranquil spot

featuring a pagoda and dam, to remember the contribution the Chinese miners made, including an ingenious troughlike structure to transport the water up to 3km away.

Young hosts the **Cherry Festival** on the first weekend in December, with markets, heritage train rides, street art and, most importantly, a cherry-pip-spitting competition.

**Marina Homestead B&B & Alpaca Farm** (☎ 6382 6770; Moppity Rd; d incl breakfast \$120) has a bevy of content alpacas, a beautiful rambling garden, a historic homestead, and en-suite rooms. The sitting room has a wood fire, and breakfast features local produce. It's just 5km southeast of town.

**Young Tourist Park** (☎ 6382 2190; Zouch St; camp sites per adult \$20, cabins standard/deluxe \$60/77; ☎) is a comfortable camping option that has drive-through sites with bathrooms for caravans.

For eats, try **Café de Jour** (☎ 6382 1413; cnr Lovell & Zouch Sts; mains \$21-27; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat), a lovely restaurant with great atmosphere, where Stephen and Kelly present meals with a finesse well acknowledged by food critics. The chicken breast stuffed with prawn and crab is like a work of art.

## FORBES

☎ 02 / pop 9975

Perched on the banks of the Lachlan River, Forbes is spectacularly pretty, retaining much of its 19th-century flavour thanks to its beautifully restored buildings. The **visitor centre** (☎ 6852 4155; cnr Newell Hwy & Union St) is inside the old train station and has local art exhibits.

Ben Hall, a landowner who became Australia's first official bushranger, was betrayed and shot near Forbes. He's buried in the town's cemetery; people still miss him, if the notes on his grave are anything to go by. The **Forbes Museum** (☎ 6852 1694; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 3-5pm Oct-May, 2-4pm Jun-Sep) houses Ben Hall relics and other memorabilia.

The **Bushrangers Hall of Fame** (☎ 6851 1881; 135 Lachlan St; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ 10am-6pm), in the Albion Hotel, has guided tours of old underground tunnels that were used to transfer gold from banks into waiting coaches.

The impressive **Vandenberg Hotel** (☎ 6852 2015; info@vandenberghotel.com.au; 7 Court St; s/d/f \$30/40/50) has grand old rooms, most of which overlook Victoria Park.

You may recognise Forbes from the popular Australian film *The Dish*, where much of the filming took place.

## PARKES

☎ 02 / pop 10,500

A visit to the Parkes gold diggings by NSW premier Sir Henry Parkes in 1871 prompted the locals to change the name of their village from Currajong and name the main street after Parkes' wife, Clarinda. It's said that Sir Henry later influenced the decision to route the railway through the town.

Today, Parkes is happy to be known as the home of the radio telescope made famous by the film *The Dish*. The town is still the sleepy, charming place that was portrayed there. The **visitor centre** (☎ 6863 8860; www.visitparkes.com.au; cnr Newell Hwy & Thomas St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is in Kelly Reserve.

Along the Newell Hwy on the Dubbo side of town, the **Sir Henry Parkes Museum** (☎ 6862 3509; adult \$5; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Sat) is more like someone's house than a traditional exhibition space, but it has some Parkes memorabilia and over 5000 pieces of antique machinery.

The **Radio Telescope**, built by the CSIRO in 1961, is 6km east of the Newell Hwy, about 20km north of Parkes. As one of the world's most powerful telescopes it has helped Australian radio astronomers become leaders in their field, and brought pictures of the *Apollo 11* moon landing to an audience of 600 million people. The telescope has also played a vital role in detecting thousands of new galaxies at the edge of the known universe. Over half the known pulsars (rapidly spinning 'cores' of dead stars) have been discovered at Parkes.

Although the telescope is off-limits, you can get close enough for a good look, and the **visitor centre** (☎ 6861 1777; www.csiro.au/parkes dish; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.15pm) has hands-on displays and screens that show you what the astronomers see. **Three-D films** (adult/child \$6.50/5.00) screen throughout the day. The **Dish Café** (☎ 6862 1566; Parkes Radio Telescope, Telescope Rd; meals \$6-12; ☎ 8.30am-4.15pm) whips up great breakfasts like Meteor Muesli and lunches like Space Station Steak Sandwich, served with rocket fuel if you want.

July festival the **Astrofest** is held at the dish; contact the CSIRO telescope on ☎ 6861 1700 for info.

**Bushmans Motor Inn** (☎ 6862 2199; Currajong Rd; r \$99-110; ☎) is settled into a lovely garden around a central court and overlooks a lush paddock at the back.

**Currajong Tourist Park** (☎ 6862 3400; Newell Hwy; camp sites per adult \$20, cabins/cottages \$45/75; ☎) (☎)

Just a few metres north of the visitor centre is this small, quiet and pretty place, with a spacious aviary to keep you entranced.

## DUBBO

☎ 02 / pop 40,000

Home to the grand Western Plains Zoo, Dubbo is also a rural centre and transport crossroads on the northern fringe of the Central West region. It's busy but attractive.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 674 443, 6801 4450; www.dubbotourism.com.au; cnr Macquarie & Erskine Sts) is in a park at the northern end of town.

## Sights

With over 1500 animals, the **Western Plains Zoo** (☎ 6882 5888; www.zootopia.com.au; Obley Rd; 2-day pass adult/child/family \$32/18/84; ☎ 9am-5pm, last entry 4pm) is Dubbo's star attraction. Stand so close to the giraffes that you can sense their majesty, or so close to endangered black rhinos that you can smell their poo. Giggle at acrobatic otters in the Asian Wetlands exhibit. The Bengal tigers alone are worth the admission price. You can walk the 6km, hire a bike (\$13) or join the crawling line of cars. Guided walks (\$3) start at 6.45am every weekend.

The **Old Dubbo Gaol** (☎ 6801 4460; 90 Macquarie St; adult/child \$12/5; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is now a museum. 'Animatronic' characters tell their stories – you hear from a condemned man due for a meeting with the gallows. Creepy but authentic.

About 2km beyond the Western Plains Zoo, **Dundullimal** (☎ 6884 9984; Obley Rd; adult/child \$6/3; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a timber-slabs homestead built in the 1840s, and it showcases some of the earliest forms of permanent European housing in NSW.

**Red Earth Estate Vineyard** (☎ 6885 6676; www.redearthestate.com.au; 18 Camp Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue), just past the zoo, is one of numerous vineyards with free tastings.

## Sleeping

**Dubbo YHA Kurrajong House** (☎ 6882 0922; dubboyha@iinet.net.au; cnr Brisbane St & Newell Hwy; unpowered sites \$8, dm/s/d/f \$23/30/46/55; ☎) This homey little fan-cooled place has open verandas and friendly hosts. Bike hire (\$8) is available.

**de Russie Boutique Hotel** (☎ 6882 7888; www.derussiehoteles.com.au; 95 Cobra St; s/d \$88/95; ☎) (☎) This newish B&B has delightful architectural features, a good continental breakfast and wi-fi access.

**Westbury Guesthouse** (☎ 6884 9445; westbury.dubbo@bigpond.com; cnr Brisbane & Wingewarra Sts; s/d \$90/110; 🍷) This lovely old heritage home (1910) has spacious rooms, all with en suites, and a shared lounge and kitchen. Longer-term stays attract discounts.

**Dubbo City Caravan Park** (☎ 6882 4820; www.dubbo.caravanpark.com.au; Whylandra St; powered sites/cabins from \$24/46; 🍷 🚰) Right on the riverbank and an easy walk across the bridge into town, this busy spot has a BBQ area, a kids' playground, and cabins nestled between the trees.

## Eating

**Grape Vine Café** (☎ 6884 7354; 144 Brisbane St; mains \$11-15; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Enjoy fresh soup, pasta and cakes in a coffeehouse atmosphere or the lovely courtyard.

**Two Doors Tapas & Wine Bar** (☎ 6884 4338; 215b Macquarie St; mains \$14-16; 🍷 dinner) Enjoy a great range of tapas, or just kick back with a drink in a leafy courtyard below street level.

**Rose Garden** (☎ 6882 8322; 208 Brisbane St; mains \$14-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) An institution in Dubbo, this is a cosy spot with good Thai cuisine, richly coloured décor and very friendly staff.

**de Russie Restaurant** (☎ 6882 7888; 93 Cobra St; mains \$23-5; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) For a special meal, this pretty restaurant is perfect. Chef Wade Holding has a light touch, preparing beautifully balanced meals like braised duck with black grapes.

## Getting There & Around

**Rex** (☎ 13 17 13) has regular flights to/from Sydney and Bourke (via Cobar). **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) also has regular flights to/from Sydney.

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) runs the XPT train, and one coach service, to/from Sydney (\$60 to \$78, 6½ hours) daily.

**Darren Wheelers** (☎ 6882 9899; 25 Bultje St; 🍷 closed Sun) rents out mountain bikes for \$15 per day.

## WELLINGTON

☎ 02 / pop 5200

With its steep green hills and the wide Bell River running through it, Wellington is a very pleasant spot, but it also has a dazzling set of attractions worth a chunk of your time. You'll find the very helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 6845 1733; www.wellington.nsw.gov.au; 🍷 9am-5pm) in Cameron Park.

The **Wellington Caves & Phosphate Mine** (☎ 6845 1733; adult/child 1 cave \$14/9, 2 caves/cave &

mine \$24/17; 🍷 tours daily; 🚰 🚰) were discovered in 1830 by a colonist, George Ranken, who accidentally fell into one of the caves. These exquisite and unusual formations, plus subterranean waters, marsupial fossils and 'living fossils', are an absolute highlight. Cathedral Cave is famous for its majestic 32m-wide and 15m-high stalagmite! The phosphate mine is wheelchair friendly.

Across the road from the caves is a **Japanese Garden** (admission free; 🍷 9am-4pm), a gift from Wellington's Japanese sister city, Osawanao.

You'll be entranced by the **Burrendong Botanic Garden & Arboretum** (☎ 6846 7454; www.burrendongarboretum.org; per car \$4; 🍷 7.30am-sunset), an area overlooking Lake Burrendong that's been transformed into a wonderland of native vegetation – 50,000 plants and the largest range in Australia.

There are also stunning parks and water sports at **Lake Burrendong**, which holds 3½ times the volume of water in Sydney Harbour.

Stay in fancy digs at **Hermitage Hill Resort** (☎ 6845 4469; www.hermitagehill.com.au; 135 Maxwell St; guesthouse/cottage d \$89/165; 🍷 🚰), a handsome complex of heritage buildings and classic gardens. There are spa baths in some rooms, and an excellent restaurant, Red Rosellas (mains \$20 to \$30; open for lunch and dinner), boasting an interesting menu, such as chicken breast in bacon on a rosemary skewer.

**Wellington Caves Holiday Complex** (☎ 6845 2970; www.wellington.nsw.gov.au/tourism; Caves Rd; camp sites per adult \$21, cabins/units \$52/68; 🚰) has camp sites and cabins hidden between the trees around a golf course.

## MUDGEES

☎ 02 / pop 8500

Mudgee, an Aboriginal word for 'nest in the hills', is the centre for the new regional gourmet food and wine industries. It's a popular weekend getaway, combining attractive natural surroundings with gastronomic exploration.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 816 304, 6372 1020; www.visitmudgeeregion.com.au; 84 Market St), near the post office, can help with wine-tasting jaunts.

## Sights

### WINERIES

Mudgee's vineyards are clustered in two groups north and southeast of town. This

makes them ideal for cycling between as long as you don't get the wobbles. The vintage is later than it is in the Hunter Valley because of Mudgee's higher altitude.

**Poet's Corner** (☎ 6372 2208; Craigmoor Rd; 🍷 10am-4.30pm) has produced a vintage annually since 1858, making it one of Australia's oldest vintners. The atmospheric cellar holds musical evenings.

Get some old-fashioned winery atmosphere at **Pieter Van Gent** (☎ 6373 3807; Black Springs Rd; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun), where tastings can be taken in old choir stalls, and the muscat is nectar of the gods.

**Simon Gilbert Wines** (☎ 6373 1245; www.simongilbert.wines.com.au; Castlereagh Hwy; 🍷 9am-5pm) offers stunning views along the Cudgong River Valley, and a winemakers' platter (\$15) that includes local produce to add to your taste treat.

There's a **wine festival** every September.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Mudgee Vineyard Motor Inn** (☎ 6372 1022; 252 Henry Lawson Dr; s/d/f \$75/85/120; 🍷 🚰) Located only a couple of minutes' drive from town, this is an attractive place in the heart of the vineyards, with pretty rooms and great views.

**Bleak House** (☎ 6372 4888; www.geocities.com/bleak.housemudgee; 7 Lawson St; d incl breakfast \$165; 🍷 🚰) Built in 1860, this place is anything but bleak, with gracious verandas, soaring ceilings and pretty gardens. The rooms are tasteful and the breakfasts scrumptious.

**Mudgee Riverside Caravan & Tourist Park** (☎ 6372 2531; www.mudgeeriverside.com.au; 22 Short St; powered camp sites \$20, cabins/villas \$60/72; 🍷) Central and leafy, this pleasant park has an aviary, self-contained cabins and mountain-bike rental (per half-day \$15).

**Butcher Shop Café** (☎ 6372 7373; 49 Church St; mains \$7-15; 🍷 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) A hip eatery in an old butchery, with stained glass, interesting artwork, and the best scrambled eggs and smoked salmon for miles. Dinner is well-presented Mod Oz.

**Blue Wren Wines Café & Restaurant** (☎ 6372 6205; Cassilis Rd; mains \$24-29; 🍷 lunch, dinner Wed-Sat) An exceptional restaurant in an interesting space, this winery is the place to indulge in dishes like Moroccan-spiced lamb tagine.

**Roth's Wine Bar** (☎ 6372 1222; 30 Market St; 🍷 noon-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) Roth's is the oldest wine bar in NSW, and the atmosphere is still there.

## Getting There & Away

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) buses to Lithgow connect with Sydney trains (\$23, five hours 20 minutes, twice daily).

## GULGONG

☎ 02 / pop 2500

This little time-warp town was known as 'the hub of the world' during the roaring gold days. It was once so packed that dogs in the main street had to wave their tails up and down rather than side to side (or so they say). Today the narrow, rambling streets are classified by the National Trust. The **visitor centre** (☎ 6374 1202; www.mudgee-gulgong.org; 109 Herbert St; 🍷 8am-1pm, 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun) has guides to some terrific walks around the area.

The huge **Gulgong Pioneer Museum** (☎ 6374 1513; 73 Herbert St; admission \$5; 🍷 9am-5pm) has one of the most eclectic and chaotic collections of artefacts in the state.

Author Henry Lawson spent part of his childhood in the area, and the **Henry Lawson Centre** (☎ 6374 2049; 147 Mayne St; adult/child \$4/2.50; 🍷 10am-3.30pm Wed-Sat, to 1pm Sun-Tue) looks at his early memories of the town. Originally built from bark, the **opera house** (☎ 6374 1162; 99-101 Mayne St) is one of the oldest surviving theatres in Australia and still holds several performances a year. It once played host to Dame Nellie Melba.

**Henry Lawson Van Park** (☎ 6374 1294; www.henrylawsoncaravanpark.com.au; 111 Mayne St; powered sites \$19, cabins standard/de luxe \$36/63) spreads out prettily amongst the trees and has an animal farm complete with friendly llamas and a great aviary. **Meg's Kitchen** (☎ 6374 1166; 97 Mayne St; mains \$8-21; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a delightful little den serving delicious food cooked by Meg herself.

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) runs daily buses to Mudgee (\$5.50, 25 minutes).

## NORTHWEST

Kilometres of cotton and a sprinkling of canola, cow peas, field peas and other fruits of the soil dominate today's northwest, but drought and flood often reign. The weather here shapes the land and cultivates hardened and hard-working farmers – down-to-earth people with a certain admiration and respect for Mother Nature.



Most people pass through this wedge of Oz on the Newell Hwy, barely pausing on their way to/from Queensland. Warrumbungle National Park and Lightning Ridge remain the main tourist lures, but the incongruous and sinuous routes that stretch across this flat landscape reveal the type of big, open country that is synonymous with Australia.

## NEWELL HIGHWAY

The Newell Hwy is the quickest route between Melbourne and Brisbane, briefly joining the Oxley Hwy from Tamworth at **Coonabarabran** (population 3012), the gateway to the Warrumbungles. The helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6842 1441; www.coonabarabran.com; Newell Hwy) is south of the clock tower.

**Wattagan Estate Winery** (☎ 02-6842 2456; Oxley Hwy; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Mon) has delicious port, crisp Chardonnay and ample emu-oil products.

**Skywatch Observatory** (☎ 02-6842 3303; Timor Rd; adult/child \$15/9; ☎ viewings 7-10pm), just west of the town centre, has a planetarium, an astronomy exhibition and night-time star gazing. Or head to **Siding Spring Observatory** (☎ 02-6842 6211; www.sidingpringexploratory.com.au; National Park Rd; tours adult/child \$11/9; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun), 27km west of town, for some of the world's major, and Australia's largest, telescopes.

**Coachman's Rest Motor Lodge** (☎ 02-6842 2111; coachmans\_rest@bigpond.com.au; Newell Hwy; s/d \$77/88; 🍷 🍷) has stately gardens, a slightly ick brick interior, and a decent **restaurant** (mains \$20-25; ☎ lunch & dinner). Alternatively, **John Oxley Caravan Park** (☎ 02-6842 1635; Newell Hwy; sites \$14-19, cabins \$39-49), on the south side of town, has large basic cabins.

Snap, crackle, pop went the Warrumbungle Volcano as it erupted 17 million years ago, forming the spectacular granite domes of the **Warrumbungle National Park**. Sitting 33km west of Coonabarabran, this 23,198-hectare park has over 30km of bushwalking trails and explosive wildflower displays during spring. Park entrance fees (per car \$7) are payable at the **NPWS visitor centre** (☎ 02-6825 4364; ☎ 9am-4pm) in the park, which also handles camping registration (\$5 to \$8). Ask the centre about the **Warrumbungle Tara Cave Walk and Sundancin' Tour**, which is guided by local Gamilaroi people, including Aboriginal elders. The tour encompasses a walk through Tara Cave, a significant Aboriginal site that was occupied for over 4000 years, and insight into the traditional use of the land. For the Sundancin'

section of the tour you'll need your own wheels to follow a ranger to the Sandstone Caves in the Pilliga Nature Reserve.

Be warned that it can get cold here, even in summer.

Park yourself at **Mountain View Hotel/Motel** (☎ 02-6848 1017; s/d \$40/60) in wee Tooraweenah, at the foot of the Warrumbungles. Flashier digs can be found at **Tibuc Cabins** (☎ 02-6842 1740; www.coonabarabran.com/tibuc; Timor Rd; r \$90-110) – romantic wilderness cottages around 17km from Coonabarabran.

Alternatively, try **Tooraweenah Tourist Park** (☎ 02-6848 1133; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/18; cabins \$40-55; 🍷).

**Narrabri** (population 7300), the cotton-growing centre, is home to the **Australian Cotton Centre** (☎ 02-6792 6443; Newell Hwy; adult/child \$8/6; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), dedicated to the region's big cash crop. FYI: one standard 225kg bale of cotton can be made into 3085 nappies. Some 20km west, the **Australia Telescope Array** (☎ 02-6790 4070; Yarric Lake Rd; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm) comprises an array of radio telescopes used to map the universe. The **visitor centre** (☎ 02-6799 6760; www.visitnarrabri.com.au; Newell Hwy) has displays and a shop. **Joblink** (☎ 02-6792 5188; 5/100 Maitland St) can help you out with cotton jobs (also check out www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail or ring ☎ 1800 062 332).

**Sawn Rocks**, a pipe-organ formation about 40km northeast of Narrabri (20km unsealed), is the most accessible and popular part of **Mt Kaputar National Park**. The southern part of the park has dramatic lookouts, climbing, bushwalking and camping.

**Moree** (population 10,000), a large town on the Gwydir River, has the **Hot Springs Health Resort** (☎ 02-6752 2122; cnr Newell Hwy & Jones Ave; adult/child \$4/3; ☎ 8am-8pm), with a 1920s atmosphere of swimming caps, deck chairs and strong-man competitions. But it's mostly just a few locals frolicking in the hotter of the artesian pools (42°C).

In one of the town's attractive historic buildings, **Moree Plains Gallery** (☎ 02-6757 3320; cnr Frome & Herber Sts; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) specialises in Aboriginal art.

Cotton-related work is available throughout the year for skilled workers who are not afraid of a little blood, sweat and tears. However, anyone can partake in cotton chipping over the long, hot days from November to January. Contact **Joblink** (☎ 02-6752 8488) for further info on Project Harvest, or check out www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail.

## CASTLEREAGH HIGHWAY

The Castlereagh Hwy forks off the Newell at pretty **Gilgandra** (population 5156), and runs north into rugged opal country towards the Queensland border. Just north of Gilgandra, pull off the highway at the spot where, in 1818, John Oxley spat the dummy, when, expecting to find a giant inland sea, he instead discovered that the Macquarie River petered out into a boggy marsh. The town was also the starting point for the Coo-ee March, a WWI recruiting drive to Sydney, led by a butcher and his brother.

West of here, the prolific bird life of 200,000-hectare **Macquarie Marshes** is best seen during breeding season (usually spring, but it varies with water levels).

## Lightning Ridge

☎ 02 / pop 2200

Near the Queensland border, this fiercely independent and strikingly imaginative mining community (one of the world's few sources of black opals) has real frontier spirit. Battlers still dream of striking it rich underground here, and now and again some of them even do. Consequently, the streets are trodden by eccentric artisans, true-blue bushies and the general unconventional collective. And that's all ridgy-didge in the Ridge.

The town was named after an unfortunate event in 1963 when a flock of sheep, their drover and his faithful dog were struck down by lightning. Their singed woolly carcasses were still wafting with smoke when the town took its name from said event.

The fossicking season kicks off over the Easter long weekend, when you can prove your worth at the **Great Goat Race**. Catch a feral beast, give it some racing lessons, let it go with 50 other goats, and bet money on it.

Several **underground mines** and **opal showrooms** are open to the public, and there's a **gem festival** every July. In an example of the community's spirit, locals have mapped out four touring routes around town, using car doors as markers. Get details from the **Lightning Ridge visitor centre** (☎ 6829 1670; www.lightningridge.net.au; Morilla St; ☎ 9am-5pm).

Visit the **Walk-In Mine** (☎ 6829 0473; adult/child \$8/3; ☎ 9am-5pm) to get a feel for the type of environment encountered by the average opal miner.

There are **Hot Artesian Bore Baths** (Pandora St; admission free; ☎ 24hr) – we have four words; warm artesian water, free.

Do a bit of fossicking with **Black Opal Tours** (☎ 6829 0368; adult/child \$25/10; ☎ tours at 8.30am, 9.30am & 1.30pm).

**Bluel Motel** (☎ 6829 0380; 32 Morilla St; s/d \$45/55; 🍷) offers everything you need: simple digs, a corkscrew and a face washer.

**Lightning Ridge Hotel/Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 6829 0304; www.ridgehotelmotel.com.au; Onyx St; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/18, cabins \$60-80; 🍷 🍷) has all your accommodation needs in the one place plus Nobbie's Bistro a short walk away.

At the **Star Dust Café** (☎ 6829 2725; 4 Opal St; mains \$8-16; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) you get one steak and salad sandwich, \$7; a Dolly Parton CD for your listening pleasure, \$26; and a meal delivered with 'Here you go darl'...priceless.

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) buses go to/from Dubbo (\$90, 4½ hours).

## LORD HOWE ISLAND

☎ 02 / pop 350

Lord Howe is one of the best kept secrets along the Australian coastline. About 500km east of Port Macquarie and 770km northeast of Sydney, this exquisite, subtropical island remains remarkably pristine. Listed on the World Heritage Register for its rare bird and plant life, it lures ecotourists and those looking to escape the crowds for a quiet and authentic retreat. Many visitors are repeat customers who return regularly to indulge in Lord Howe's bare-feet, first-name hospitality, idyllic beaches and tropical-paradise ambience.

Lord Howe is not a budget destination, although prices fall considerably in winter. Unless you have a boat you'll have to fly here, and both food and accommodation are relatively limited and expensive. It's popular with older travellers and honeymooners, but there's plenty here for the active family.

## Orientation & Information

Boomerang-shaped Lord Howe is dominated by three peaks; **Mt Lidgbird** (777m) and **Mt Gower** (875m) brood at its southern tip, and the spectacular spire of **Ball's Pyramid** (551m) juts from the sea 23km to the southeast.

The island is about 11km long by 3km wide, with most accommodation and services located in the flat area north of the airport.

Island time is GMT plus 10½ hours, 30 minutes ahead of Sydney (except in summer).

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 240 937, 6563 2114; www.lordhoweisland.info; cnr Lagoon & Middle Beach Rds; ☎ 9.30am-3pm) is inside the Lord Howe Island Museum and screens a worthwhile 20-minute audiovisual presentation. There's **internet access** (📶 9am-4pm Sun-Fri) at the museum.

Near the corner of Ned's Beach and Lagoon Rds you'll find the post office, Thompson's general store and a Westpac Bank (no ATM).

## Sights & Activities

Between September and April you'll be amazed by the huge number of seabirds nesting in this tiny oasis.

One of the pleasures of Lord Howe is **bushwalking** in the low hills and rainforests. The climb to the summit of Mt Gower is a candidate for Australia's finest one-day **walk** (licensed guide required; ☎ 6563 2218; per person \$35) and takes eight to 10 hours return. You need to be relatively fit for this hike, and some of the route will either cure or initiate vertigo.

**Fish feeding** is popular in the shallows at Ned's Beach, as is snorkelling among the vivid tropical fish and coral just offshore. You can hire mask, snorkel, fins and wet suit at the beach using an honesty box system. There's good **surf** at Blinky Beach, and off the island's western shore lies the world's southernmost **coral reef**, sheltered by a wide lagoon, where **sea kayaking** is popular. You can inspect the brilliantly coloured sea life from **glass-bottom boats** (adult/child \$30/15) or rent snorkelling and diving equipment from outfitters at Lagoon Beach.

The **museum** (📶 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) will give you a good rundown of all aspects of the island's geography and history; it also has a good gift shop and café.

If you get a cloudy day consider heading to the **golf course** (green fees & club hire \$35). Its challenging nine-hole layout, well-prepared greens and dramatic backdrop beneath Mt Lidgbird make for an enjoyable couple of hours.

## Tours

**Thompson's General Store** (☎ 6563 2155) takes bookings for a range of tours and activities, from fishing charters to historical and nature walks.

## Sleeping & Eating

Camping is prohibited and all accommodation must be booked in advance. There are plenty

of lodges and self-contained apartments, some of which drop rates or close in winter. Eating out is expensive and bookings are essential. Look out for information on the local fish fries (\$35) held on various nights at a number of the lodges as well as venues such as the bowling club and golf course, where you can eat as much fish and seafood as you like, fresh off the boat – the local kingfish is a real speciality.

**Ocean View Apartments** (☎ 6563 2041; Lagoon Rd; d \$145, f apt from \$275) In truth, these self-contained apartments don't have ocean views, but they do have tennis courts and a swimming pool.

**Pinetrees** (☎ 6563 2177; www.pinetrees.com.au; Lagoon Beach; 5 nights per person from \$890) Affordable by Lord Howe standards, this lodge is set in an old homestead and has decent units or cottages. Rates include all meals.

**Arajilla Retreat** (☎ 1800 063 928, 6563 2002; www.arajilla.com.au; Lagoon Rd; s/d/f from \$500/770/710) This plush, upmarket resort sits in a beautiful kentia-palm forest and pampers guests with opulent suites and family-friendly apartments. Rates include all meals and free use of mountain bikes, snorkelling gear and a host of other activity necessities. It also has a good (but pricey) restaurant.

**Capella Lodge** (☎ 9918 435; www.lordhowe.com; s/d incl breakfast from \$585/900; 📺) Big money has been splashed around to make this luxury resort a haven for the cash-rich and time-poor. As well as offering spectacular views, it has a range of premium suites and packages with all the extras from spa treatments to complimentary canapés and cocktails each evening. It has a suitably good restaurant attached.

Eating options apart from the resort restaurants:

**Humpty Micks Cafe** (☎ 6563 2287; Ned's Beach Rd; mains \$8-12) Opposite the post office; fab smoothies, wraps and burgers.

**Palmsugar Café** (☎ 6563 2120; Skyline Rd; mains \$24-32; 📺 dinner Fri-Wed) Informal ambience with good-quality food and mouthwatering desserts. Coffee and cake from 2pm.

**Pandanus** (☎ 6563 2400; Anderson Rd; mains \$24-32; 📺 lunch Thu-Sat, dinner daily Jan-Feb, Mon-Sat Mar-Dec) Strong wine list and tasty, well-presented food from a varied menu.

## Getting There & Away

Flight and accommodation packages are usually the only way to get a decent deal. Winter prices start from around \$859 for seven nights.

Try **Fastbook Pacific Holidays** (☎ 1300 361 153; www.fastbook.com.au) or **Oxley Travel** (☎ 1800 671 546; www.oxleytravel.com.au; 91 Horton St) in Port Macquarie.

**QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) has daily flights from Sydney, and weekend flights from Brisbane and Port Macquarie. There's also a weekly flight from Coffs Harbour during the high season.

## Getting Around

You can hire bicycles (per day \$8) and cars (per day \$50) on the island, but a bicycle is all you really need and most accommodation places will happily drive you somewhere. There is a 25km/h speed limit throughout the island. As there are few streetlights, the walk back to your digs after dark can be a challenge – bring a torch.

# NORFOLK ISLAND

☎ 6723 / pop 1828

Norfolk Island is a green speck in the vast South Pacific Ocean, 1600km northeast of Sydney and 1000km northwest of Auckland. It's the largest of a cluster of three islands emerging from the Norfolk Ridge, which stretches from New Zealand to New Caledonia, the closest landfall, almost 700km north.

Norfolk Island is particularly popular with older Australians and New Zealanders on package holidays. Tourism accounts for more than 90% of the local economy, but it is not a cheap destination. Airfares are expensive and there is no budget accommodation available.

Norfolk Island is not subject to Australian tax laws, which has led on the one hand to the strip of duty-free outlets in Burnt Pine and on the other to the sprinkling of millionaires who live on the island.

## History

Norfolk Island, which appears never to have been settled by Polynesians, was first sighted by James Cook on 10 October 1774. Fifteen convicts were among the first settlers who arrived on 6 March 1788, only weeks after the First Fleet reached Port Jackson to found Sydney. As a result of food shortages, shipwrecks and native timber that proved too brittle for building, many gave up and moved to New Norfolk, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

Norfolk Island was abandoned for 11 years before colonial authorities decided to try again in 1825. Governor Darling planned this second penal settlement as 'a place of the extremest punishment short of death'. Under such notorious sadists as commandant John Giles Price, Norfolk became known as 'hell in the Pacific'.

The second penal colony lasted until 1855, when the prisoners were shipped off to Van Diemen's Land and the island was handed over by Queen Victoria to the descendants of the mutineers from the HMS *Bounty*, who had outgrown their adopted Pitcairn Island. About a third of the present population is descended from the 194 Pitcairners who arrived on 8 June 1856.

## Orientation & Information

The island measures only 8km by 5km, with vertical cliffs surrounding much of the coastline. Kingston, the principal settlement in convict days and now largely an open-air museum, is on the small coastal plain (once a swamp) at Slaughter Bay on the island's southern coast. The service town of Burnt Pine is at the centre of the island, near the airport, while Norfolk Island National Park encompasses the hillier northern part of the island.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 22 147; www.norfolkisland.com.au; Taylors Rd; 📶 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) is next to the post office in Burnt Pine.

**Westpac Bank** (☎ 22 120) and the **Commonwealth Bank** (☎ 22 144) have branches nearby, the latter with an ATM. Most shops have Eftpos.

The **Communications Centre** (Norfolk Telecom; ☎ 22 244; 📺) on New Cascade Rd has telephone, fax and internet facilities.

## VISAS

All visitors to Norfolk Island must have a valid passport and a return airline ticket. The only exception is for Australian citizens who do not have a passport; they can obtain a Document of Identity through Australia Post. Australian and New Zealand passport holders do not require visas, but all other nationalities must obtain an Australian visa for entry to Australia prior to entry to Norfolk Island.

## Sights & Activities

**Kingston**, built by convicts of the second penal colony, is Norfolk's star attraction. Many historic buildings have been restored and the



finest of these along Quality Row still house the island's administrators, as well as four small but interesting **museums** (☎ 23 088; www.museums.gov.nf; single/combined tickets \$8/20; ☎ 11am-3pm).

By the shore sits the ruins of an early pentagonal prison, a lime pit into which convict murder victims were sometimes thrown, and the picturesque **convict cemetery** with some poignant epitaphs, including that of 105-year-old Thomas Wright, a convict who at 101 had been sentenced to 14 years!

You could easily spend an hour poking around the **Bounty Folk Museum** (☎ 25 592; Midlegate Rd; admission \$7.50; ☎ 10am-4pm), crammed with motley souvenirs from the convict era and *Bounty* mutineers.

**Fletcher's Mutiny Cyclorama** (☎ 23 871; Queen Elizabeth Ave; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) is a 360-degree panoramic painting depicting the *Bounty* mutiny and the Norfolk Islanders' unique history.

West of Burnt Pine, magnificent **St Barnabas Chapel** (Douglas Dr; tours adult/child \$12/6) was built by the (Anglican) Melanesian Mission, which was based on the island from 1866 to 1920. It's never really closed; visitors are asked to close the door behind them.

Nature lovers will enjoy the island's lush vegetation and rugged coastline. The enriched volcanic soil and mild, subtropical climate provide perfect growing conditions for the 40-odd plant species unique to the island, including the ubiquitous Norfolk Island pine.

Covering the northern part of the island, **Norfolk Island National Park** offers various bushwalking tracks, with excellent views afforded from Mt Pitt (316m) and Mt Bates (318m). There's a sheltered beach with pristine waters at **Emily Bay** in the south, from where glass-bottom boats depart to view the coral reef.

The snorkelling in front of the Kingston breakwater is worthwhile; you can hire some gear in Burnt Pine, or several companies arrange snorkelling, diving and fishing trips.

**Bounty Divers** (☎ 24 375; www.bountydivers.com) operates dives around the wreck of the HMS *Sirius* from \$100 per person.

## Sleeping

There is plenty of accommodation on Norfolk; click onto www.norfolkisland.com.au for comprehensive information and listings. All accommodation must be booked in advance. Most visitors come on package deals, starting from around \$700 for seven nights in winter

and around \$1000 in summer, sometimes including car hire and breakfast.

**Hillcrest** (☎ 22 255; www.hillcrest.nf; Taylors Rd; r \$60-145) Catering to most budgets, this property has motel-style units, spa suites, self-contained apartments and gorgeous cottages. Most of the rates include breakfast.

**Anson Bay Lodge** (☎ 22 897; Burnt Pine; r \$120-150) Reasonable and reliable, Anson Bay Lodge has two self-contained units with good facilities and a lovely one-bedroom cottage.

**Christians of Buck's Point** (☎ 23 833; www.christians.nf; r from \$315) This beautifully restored house is yours for the taking entirely if you can front the cash. It has three bedrooms, can sleep up to six, and offers a perfect balance of heritage charm and mod-cons. Car hire and the first morning's breakfast are often included.

More accommodation options:  
**By the Bay** (☎ 22 730; www.bythebay.nf; r \$295) Timber cottages set in five private acres.

**Hibiscus Island Resort** (☎ 22 325; www.hibiscus.nf; s/d from \$85/125) Comfortable, motel-style accommodation.

## Eating

Interesting 'progressive' dinners (\$40) at local residents' homes and the island fish fry (\$25) – a sunset fish dinner held at Puppy's Point – can be booked through tour operators. Cafés on Taylors Rd where you can get good coffee and lunch for \$10 to \$15 include **Tropicana Cafe** (☎ 22 410), **Golden Orb Bookshop Cafe** (☎ 24 295) and **Cafe Tempo** (☎ 237 73).

**Brewery Bar & Bistro** (☎ 23 515; Douglas Dr; meals \$10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Opposite the airport, this brewery serves cheap counter meals and brews its own beer.

**Hilli Lounge & Wine Bar** (☎ 24 270; Queen Elizabeth Ave; mains \$25; ☎ dinner) Here good food is served in cosy surroundings.

**Homestead Restaurant** (☎ 22 068; Hundred Acres; mains from \$24; ☎ lunch Wed-Mon) Out of town near the gates to the Rocky Point Reserve, the Homestead serves an excellent lunch.

**Mariah's Bar & Grill** (Hillcrest, Taylors Rd; mains \$25-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of Norfolk's finest dining options, Mariah's serves excellent Mod Oz cuisine with spectacular views of Phillip Island.

## Getting There & Away

Most flights are booked as part of a package deal. There's a departure tax of \$30, payable at the airport or in advance at the visitor centre, although some packages now incorporate this into the cost.

**Norfolk Air** (☎ 1300 663 913; www.norfolkair.com) flies from Brisbane four times a week and from Sydney during summer. This airline also offers holiday packages.

**Air New Zealand** (☎ New Zealand 800 737 000; www.airnewzealand.co.nz) flies to and from Auckland on Wednesday and Sunday.

## Getting Around

Car hire can be organised at the airport for as little as \$30 a day. The speed limit around most of the island is 50km/h. Cows have right of way on the island's roads, and there's a \$300 fine for hitting one.

Bicycle hire can be arranged through the visitor centre.

# SOUTH COAST

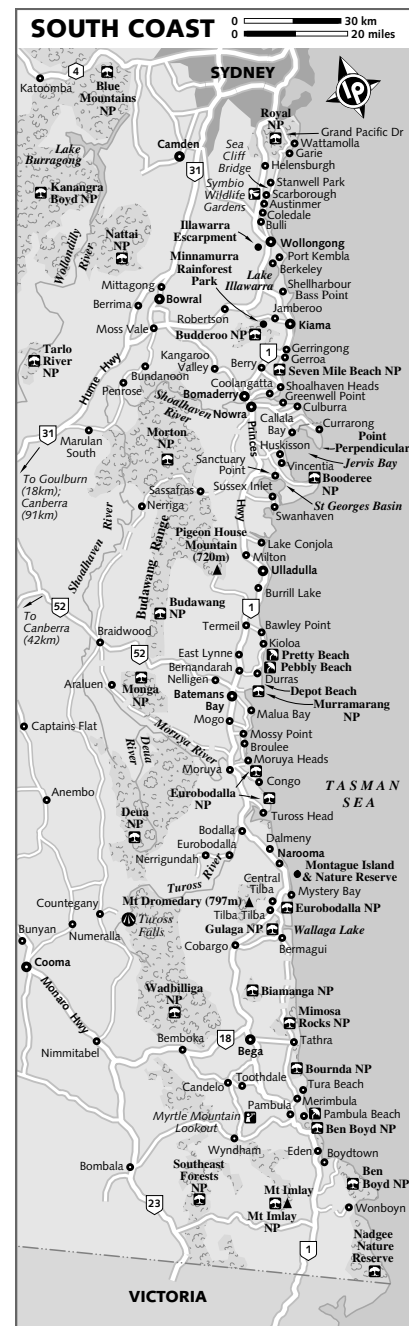
If it's off-road rugged beauty you're after, point the compass squarely in this direction. The spectacular and nonchalant South Coast, stretching 400km by road to the Victorian border, remains a parallel universe to its rowdy northern counterpart. Sure there are holiday-hectic beaches, like Wollongong, Kiama and Ulladulla, but they're tempered by the quiet, easy allure of fishing towns like Eden and Batemans Bay and the sharp tang of history wafting from settlements like Berry. By detouring, often only slightly, off the main roads into the staggeringly beautiful national parks, it's possible to find secluded beaches, remote mountain tops and rugged bushland where isolation reigns supreme. Wineries have spread their green leaves over the countryside and sea-changing city chefs have transported their culinary expertise here. Ecotourism is definitely in, and there are myriad swimming, surfing, whale-watching and diving opportunities.

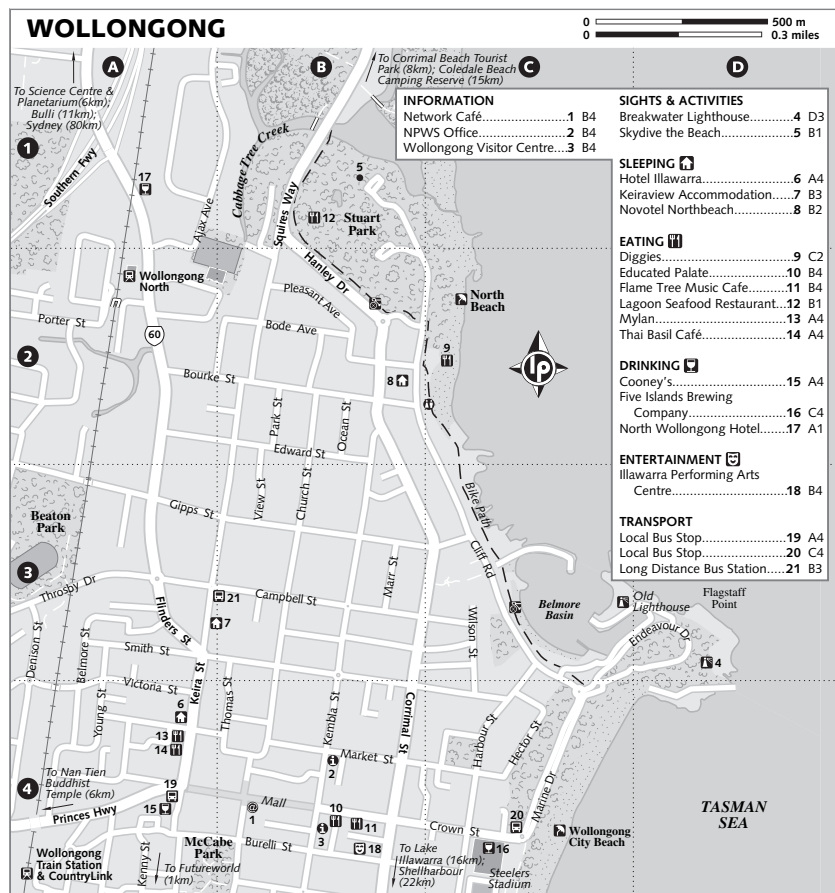
## WOLLONGONG

☎ 02 / pop 257,000

Wollongong, 80km south of Sydney, has the best of both worlds. The population (it's NSW's third-largest city) is big enough to support a host of restaurants and bars, arts, culture and entertainment, while its coastal position ensures a laid-back beach-side lifestyle lacking in larger cities.

The 'Gong' is thankfully shedding its reputation as being home to Australia's biggest steel industry, and the stunning natural





beauty of the area now attracts attention. There are 17 patrolled beaches – all unique – and a spectacular sandstone escarpment that runs from Royal National Park south past Wollongong and Port Kembla. The recently opened Grand Pacific Dr makes the most of the landscape and the whole combination makes for a host of outdoor activities: excellent surf, safe beaches, bushwalks and sky-high adventures to name a few.

### Orientation & Information

Crown St is the main street in town. Between Kembla and Keira Sts is a two-block pedestrian mall. Keira St is part of the Princes Hwy. Through-traffic bypasses the city on the Southern Fwy.

The **Wollongong visitor centre** (☎ 4227 5545; 1800 240 737; www.tourismwollongong.com; 93 Crown St) can book accommodation. There's an **NPWS office** (☎ 4225 1455; 4/55 Kembla St; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri), and you can jump online at **Network Café** (☎ 4228 8686; upstairs, 157 Crown St; per hr \$4; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Wed, to 9pm Thu, to 4pm Sun).

### Sights

Wollongong's fishing fleet is based at the southern end of the harbour, **Belmore Basin**. There's a fishing cooperative here (with a fish market and a couple of cafés) and an 1872 lighthouse on the point. Nearby, on the headland, is the newer **Breakwater Lighthouse**.

**North Beach** and **Wollongong City Beach** have breaks suitable for all visitors and are walking

distance from the city centre. Look for the Acids Reef break on North Beach for more of a challenge. Up the coast, the options are varied and less crowded, with fun beach breaks at **Coledale** and **Bulli** beaches, and reef breaks at **Sharkies** (also at Coledale) and Headlands. The risk of meeting a finned friend at Sharkies is minimal, but surfers have occasionally encountered humpback whales surfacing close to shore.

Check out www.wannasurf.com for a full rundown on local waves and www.swellnet.com for a five-day forecast.

Quizzical kids can indulge their senses at the **Science Centre & Planetarium** (☎ 4283 6665; www.sciencecentre.uow.edu.au; Squires Way, Fairy Meadow; adult/child \$10/7; ☎ 10am–4pm), or meet and greet a Tassie Tiger at **Symbio Wildlife Gardens** (Map p227; ☎ 02-4294 1244; www.symbiozoo.com.au; 7–11 Lawrence Hargrave Dr, Stanwell Tops; adult/child \$18/9; ☎ 9.30am–5pm), north of town. **Futureworld** (☎ 4426 9147; www.futureworld.org.au; Mill St, Coniston; ☎ 10am–4pm) has a fantastic interactive eco-technology exhibition.

Along the highway, **Nan Tien Buddhist Temple** (☎ 4272 0600; www.nantien.org.au; Berkeley Rd, Berkeley; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun) has weekend retreats, vegetarian cooking classes, meditation and Tai Chi.

Southwest of Wollongong, the **Illawarra Escarpment** (Map p227) is a state recreation area. There's no vehicle access, but the spot is good for bushwalking. The Wollongong NPWS office (opposite) can provide information on bush camping.

Just south of Wollongong, **Lake Illawarra** is very popular for water sports including windsurfing. Further south is **Shellharbour**, a popular holiday resort, now overrun with tacky housing.

### Activities

**Tapu Surf School** (☎ 4268 0088; ☎ Mon–Sat) runs courses at Thirroul and North Wollongong starting at \$125 for three lessons.

A bird's-eye view of the coastline is perhaps the best. **Sydney Hang Gliding Centre** (☎ 4294 4294; www.hanggliding.com.au; ☎ 8am–8pm) has tandem flights (\$165) from breathtaking Bald Hill at Stanwell Park (Map p227). If the adrenalin still hasn't kicked in, you can skydive from 14,000ft and land in the sand with **Skydive the Beach** (☎ 4225 8444; www.skydivethebeach.com; Stuart Park; tandem jumps from \$275).

More activities:  
**Cockatoo Run** (☎ 1300 653 801; www.3801limited.com.au; adult/child/family \$40/30/110; ☎ Wed & Sun)

A heritage train that travels inland across the Southern Highlands.

**Just Cruisin'** (☎ 4294 2598; www.justcruisintours.com.au; tours per person from \$30) Solo and sidecar Harley tours.

### Sleeping

The visitor centre can make accommodation reservations. Also try www.tourismshellharbour.com.au.

**Keiraview Accommodation** (☎ 4229 9700; www.keiraviewaccommodation.com.au; 75–79 Keira St; dm/tw/d/f \$29/40/100/110; ☎ ) Slightly military in its rules, this complex contains the YHA hostel, which caters to students and backpackers in tidy four-bed dorms. The double and family rooms, with verandas and kitchenettes, are pricier.

**Hotel Illawarra** (☎ 4229 5411; cnr Market & Keira Sts; s/d \$50/70) Best suited to the middy-drinking mindset, this funky complex has revamped pub rooms and a cool downstairs bar.

**Novotel Northbeach** (☎ 4226 3555; www.novotel.com.au; 2–14 Cliff Rd; r incl breakfast \$220–348; ☎ ) Wollongong's flashiest joint is all class. The spacious and comfortable rooms have balconies and ocean views on one side and the escarpment on the other.

**Coledale Beach Camping Reserve** (☎ 4267 4302; Beach Rd, Coledale; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25) This is one of the best basic camping spots on the coast. There's also **Corimal Beach Tourist Park** (☎ 4285 5688; corimaltp@wollongong.nsw.gov.au; Lake Pde, Corimal; cabins \$66–164).

### Eating

Keira St has the greatest concentration of restaurants, especially north of the mall.

**Thai Basil Café** (☎ 4228 8940; 5/166 Keira St; entrees \$6, mains \$11; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the highlights of the Asian precinct on Keira St, this joint is one of the cheapest eats in town, and is frequented by curry-lovers and noodle-tragics. Try the creamy green curry.

**Diggies** (☎ 4226 2688; 1 Cliff Rd, North Beach; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Right on the beach, this is the perfect spot for excellent coffee and a 'sunrise breakfast' of banana bread, low-fat yogurt and fresh fruit (\$10).

**Educated Palate** (☎ 4225 0100; 87 Crown St; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This culinary kitchen has a coffee bar out the back with skilled baristas on hand. The bacon-and-egg Turkish bread breakfast is a bargain (\$7).

**Lagoon Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 4226 1677; Stuart Park; entrees \$16, mains \$28) In a tranquil setting, this is one of the best seafood restaurants in



Wollongong. It has delectable dishes worthy of fine dining and it's a stone's throw (with a good arm) from the water.

Further recommendations:

**Flame Tree Music Café** (☎ 4225 7409; 89 Crown St; mains \$9; ☺ breakfast & lunch) A hippy-cum-bohemian-cum-affable café.

**Mylan** (☎ 4228 1588; 198 Keira St; mains \$10-20; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Excellent Vietnamese seafood.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Five Islands Brewing Company** (☎ 4220 2854; WIN Entertainment Centre, cnr Crown & Harbour Sts) This slick bar has nine fine draught beers including a Pig Dog Pilsner, named after the owner (an ex-St George rugby player). There's also plenty of outdoor seating and a good menu.

**North Wollongong Hotel** (☎ 4229 4177; Princes Hwy) This has the biggest beer garden you've ever seen, plus a cool interior and a student crowd. It heaves on weekends.

**Cooney's** (☎ 4229 1911; 234 Keira St) This dark and nooky bar has dim lighting, booth seating, pool tables and jazz on Saturday night.

**Illawarra Performing Arts Centre** (IPAC; ☎ 4226 3366; www.ipac.org.au; 32 Burelli St) This cultural injection presents excellent theatre, dance and music, including topical productions.

## Getting There & Away

All long-distance buses leave from the **bus station** (☎ 4226 1022; cnr Keira & Campbell Sts). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) operates daily buses to/from Sydney (\$15) and Eden (\$66). **Murrays** (☎ 13 22 51) travels to Canberra (\$31). **CountryLink** runs buses to Moss Vale from outside the train station, and **CityRail** runs frequently to Sydney's Central Station (\$9) and south

to Kiama (\$6), Gerringong (\$7) and Bomaderry/Nowra (\$9).

Wollongong Illawarra Regional Airport has **QantasLink** (☎ 13 17 13) flights to Sydney and Melbourne.

## Getting Around

Two local bus companies, **Pioneer Motor Services** (☎ 13 34 10) and **Dions** (☎ 4228 9855), service the local area. The main stops are on Marine Dr, and the corner of Crown and Keira Sts. Bringing a bike on the train from Sydney is a great way to get around; a cycle path runs from the city centre north to Bulli and south to Port Kembla.

## WOLLONGONG TO NOWRA

This region has some great beaches, state forests, and, in the ranges to the west, the big **Morton National Park**. It's a popular family-holiday area, but it isn't yet as crowded as parts of the north coast and much of the tourism is confined to weekenders from Sydney. **Lake Illawarra** is popular for water sports.

Further south is **Shellharbour**, a popular holiday resort and one of the oldest towns along the coast (its name comes from the number of shell middens, remnants of Aboriginal feasts, that the early Europeans found here). There are beaches on the Windang Peninsula north of the town and scuba diving off **Bass Point** to the south.

## Kiama & Around

☎ 02 / pop 22,000

Kiama is a pretty town at the epicentre of some good beaches and quaint villages – both rural and seaside. The **Kiama Area visitor**

**centre** (☎ 4232 3322, 1300 654 262; www.southcoast.com.au/kiama; ☺ 9am-5pm) is on Blowhole Point, so called because of a **blowhole** that can spurt water up to 60m. In 1889 local freak Charles Jackson drew huge crowds for his shtick of traversing the mouth of the blowhole on a tightrope.

There's a good **lookout** from the top of Saddleback Mountain, and waves at **Surf and Bombo Beaches**, and at **Werri Beach**, 10km south in Gerringong.

**Minnamurra Rainforest Centre** and an **NPWS visitor centre** (☎ 4236 0469) are in beautiful **Budderoo National Park** (☎ 4236 0469; car/motorcycle \$10/4), about 14km inland from Kiama. On the way to Minnamurra you'll pass through the old village of **Jamberoo**, which has a nice pub. South along the coast, **Gerringong** and **Gerroa** have their fair share of picture-postcard scenery.

**Kiama Backpackers** (☎ 4233 1881; 31 Bong Bong St; dm/d \$20/49; ☑) is a decidedly drab building but has clean male and female dorms.

**Grand Hotel** (☎ 4232 1037; 49 Manning St; r per person \$30) also caters to backpackers with basic rooms. Bands crank up the volume on Saturday night.

The modern **Kiama Harbour Cabins** (☎ 1800 823 824; Blowhole Point; 1-bedroom cabins from \$190) are in the best position in town and have BBQs on the front verandas for dinner with a view.

**Surf Beach Holiday Park** (☎ 4232 1791; Bourrool St; sites/cabins from \$24/42) is a haven for anyone wanting to catch a wave, and some of the cabins have water views and a spa.

**Seahaven Café** (☎ 4234 3796; 19 Riverleigh Ave, Gerroa; mains \$15-25; ☺ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Fri & Sat) is one of the South Coast's best café-cum-restaurants, with gourmet food, tasteful décor and a seaside setting. Try the eye fillet with sweet potato and coriander salad.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) stops in Kiama (but only if there's a booking). **Kiama Coachlines** (☎ 4232 3466) runs to Gerringong and Minnamurra (via Jamberoo).

Frequent **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00) trains run to Wollongong (\$6), Sydney (\$13), and Bomaderry/Nowra (\$5).

If you're driving, take the beach detour via Gerringong and Gerroa and rejoin the highway just north of Nowra.

## Berry & Around

☎ 02 / pop 2670

Inland and about 20km north of Nowra, this comely town is worthy of a stopover for its

plethora of great eating venues, two pubs fit for shouting a round or two, and smattering of National Trust-classified buildings.

**Pottering Around** (☎ 4464 2177; 97-99 Queen St), opposite the Great Southern Hotel, has some tourist information, or try www.berry.net.au.

There are scenic roads from Berry to pretty **Kangaroo Valley**. **Mild to Wild** (☎ 4464 2211; www.m2w.com.au; 84 Queen St) organises adventure tours such as half-day self-guided mountain-bike rides (\$40) and kayaking trips (\$20) in the area.

There are several nearby **wineries**, including **The Silos** (4448 6082; 640b Princes Hwy, Jaspers Brush; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sun), where the original cow barn now houses the cellar door, and **Bundewallah Estate** (☎ 4464 3600; 204a Bundewallah Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun). **Hotel Berry** (☎ 4464 1011; 120 Queen St; ☺ 11am Sat) runs a short, sweet and cheap wine tour (\$15). The **Shoalhaven Jazz & Blues Festival** is held mid-October at **Cambewarra Estate Winery** (☎ 4446 0170; www.shoalhavenjazz.com.au; Illaroo Rd, Cambewarra; from \$35), northwest of Nowra.

Accommodation is abundant in Berry, but prices rise at weekends. Holiday apartments can be booked through **Elders Real Estate** (☎ 4464 1600; 121 Queen St).

**Hotel Berry** (☎ 4464 1011; 120 Queen St; s/d \$35/70) is a popular local watering hole with standard but large pub bedrooms with shared bathroom facilities. It also has seven beers on tap.

A step up are the stylish rooms (some with a spa) at the **Village Boutique Motel** (☎ 4464 3570; 72-76 Queen St; www.berrymotel.com.au; d \$125; ☺ ☑). Locals rave about the adjoining restaurant, known as **Twenty Three at Berry** (☎ 4464 2323; 85 Queen St; mains \$24-30 ☺ dinner Wed-Sun), which serves a fabulous kangaroo fillet with garlic mash.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) buses between Kiama and Nowra (\$30) stop in Berry on request.

## Kangaroo Valley

☎ 02 / pop 350

As you head south from Fitzroy Falls the world disappears over the edge of a steep escarpment and the road descends alarmingly to deposit you in the unbelievably picturesque Kangaroo Valley. Pegged in by a fortress of rainforest-steeped cliffs, the valley floor is carpeted by cow-dotted pasturelands, river gums and gurgling creeks. In perfect harmony with its surrounds, the slow country town of Kangaroo Valley itself, with its old pub, bakery and general store, feels lost somewhere between 1920 and 1980.

### DETOUR: GRAND PACIFIC DRIVE

Is the big smoke doing your head in? If so, ditch the traffic just out of Sydney for a cliff-hugging coastal drive to Wollongong. At Loftus, take a left off the Princess Hwy into Farnell Ave towards the **Royal National Park** (the world's second oldest), where you can visit tranquil beaches at **Wat-tamolla** and **Garie**, picnic at **Bundeena** or stretch the legs on one of the many walking tracks.

Continue on to Otford and **Bald Hill** for eye-catching coastal views, then follow Lawrence Hargrave Dr to the spectacular new **Sea Cliff Bridge**, a ribbon of road that swings out from the cliff over the water. It has a pedestrian footpath perfect for dolphin and whale watching.

Further on, the small seaside towns dotted along the coast from Coalcliff to Bulli have superb beaches for swimming, surfing and soaking up the atmosphere. Pop into the pub at **Scarborough**, surely one of the best in Australia, with beer, BBQs and brilliant views or, for something a little more sobering, a gelato at the Fireworks Café on the beach road at **Austinmer**.

Coledale, Bulli and Corrimal have camping sites slap bang on the beach, or you can continue on to Wollongong for the night. From here you can rejoin the Princes Hwy.

The formal entry to the valley is the castellated sandstone-and-iron **Hamden Bridge** (1898), a few kilometres north of the town. Next to the bridge is the walkabout **Pioneer Museum Park** (☎ 4465 1306; elaineaa@bigpond.net.au; Hampden Bridge, Moss Vale Rd; adult/child/family \$4/3/10; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Oct-Easter, 11am-3pm Fri-Mon Easter-Sep), which provides a visual encounter with rural life in the late 19th century. A collection of historical buildings includes an 1860s homestead, a blacksmith's forge and a reconstructed dairy.

If you want to get a little more personal with the landscape, go canoeing, mountain biking and bushwalking in and around the Shoalhaven and Kangaroo Rivers. **Kangaroo Valley Escapes** (☎ 0404-807 991; www.kangaroovalleyescapes.com.au; Moss Vale Rd; tours half day \$30-80, overnight \$65-75) offers environmentally conscious guided tours that you design yourself, combining various rigorous activities. It also hires out canoes (half-/full day \$25/50) and mountain bikes (\$30/50).

**Kangaroo Valley Safaris** (☎ 4465 1502; www.kangaroovalleycanoes.com.au; 2210 Moss Vale Rd; full day \$35-60) rents out one- to three-person canoes and provides transport to/from specified points on the Shoalhaven River. It also runs overnight canoe camping trips (two-/three-day trips per person \$75/105).

There's a carpet of flat, lush grass to pitch a tent at **Glenmack Park** (☎ 4465 1372; www.glenmack.com.au; 215 Moss Vale Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/20, cabins with/without bathroom \$70/50), or you can take the more comfortable option of a cabin. Trees and ducks dominate here, and you can light a campfire (such a rarity!), but there's an under-cover BBQ if things get too rough.

Kangaroo Valley's nocturnal life revolves around the **Friendly Inn Hotel** (☎ 4465 1355; 159 Moss Vale Rd; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner), a classic country boozier, ever-so-subtly renovated to retain its local character. Styled-up pub nosh includes steaks of monstrous proportions and a slew of veggie, fish and chicken dishes.

**Kennedy's Bus Service** (☎ 4421 7596, 0403-040 029; 7 Flinders Rd, Nowra) has one bus a day from Moss Vale to Kangaroo Valley (adult \$6, 45 minutes), continuing to Nowra.

## NOWRA

☎ 02 / pop 25,000

Nowra sits about 17km from the coast and is the largest town in the Shoalhaven area. Although it's not top of the pops in terms

of beach holidays, it is a handy base for excursions to beaches and villages around the region.

The **Shoalhaven visitor centre** (☎ 1300 662 808; www.shoalhavenholidays.com.au; Princes Hwy) is just south of the bridge and has internet access for \$5 per half-hour. There's also an **NPWS office** (☎ 4423 2170; 55 Graham St).

The 6.5-hectare **Nowra Wildlife Park** (☎ 4421 3949; www.nowrawildlifepark.com.au; Rock Hill Rd, North Nowra; adult/child \$14/8; ☎ 9am-5pm), on the north bank of the Shoalhaven River, is a native-animal hangout the kids will enjoy.

Both **Nowra Museum** (☎ 4421 2021; cnr Kinghorne & Plunkett Sts; admission \$1; ☎ 1-4pm Sat & Sun) and **Meroogal** (☎ 4421 8150; cnr West & Worrige Sts; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 1-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Feb-Dec, 10am-5pm Thu-Sun Jan) have the low-down on local history.

Love jumping out of planes? **Nowra Sky-dive** (☎ 0419-446 904; www.skydivenowra.com.au; Braidwood Rd) has tandem jumps from 10,000ft for \$380.

The relaxing **Ben's Walk** starts at the bridge near Scenic Dr and follows the south bank of the Shoalhaven River (6km return). North of the river, the circular 5.5km **Bomaderry Creek Walking Track** runs through sandstone gorges from a trailhead at the end of Narang Rd.

**Shoalhaven River Cruises** (☎ 0429-981 007; www.shoalhavenrivercruise.com; per person from \$20) has great river tours that leave from the wharf, near the visitor centre.

There are decent motel rooms at **Riverhaven Motel** (☎ 4422 8006; www.nowrabackpackers.com; Scenic Dr; s/d \$65/75), or **Whitehouse** (☎ 4421 2084; www.whitehouseguesthouse.com; 30 Junction St; d/tr \$100/115) is a homely and family-friendly guesthouse.

Ship-shape **Shoalhaven Caravan Village** (☎ 4423 0770; 17 Terara Rd; sites \$32) backs onto the river.

**Carlucci's** (☎ 4421 4711; cnr Kinghorne & North Sts; mains \$10-18; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Wed-Sat) is a local fave serving good Italian fare. Alternatively, the upmarket **Boatshed Restaurant** (☎ 4421 2419; 10 Wharf Rd; mains \$28-30; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) serves excellent seafood with a view.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) runs buses to Sydney (\$31, three hours). The **train station** (☎ 4423 0141) is at Bomaderry. Frequent **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00) trains head to/from Sydney (\$16, about three hours).

An interesting and mainly unsealed road runs from Nowra to Braidwood, through Morton National Park and the hamlets of Sassafras and Nerriga.

## AROUND NOWRA

East of Nowra, the Shoalhaven River meanders through dairy country in a system of estuaries and wetlands, finally reaching the sea at Crookhaven Heads.

**Greenwell Point**, on the estuary about 15km east of Nowra, is a quiet, pretty fishing village specialising in fresh oysters. On the way there from Nowra you'll pass the **Jindyandy Mill** (719 Greenwell Point Rd; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Thu-Mon), a convict-built flour mill that's now a craft village.

Further around the inlet there's great **surfing** at **Culburra Beach** and **Crookhaven Heads** (Crooky). Also try **Warrain Beach**, which is protected from wind by the headland. There are camping grounds and, for landlubbers, walking tracks to the lighthouse.

On the north side of the estuary, just before Shoalhaven Heads, is **Coolangatta Estate** (☎ 4448 7131; www.coolangattaestate.com.au; 1335 Bolong Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu), a slick winery with a golf course, a good restaurant and accommodation (singles/doubles \$100/120) in convict-built buildings.

At **Shoalhaven Heads**, sandbars form a bridge between the river and the sea. There's a motel, a caravan park and an excellent **surf beach** here, but for a picnic or a swim keep on trucking north to the **Seven Mile Beach National Park** (admission free), one of the largest stretches of natural coastal-dune vegetation.

There are camping parks on both sides of Crooked River at Gerroa, a sleepy little town overlooking the white-sand dunes of Seven Mile Beach.

## JERVIS BAY

South of Nowra, Jervis Bay is a pleasing stretch of coastline with white sandy beaches, bush and forest. **Huskisson** (population 1600), one of the oldest towns on the bay, has a handful of excellent eating venues, plenty of adventure-based activity and delightful surrounds that make it a great place to spend a night or two.

The **Lady Denman Heritage Complex** (☎ 02-4441 5675; Dent St; www.ladydenman.asn.au; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 10am-4pm) has interesting history on Jervis Bay and a maritime museum. On the first Saturday of each month it hosts a **growers market**.

June to November is prime whale time in Jervis Bay, and **Dolphin Watch Cruises** (☎ 1800 246 010; 50 Owen St) has the best reputation for

whale (adult/child \$43/28 three hours) and dolphin-watching trips (adult/child \$20/15 two hours). Jervis Bay is also popular with divers, and **Deep 6 Diving** (☎ 1300 139 850; www.deep6divingjervisbay.com.au; 64 Owen St) charges \$90 for two boat dives plus equipment hire.

Remarkable **Booderee National Park** (its name means 'plenty of fish'), occupies Jervis Bay's southeastern spit, a stunning area combining heathland, small rainforest pockets, sparkling water, white sandy beaches and a Botanic Garden. In 1995 the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community won a land claim and now jointly administers the vast park.

Off Jervis Bay Rd, **Scottish Rocks** and **Murrays Beach** are exceptionally beautiful secluded spots.

The **Booderee visitor centre** (☎ 02-4443 0977; Jervis Bay Rd; www.booderee.np.gov.au), at the park entrance, has walking-trail maps and camping information.

South of Huskisson, **Hyams Beach** is spectacularly white and secluded.

There's substantial accommodation in Huskisson and Vincentia; book ahead for weekends and holidays, when prices soar.

**Jervis Bay Guesthouse** (☎ 02-4441 7658; www.jervisbayguesthouse.com.au; 1 Beach St, Huskisson; r incl breakfast \$145-440; ☎) is a two-storey wooden guesthouse containing pretty bedrooms with French doors. Boutique **Paperbark Camp** (☎ 1300 668 167; www.paperbarkcamp.com.au; 571 Woollamia Rd; d from \$270; ☎ Sep-Jun) is ecotourism at its luxury best; five-star accommodation in 12 safari-style tents with outdoor showers.

**Husky Pub** (☎ 02-4441 5001; Owen St; s/d \$50/70) is a good-time joint with decent rooms, live music and tip-top bay views.

## AROUND JERVIS BAY

**Ulladulla** has excellent beaches and is close to Pigeon House Mountain (which has fantastic walks), but the town itself doesn't have much to offer. There is, however, good swimming and surfing nearby – try **Mollymook beach**, just north of town.

**One Track for All** is a 2km figure-eight culture track (pram and wheelchair accessible) with a series of relief carvings and paintings that tell the history of the Shoalhaven area. On the way you'll pass four magnificent lookouts.

The welcoming **Ulladulla Guest House** (☎ 02-4455 1796; www.guesthouse.com.au; 39 Burrill St; r from \$99; ☎ ☎) has local and international art lining the walls, a fantastic French restaurant and



lovely hosts. At the other end of the budget is **Ulidulla Tourist Park** (☎ 02-4455 2457; South St; sites/cabins from \$20/45), a few blocks from the town centre.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) runs to Eden (\$42) and Sydney (\$31) twice a day. **Priors Scenic Express** (☎ 1800 816 234) heads to local towns, including Milton and Burrill Lake.

The beautiful, coastal **Murrumarang National Park** is home to wild kangaroos and lorikeets that will eat from your hand (careful – the little buggers can get nippy).

Inside the park, stunning **Pretty** (☎ 02-4457 2019), **Pebbley** (☎ 02-4478 6023) and **Depot Beach** (☎ 02-4478 6582) camping grounds are idyllic locations close to the surf (Pebbley is the most popular for surfing). There's an NPWS entry fee of \$7 per car plus camping fees if you stay overnight (adult/child \$5/3). Pretty Beach is the most accessible, and no caravans are allowed at Pebbley Beach.

## BATEMANS BAY

☎ 02 / pop 13,000

Batemans Bay is a fishing port that has become one of the South Coast's largest holiday centres, with good beaches and a luscious estuary. The town itself is lacklustre, though, and utterly overrun with holidaying Canberrans during school holidays.

The **Batemans Bay visitor centre** (☎ 1800 802 528; Princes Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) has local art for sale and an internet kiosk. **Total Computer Care** (☎ 4472 2745; 10 Citi Centre Arcade, Orient St) has internet access for \$3/5 per half-/full hour.

On the north side of the Clyde River estuary, just across the bridge, there are a couple of boat-hire places. **Red Boat Hire** (☎ 4472 5649; Wray St; ☎ 7am-7pm) hires out runabouts from \$50 for two hours.

Several boats offer cruises up the estuary from the ferry wharf just east of the bridge, including **Merinda Cruises** (☎ 4473 4052; 3hr cruise adult/child \$25/12).

**Corrigans Beach** is the closest patch of sand to the town centre. South of here is a series of small beaches nibbled into the rocky shore. Surfers flock to **Surf Beach**, **Malua Bay** and **Broulee**, which has a small wave when everywhere else is flat. For the experienced, the best surfing in the area is at **Pink Rocks** (near Broulee).

Holiday apartments are profuse; letting agents include the **Professionals** (☎ 1800 808 054) and **Ray White Real Estate** (☎ 4472 4799).

The central **Clyde River Motor Inn** (☎ 4472 6444; www.clydemotel.com.au; 3 Clyde St; s/d \$75/79) is excellent value and offers good river rooms and townhouses. If you're cashed up, try the **Esplanade Motor Inn** (☎ 4472 0200; www.esplanade.com; 23 Beach Rd; d from \$118) for river views that kick butt. **Coachhouse Marina Resort** (☎ 4472 4392; www.coachhouse.com.au; 49 Beach Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, cabins from \$40; ☎) is a well-equipped family-friendly park at the beginning of Corrigans Beach.

Houseboats are an inspired way to explore the waterways with your mates, and **Bay River Houseboats** (☎ 4471 2253; www.bayriverhouseboats.com.au; Wray St) and **Clyde River Houseboats** (☎ 4472 6369; www.clyderiverhouseboats) lease eight-berth boats from \$550 for four nights (Monday to Friday).

**Pearly Oyster Bar** (☎ 4472 4233; 6 North St, Batemans Bay; ☎ Fri-Tue) dishes up 40 unshucked oysters for \$12. For more choice, head to **Monet's Café Restaurant** (☎ 4472 5717; 3/1 Orient St; mains \$18; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Sat) with its worldly menu boasting Moroccan lamb *cher-moula* and Italian mascarpone chicken.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) runs to Eden (\$35) and Sydney (\$41) twice daily. **Murrays** (☎ 13 22 51) and **Rixon** (☎ 4474 4243) run to/from Narooma (\$23) and Canberra (\$24).

## AROUND BATEMANS BAY

About 60km inland from Batemans Bay, on the scenic road to Canberra, is **Braidwood**, home to many old buildings and a thriving arts-and-crafts community. A burgeoning food scene in this tiny town lures passing weekenders to perch themselves streetside under big umbrellas for inventive fare. From November to February there's peach-picking work in the peaceful little town of **Araluen**, 26km south of Braidwood on the road to Moruya. **Araluen Valley Hotel** (☎ 02-4846 4023; Main Rd; s \$45) has all the info and great pub rooms.

There's unspoilt coast down the side roads south of **Moruya**, including **Eurobodalla National Park**, an area of many lakes, bays and inlets backed by spotted-gum forests. Eurobodalla is an Aboriginal word meaning 'place of many waters', and there are Aboriginal middens here, as well as native wildlife including potoroos, hooded plovers and white-footed dunnarts. Don't miss the incredible rock formations at **Bingie Bingie Point**. Contact the Narooma NPWS (opposite) for more information.

## SOUTH COAST: TOP FIVE CULTS OF PERSONALITY

The South Coast's quiet charm has always attracted its fair share of unique individuals. Following are some of the most interesting historical figures to have graced the region since Charles Jackson (p231) stretched a line across the Kiama blowhole, took a deep breath and hoped for the best...

- Ben Boyd – Charismatic Boyd, a former London stockbroker, liked to gamble with other people's money. He sunk a small fortune into two whaling settlements at Twofold Bay – Boydtown and East Boyd – only for his British backers to get cold feet and vote him out of the syndicate. Boyd left Sydney in disgrace and was last seen in the Solomon Islands in 1851 after going ashore to hunt duck; his deserted rowboat was later found next to a gun and a multitude of footprints. They say Boyd was killed by headhunters, a salutary lesson that the spectacular, failed Aussie entrepreneurs of the 1980s singularly neglected to heed.
- Old Tom, the killer whale – In the 1920s in Twofold Bay, Old Tom led a pod of killer whales (including Stranger, Hooky and Humpy) that was known as the 'Killers of Eden'. This mob was hell-bent on genocide. Finding stray baleen whales, they'd shepherd them into the bay, alerting whalers by thrashing the water with their tails. Once the baleen was harpooned, Tom would roll over its blowhole so it couldn't breathe; Stranger, Hooky and Humpy would swim below to prevent the victim from diving deeper. The pod's reward was the tongue and lips, leaving the carcass for the whalers.
- DH Lawrence – In 1922 the famous English novelist took a break from scandalising the Poms to spend the winter in Thirroul. With wife Frieda, Lawrence lived in a house named Wyewurk, where he wrote almost all of his famous novel *Kangaroo*. Wyewurk still stands, looking much as Lawrence described it in the book: 'A real lovely brick house, with a roof of bright red tiles'. *Kangaroo* has become an unofficial guide to Thirroul, even though the town bears little resemblance to Lawrence's world. Rampant development, as always, threatens to turn it into an identikit suburb of Wollongong.
- Zane Grey – This prolific American writer was the first to use the Western as a serious literary genre, but to Aussies he'll always be known for *An American Angler in Australia*, the book that put Bermagui on the global stage. In 1936 Grey, an obsessive fisherman, heard about the angling in Bermagui and decided to try his luck. The outsider was met with bemusement, but the locals changed their tune when he snagged a 460kg tiger shark, then the largest fish ever caught with rod and reel. Later, Grey caught the South Coast's first-ever yellowfin tuna.
- Arthur Boyd – This much-loved Australian artist was known for paintings that were deeply mired in personal experience: love, anger, religious attitudes. Later, he became immersed in the Australian landscape, buying the beautiful property Bundanon on the Shoalhaven River, before donating it for use as a gallery and artists' retreat. Boyd said that 'you can't own a landscape' and his decision to release Bundanon was born from his desire for the public to be inspired by the place, rather than having it benefit only a chosen few.

Inland from Moruya, **Deua National Park** is a mountainous wilderness area (122,033 hectares) with gentle and swift-running rivers (good for **canoeing** or floating on a lilo), some challenging walks and a network of limestone caves.

## NAROOMA

☎ 02 / pop 6000

Narooma is an attractive seaside town that is less-developed than some of its neighbouring holiday settlements. In all honesty, when

you're sitting by the water on Riverside Dr, it's hard to imagine why this place is not busier.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 240 003, 4476 2881; www.naturecoast-tourism.com.au; Princes Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm), incorporating the Lighthouse Museum, is just south of the bridge.

Narooma is an access point for Deua, Gulaga and Wadbilliga National Parks, and there's a **NPWS office** (☎ 4476 2888; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; 36 Princes Hwy).

Cruise inland up the Wagonga River on the **Wagonga Princess** (☎ 4476 2665; 3hr cruises adult/child

\$30/20). **Boat hire and fishing charters** are available along Riverside Dr.

Heading north over the bridge, take the first two right turns to **Mills Bay Boardwalk**, part of a 5km wheelchair- and pram-friendly walking track where you can spot large schools of fish and stingrays.

For **surfing**, Mystery Bay, between Cape Dromedary and Corunna Point, is rocky but good, as is Handkerchief Beach.

The clear waters around the island are good for **diving**, especially from February to June when you can snorkel with the fur seals. **Island Charters Narooma** (☎ 4476 1047; www.islandchartersnarooma.com) offers diving (from \$70), snorkelling (from \$60) and whale watching (from \$55).

**Narooma Real Estate** (☎ 4476 2169), opposite the visitor centre, rents holiday accommodation.

**Narooma YHA** (☎ 4476 4440; www.yha.com.au; 243 Princes Hwy; dm/s/d \$25/40/50; ☑) has comfortable, clean motel-style rooms and fun hosts. **Lynch's Hotel** (☎ 4476 2001; 135 Wagonga St; s/d \$40/70) is an old-school place in the heart of town, with lovely rooms, and shared kitchen and bathroom facilities.

**Whale Motor Inn** (☎ 4476 2411; www.whalemotorinn.com; 104 Wagonga St; d \$115; ☑) offers the best all-round views of Narooma. It has large, clean rooms with balconies, and a nice restaurant.

**Surf Beach Holiday Park** (☎ 4476 2275; unpowered/powering sites from \$22/18, d cabins from \$50) sits on a beautiful beach and is small and peaceful.

**Taylor's Boatshed** (☎ 4476 2127; Riverside Dr; mains \$12-16; ☑ lunch & dinner) whips up fresh fish for a takeaway or sit-down dinner. BYO bottle.

**Quarterdeck Marina** (☎ 4476 2723; 13 Riverside Dr; mains \$22; ☑ breakfast & lunch, dinner Sat & Sun) serves good portions of fresh seafood on a great deck overhanging the river. There's usually live music on weekend evenings.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) buses stop in Narooma, outside Lynch's Hotel, on the run between Sydney (\$53) and Melbourne (\$62). **Murrays** (☎ 13 22 51) heads to Canberra (\$37), via Batemans Bay (\$23).

## AROUND NAROOMA

About 10km offshore from Narooma, **Montague Island** was once an important source of food for local Aborigines (who called it Barunguba) and is now a nature reserve. **Little penguins** nest here; the best time to see them is spring. Many other seabirds and hundreds of fur seals also call the island home, and there's a historic **lighthouse**.

**Narooma Charters** (☎ 0407-909 111; adult/child \$100/77) operates a daily 30-minute **boat trip** to Montague Island including an NPWS tour. Take the afternoon trip if you want to see the little penguins.

The clear waters around the island are good for **diving**, especially from February to June when you can snorkel with the fur seals. **Island Charters Narooma** (☎ 02-4476 1047; www.islandchartersnarooma.com) offers diving (from \$70), snorkelling (from \$60) and whale watching (from \$55). Attractions in the area include grey nurse sharks, fur seals and the wreck of the SS *Lady Darling*.

Off the highway, 15km south of Narooma, **Central Tilba** is perched on the side of **Mt Dromedary** (797m). It's a delightful 19th-century gold-mining boomtown.

There's information and a town guide at **Bates Emporium** (☎ 02-4473 7290; ☑ 8am-5pm), at the start of the main street (Bates St). Further along are several craft, antique and gift shops, galleries, and food venues including the **ABC Cheese Factory** (☎ 02-4473 7387; ☑ 10am-4.30pm), where you can chow down on cheddar.

Nearby Gulaga National Park includes Gulaga Flora Reserve, a large portion of Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) and the former Wallaga Lake National Park. It was recently transferred to the local Aboriginal people. Trees now block the views from the summit of Gulaga, but there are many sites of Aboriginal significance worth experiencing. For an expert tour visit **Umbarra Cultural Centre** (☎ 02-4473 7232; www.umbarra.com.au; ☑ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun), run by the Yuin people from Wallaga Lake Koori community. Umbarra is the Black Duck and totem of the Yuin people. The centre's museum contains historical photos and displays portraying significant cultural heritage, and activities include ochre painting, didg lessons and boomerang throwing. It is 3km from the highway on the road to Wallaga Lake.

South of the beautiful bird-filled **Wallaga Lake** and off the Princes Hwy, **Bermagui** (population 1300) is a pretty fishing port. The **information centre** (☎ 1800 645 808; www.bermagui.net; Lamont St; ☑ 10am-4pm) is on the main street.

There are several **walks** around Bermagui and good **surfing** at Camel Rock and Cuttagee beaches.

**Bermagui Beach Hotel** (☎ 02-6493 4206; 10 Lamont St; dm/d from \$20/110) has lovely double rooms and 10 beers on tap. **Bimbimbi House** (☎ 02-6493 4456; www.bimbimbihouse.com.au; 62 Nutleys Creek Rd; r/ind

breakfast \$100-170) is a gorgeous homestead set in tranquil gardens a 2km stroll from town.

**Zane Grey Park** (☎ 02-6493 4382; Lamont St; sites/cabins from \$17/60) has a prime position on Dickson's Point overlooking Horseshoe Bay.

**Snazzy Morrisons on Lamont** (☎ 02-6493 3165; Lamont St; mains \$15-25; ☑ dinner Fri-Tue) cooks seafood delights such as mussels with leak-and-saffron cream sauce.

On the Princes Hwy is **Cobargo**, another unspoilt old town. Near here is the main 2WD access point to rugged **Wadbilliga National Park**, a subalpine wilderness area of 77,000 hectares.

## SOUTH TO THE VICTORIAN BORDER

Running along 20km of beautiful coastline, Mimosa Rocks National Park (5802 hectares) is an earthly paradise with dense and varied bush, caves, headlands, and beaches with crystal-clear water. Admission is free and there are basic **camp sites** (per adult \$7) at **Aragunnu Beach**, **Picnic Point**, and **Middle and Gillards Beaches**.

Taking in most of the coast from Merimbula north to Tathra, **Bournda National Park** (per car \$6) is a 2378-hectare park with good beaches, freshwater lagoons and several walking trails. **Camping** (sites per adult \$8) is permitted at Hobart Beach, on the southern shore of the big **Wal-lagoot Lagoon**. Contact the **Merimbula NPWS office** (☎ 02-6495 5000) for more information.

## Merimbula

☎ 02 / pop 4560

Merimbula's impressive inlet (or lake) is its central focus and somehow, by focusing on the rocking boat masts and sky-blue water, it's easy to forgive the glaringly new holiday apartments dotting the hillsides.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6495 1129; ☑ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun) is at the bottom of Market St, and can book tours and activities. **Dragnet Internet Café** (☎ 6495 2666; 3/11 Merimbula Dr; per hr \$5; ☑ Mon-Sat) has internet access.

The **NPWS office** (☎ 6495 5000; cnr Merimbula & Sapphire Coast Drs; ☑ 9am-5pm) provides information on bushwalking in the area.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the wharf on the eastern point is the small **Merimbula Aquarium** (☎ 6495 4446; adult/child \$9/5; ☑ 10am-5pm). There are good views across the lake from near here and the jetty is a popular little fishing spot.

**Merimbula Divers Lodge** (☎ 1800 651 861; www.merimbuladiverslodge.com.au; 15 Park St) has one shallow dive (\$40), PADI-certificate courses (\$400) and snorkelling trips (\$30). The more adventurous can descend into the depths and explore the 1950 wreck of the intact SS *Empire* (\$99).

**Sapphire Coast Fishing Charters** (☎ 6495 1686; cruises adult/child \$30/20) runs dolphin cruises, and there's **boat hire** at the Merimbula Marina jetty.

North of the bridge, just off the causeway, a magnificent 1.75km **boardwalk** takes nature lovers and morning people hopping and skipping around mangroves, oyster farms and melaleucas.

Nearby **Pambula Beach** is quiet, in a suburban kind of way.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Letting agents for the area include **LJ Hooker** (☎ 6495 3300; Shop 1, Centrepoint, Market St).

**Wandarrah YHA Lodge** (☎ 6495 3503; wanlodge@atis.com.au; 8 Marine Pde; dm \$24-31, d \$55-70) This clean place, with a good kitchen and hanging-out areas, is near the surf beach and the bus stop. Let the staff know if you're arriving late.

**Merimbula Lakeview Hotel** (☎ 6495 1202; Market St; s/d \$69/79) This waterfront establishment has stylish rooms with all the motel-style trimmings. A handful have good views. Come summertime, they're close to the beer garden...which may be good or bad.

**Seachange B&B** (☎ 6495 3133; www.sapphirecoast.com.au/seachange; 49 Imlay St; r/ind breakfast from \$110/135) This comfortable and modern B&B is 2km out of town. It has fantastic water views.

**Waterfront Café** (☎ 6495 2211; cnr Beach & Market St; mains \$15-19) With excellent coffee, a mean eggs Florentine (\$14) and a sunny spot by the water, you can't go wrong with this place.

**Merimbula Lakeview Hotel Bistro** (☎ 6495 1202; Market St; entrees \$15, mains \$24) This place has an upmarket bistro menu with a chilli-mussel dish worth writing home about. There's an open fire in winter, and the views are pretty good too.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are daily flights to Melbourne and to Sydney with **Rex** (☎ 13 17 13). The airport is 1km out of town on the road to Pambula.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) buses stop near the lakeside BP on their way to Sydney



(\$64) and Melbourne (\$53). **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) runs to Canberra (\$46), and **Deane's** (☎ 6495 6452) runs to/from Bega (\$10) and Eden (\$9).

## Eden

☎ 02 / pop 5000

Once a haven for fishermen and woodchippers, this charming seaside town is now jumping on the tourism bandwagon. A stubby holder and a deckchair is about all visitors will need to complement Eden's 1.5km beach, and the surrounding national parks and wilderness areas are quite breathtaking.

The helpful **Eden visitor centre** (☎ 6496 1953; Mitchell St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) is in the same building as the **library** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), which has internet access for \$4 per half-hour.

Eden comes alive at the start of November with the annual **Whale Festival** (www.edenwhalefestival.com).

The **Killer Whale Museum** (☎ 6496 2094; 94 Imlay St; adult/child \$6/2; ☎ 9.15am-3.45pm Mon-Sat, 11.15am-3.45pm Sun) is often derided as a little old-hat. You decide. The skeleton of Old Tom, a killer whale and local legend (see the boxed text, p235) is housed there.

In October and November, **Cat Balou Cruises** (☎ 0427-962 027; www.catbalou.com.au; Main Wharf) has whale-spotting cruises (adult/child \$65/55). At other times of the year, dolphins, fur seals and seabirds can usually be seen during the shorter bay cruise (\$30/17).

**Ocean Wilderness** (☎ 6496 9066; www.oceanwilderness.com.au) has sea-kayaking trips (per half-/full day \$125/80), and two-hour whale-watching tours during whale season (\$40).

**Boydton**, off the highway 10km south of Eden, has relics of Ben Boyd's stillborn empire (see the boxed text, p235).

Plans to open a **Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre** in Eden are rolling along. Check its progress at www.edenmarinediscovery.org.au.

The **Great Southern Hotel** (☎ 6496 1515; 121 Imlay St; dm \$10-\$65) has good-value shared pub rooms and promises to offer fully fledged dorm-style backpacker accommodation in 2007. The pub grub downstairs is hearty (mains \$15 to \$20; open for lunch and dinner).

The **Crown & Anchor Inn** (☎ 6496 1017; www.crownandanchoreden.com.au; 239 Imlay St; r incl breakfast from \$130) is a beautifully restored historic house (1845) with whale-watching views

from the back patio and individually styled rooms.

At Boydton, the **Seahorse Inn** (☎ 6496 1361; d from \$180), overlooking Twofold Bay, has been converted into a luxury boutique hotel (but there's also camping). It's worth just having a look around.

**Eden Tourist Park** (☎ 6496 1139; Aslings Beach Rd; www.edentouristpark.com.au; unpowed/powed sites from \$18/21, cabins from \$55) is neat, trim and in a prime position on a spit separating Aslings Beach from Lake Curalo.

**Disaster Bay Chillies** (☎ 6496 4145; www.disasterbaychillies.com) has the business of chillies down pat, serving a flagship Hot Chilli Wine that arrives (chilled) with oysters.

**Taste of Eden** (☎ 6496 1304; mains \$17; Main Wharf) is an atmospheric, tiny café serving a good selection of seafood.

**Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10) buses between Melbourne and Sydney (\$79) stop opposite the Caltex service station. Bus bookings can be made at the visitor centre.

## Ben Boyd National Park & Around

Protecting some relics of Ben Boyd's operations, this national park (9450 hectares), stretching north and south along the coast on either side of Eden, has dramatic coastline, bush and walking territory (see the boxed text, p241). The southern access road is the sealed Edrom Rd, off the Princes Hwy 19km south of Eden.

Wonboyn Rd is 4km south of Edrom Rd, and gives access to **Nadgee Nature Reserve** and to **Wonboyn**, a small settlement on Wonboyn Lake at the northern end of the reserve. Many roads in the parks have unsealed sections that can be slippery after rain.

Nadgee Nature Reserve is one of Australia's spectacularly wild and remote wilderness areas. Such is the importance of this pristine environment that general access is only allowed as far as the ranger station near the Merrica River, 7km from Newton's Beach. To really get a feel for the breathtaking scenery, a limited number of visitors can apply in writing for a permit. Most do so to experience the **Nadgee Howe Wilderness Walk**, 50km of remote heathlands, windswept beaches and coastal lagoons. Contact the **Merimbula NPWS office** (☎ 02-6495 5000) for info.

**Nadgee by Nature Cottages** (☎ 0410-511 458; www.nadgeebynature.com.au; d \$165) has three lovely cottages set in serene bushland.

# SNOWY MOUNTAINS

The Snowy Mountains – the Snowies – form part of the Great Dividing Range where it straddles the NSW-Victorian border. Kosciuszko National Park dominates this inland area of NSW, and with it comes a mixture of winding mountain roads, spectacular scenery, and, perhaps unexpectedly in Australia, snow. Small towns that hardly rate a mention in summer become hives of activity in winter, when day-trippers and holidaymakers pass through on their way to live it up in Thredbo and Perisher Blue.

When the white powder isn't falling (or being made artificially), the dense bushland, native wildlife, cascading waters and limestone caves attract just as many outdoor and adventure types as they do the kind of folk who just want to get away from it all. And there's plenty of room for both!

The upper waters of the Murray River form both the state and national-park boundaries in the southwest. The Snowy River, made famous by Banjo Paterson's poem *The Man from Snowy River* and the film based on it, rises just below the summit of Mt Kosciuszko. The Murrumbidgee River also rises in the national park.

## Getting There & Away

Cooma is the eastern gateway to the Snowy Mountains. The most spectacular mountain views can be enjoyed from the Kosciuszko Alpine Way (sometimes closed in winter), running between Khancoban, on the western side of the national park, and Jindabyne. You'll need a car to use this road. There are restrictions on car use in the national park during the ski season; check with the NPWS or visitor centres at Cooma or Jindabyne before entering.

If you are just going to one place to ski, then public transport is an option. Otherwise, you'll need a car, which does let you fully appreciate the region.

## COOMA

☎ 02 / pop 8000

Proximity to the snowfields keeps this little town punching above its weight during winter, but it slows down considerably during summer. It imbues the best of 'country town' and 'mountain momma', with good

places to hang out, an attractive centre and a laid-back vibe.

The **Cooma visitor centre** (☎ 1800 636 525; www.visitcooma.com.au; 119 Sharp St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) makes accommodation bookings and has internet access (per hour \$6), as do the **library** (Vale St; per hr \$6) and **Public Internet Access** (67 Sharp St; per hr \$15).

## Sights & Activities

Off the Monaro Hwy, 2km north of the town centre, the **Snowy Mountains Scheme Information Centre** (☎ 1800 623 776; www.snowyhydro.com.au; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun) has the best info on this feat of engineering, which took 25 years and more than 100,000 people to build.

The **Cooma Monaro Railway** (☎ 6452 7791; ☎ 11am, 1pm & 2pm Sat & Sun, public holidays & summer school holidays, 1pm & 2pm Sun winter) runs 45-minute train rides (\$12) aboard restored 1923 CPH rail motors.

The **heritage walk** around town is a good way to take in the sights and historical buildings, and to get a flavour for Cooma's late-19th-century history. Maps are available from the visitor centre, where you can also arrange to tour **Cooma Gaol** (although it's sometimes pressed back into use).

Out of town, 3km to the west, **Mt Gladstone lookout** has picnic tables.

## Sleeping & Eating

Cooma has some excellent restaurants, and most pubs also have pretty good food.

**Royal Hotel** (☎ 6452 2132; 59 Sharp St; s/d \$30/50) The oldest licensed hotel in Cooma is a beautiful old sandstone place with decent pub rooms, shared bathrooms and a great veranda.

**Bunkhouse Motel** (☎ 6452 2983; www.bunkhousemotel.com.au; 28 Soho St; s/d winter \$45/60, dm/s/d summer \$25/35/60) This is the best value for money in Cooma – a neat, friendly place with a slightly cramped and rustic feel. Some rooms have cooking facilities.

**Snowtels Caravan Park** (☎ 6452 1828; info@snowtels.com.au; 286 Sharp St; unpowed/powed sites \$18/22, cabins from \$45) On the highway, 1.5km west of town, this is a big, well-equipped place.

**Lott** (☎ 6452 1414; 178-180 Sharp St; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A great place, as cosy as mum's kitchen, with colourful cushions, produce piled high on the counter and the smell of freshly brewed coffee wafting around the room.

**Pastry Box Patisserie** (☎ 6452 5159; 100 Sharp St; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Opens at about 6am (knock and the pastry chef will let you in) with a selection of French pastries, chunky beef pies, wraps, flans and sandwiches.

**Danielle's** (☎ 6452 4488; 121 Sharp St; mains \$16-25; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, breakfast Sat & Sun) Next door to the visitor centre, this is probably Cooma's best restaurant. It's licensed, and has a menu of Italian-influenced dishes and a second-storey view over the main street.

### Getting There & Away

The airport is about 10km southwest of Cooma on the Snowy Mountains Hwy. **Rex** (☎ 13 17 13) flies to/from Sydney daily. **Aeropelican** (☎ 13 13 13; www.aeropelican.com.au) is due to start flights to/from Newcastle in 2007.

**Greyhound Ski Express** (☎ 13 14 99) buses run from Sydney and Canberra to Thredbo, Bullocks Flat Skitube and Jindabyne daily.

**SkiBus** (☎ 6456 2957) buses run daily from Thredbo and Perisher via the Skitube, Jindabyne and Cooma (on request) to Canberra.

The **Snowy Mountains Express Shuttle** (☎ 1800 679 754) meets every Rex flight and runs between the airport and Jindabyne, Alpine Way, Perisher Blue and Thredbo.

**Transborder** (☎ 6241 0033) buses run daily from Thredbo via the Skitube (\$21), Jindabyne (\$25) and Cooma (\$35) to Canberra (\$64).

Victoria's **V/Line** (☎ 136 196) has a twice-weekly run from Melbourne to Canberra via Cooma (\$63). The nine-hour trip from Melbourne takes you by train to Bairnsdale, then by bus.

Heading to Batemans Bay, you can travel via Numeralla (Map p227) to Braidwood on a partly sealed road skirting Deua National Park. If you're heading to Bega, be warned that there's no petrol until Bemboka (Map p227).

### JINDABYNE

☎ 02 / pop 4420

Jindabyne has a split personality. As the closest town to Kosciuszko National Park's major ski resorts, it sleeps more than 20,000 visitors in winter. But in summer the crowds go elsewhere and the town reverts to its relatively peaceful small-town self, where fishing is the mainstay activity.

### Orientation & Information

The impressive **Snowy Region visitor centre** (☎ 6450 5600; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Kosciuszko

Rd) is operated by the NPWS. There are display areas, a cinema and a good café.

Nearby is **Nugget's Crossing** (Kosciuszko Rd), the town's main shopping centre, with three banks, cafés and shops. The post office is located behind the centre.

### Summer Activities

**Jindabyne Adventure Booking** (☎ 1800 815588; 2 Thredbo Tce) has various tours and packages, including wake boarding, mountain biking, kite boarding, white-water rafting, abseiling and guided walks to the top of Mt Kosciuszko.

**Paddy Pallin** (☎ 1800 623 459; www.paddypallin.com.au; cnr Kosciuszko & Thredbo Rds) is a kitted-out adventure centre 2.5km from Jindabyne, just past the Thredbo Rd turn-off. It has tents, skiing and walking equipment for hire, and national park bushwalks.

Among the dozens of local adventure companies:

**Snowy River Horseback Adventure** (☎ 6457 8385; www.snowyriverhorsebackadventure.com.au; half-day rides \$95) Suits more experienced riders.

**Upper Murray Rafting** (☎ 1800 677 179; www.kos.com.au/rafting; half-day trips per person \$65) White-water rafting.

### Sleeping

The influx of snow bunnies in winter sends prices through the roof, so book ahead. Agents for holiday rental include **Alpine Resorts & Travel Centre** (☎ 1800 802 315) and **Kosciuszko Accommodation Centre** (☎ 1800 026 354).

**Snowy Mountains Backpackers** (☎ 1800 333 468; www.snowybackpackers.com.au; 7-8 Gippsland St; dm \$30-42, d \$90-120 Sun-Thu, dm \$35-44, d \$90-130 Fri & Sat) A well-oiled machine with clean rooms, internet access (\$3 for 20 minutes) and service with a smile. The way a backpackers should be.

**Lake Jindabyne Hotel/Motel** (☎ 1800 646 818; Kosciuszko Rd; d incl breakfast 5 nights Sun-Thu \$600-675, 2 nights Fri & Sat \$380-495; 🚽) A big place by the lake in the centre of town, this has a heated pool, a spa and a sauna.

**Banjo Paterson Inn** (☎ 1800 046 275; www.banjo-patersoninn.com.au; 1 Kosciuszko Rd; d \$120-250) Rooms at this snazzy lakefront place have balconies and good facilities, and there's a decent bar and on-site restaurant called Clancy's.

Other recommendations:

**Jindabyne Holiday Park** (☎ 6456 2249; www.jindabyneholidaypark.com.au; Kosciuszko Rd; powered/unpowered sites from \$35/\$22, add \$10 at weekends)

**Troldhaugen Lodge** (☎ 6456 2718; 13 Cobbodah St; s/d incl breakfast from \$60/120)

### LIGHT TO LIGHT WALKING TRACK

OK, so Boyd's Tower was never an official lighthouse, but you get the point. The Light to Light track, stretching 31km between Boyd's Tower and Green Cape Lighthouse, has some of the area's most dramatic coastal landscape. While traversing the full distance can take three days, the sealed roads into **Saltwater Creek** and **Bittangabee** (via Edrom and Green Cape Rds), and the 4WD road (via Edrom Rd) into Leatherjacket Bay make it possible to walk shorter sections. Just follow the track markers with the lighthouse icon in either direction.

Expect to see diverse landscapes and habitats, from folding red-rock cliffs, sheltered coves and rugged shorelines to waist-high shrubby heath and imposing native forests. Goannas, eastern grey kangaroos and brush tail possums are plentiful, and during autumn and spring you've got a chance to see whales and seals.

There are camping spots at Saltwater Creek and Bittangabee Bay, and bush-camping sites (without facilities) at Mowarry Point, Leatherjacket Bay and Hegarty's Bay. If the maritime feel of the historic **Green Cape Lighthouse cottage** (4-6 people \$175) sounds more comfortable, overnight accommodation is available. Tours also run. The **Merimbula NPWS office** (☎ 02-6495 5000) and the **Eden visitor centre** (☎ 02-6496 1953) have all the info.

### Eating & Drinking

**Wrap a Go Go** (☎ 6457 1887; Shop 1, Lakeview Plaza, Snowy River Ave; mains \$15-20 ☺ lunch & dinner) Up behind Nugget's Crossing, this place does a damn good chilli-prawn quesadilla and other well-priced fare.

**Café Susu** (☎ 6456 1503; 8 Gippsland St; mains \$12) This spot has reasonably priced curries, stir-fries and pasta. Friday is sushi night.

**Banjo Paterson Inn** (☎ 1800 046 275; www.banjo-patersoninn.com.au; 1 Kosciuszko Rd; mains \$20; ☺ lunch & dinner) This is a flash establishment where locals flock for a piss-up in the main bar or a quiet glass of wine next door at Clancy's.

### KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

The closest you'll get to Switzerland (but without the attitude, just the altitude) is this jewel in the national-park crown. It's NSW's largest and most spectacular national park, covering 690,000 hectares. Winter sees throngs of ski bunnies and unfair-weather families descend to make the most of the skiing and snowboarding. But it's also popular in summer, when there are excellent bushwalks and marvellous alpine wildflowers (in January). What's more, it's home to Australia's highest mountain, **Mt Kosciuszko** (koz-zy-os-ko), where a expedition to the summit (2228m) can make you feel on top of the world.

### Orientation & Information

Mt Kosciuszko and the main ski resorts are in the south-central area of the park. From Jindabyne, Kosciuszko Rd leads to the resorts

of Smiggin Holes (30km), Perisher Valley (33km) and Charlotte Pass (40km), with a turn-off before Perisher Valley to Guthega and Mt Blue Cow. From Jindabyne, the Alpine Way leads to Thredbo (33km) and on to Khancoban (103km).

The main visitor centre for the park, run by the NPWS, is at Jindabyne (opposite). There's an **education centre** (☎ 02-6450 5666) at Sawpit Creek (15km from Jindabyne), which runs programs during school holidays (but is otherwise closed), and a visitor centre at Tumut (p246) in the north of the park.

Entry to the national park costs \$27 a day per car in summer and \$16 at other times. If you intend to stay a while, buy the \$190 annual parks permit, which gives you unlimited access to every national park in NSW.

### Sleeping

There's no longer a problem finding accommodation in summer, especially at the year-round resort of Thredbo (p242). In all cases the prices will be considerably lower, some less than half the peak-season prices.

In winter, a two-bedroom apartment in Thredbo costs from about \$3000 for a week during peak ski season (roughly mid-July to early September) and a double room in a lodge costs around \$1000, including some meals.

Travel agents in most regions book accommodation and ski packages. Useful contacts:

**Perisher Blue Snow Holidays** (☎ 1300 655 811)

**Snowy Mountains Holiday Centre** (☎ 1800 641 064)



### SLEEPING IN THE SNOWIES

Contrary to elsewhere in this book, accommodation prices listed for the Snowy Mountains are mid- to peak-season rates. Low-season rates are moderately cheaper for hostels and camping options and up to 50% cheaper for all other options.

**Snowy Mountains Reservation Centre** (☎ 1800 020 622)

**Thredbo Accommodation Service** (☎ 1800 801 982)

**Thredbo Resort Centre** (☎ 1300 020 589)

The only formal camping area is **Kosciuszko Mountain Retreat** (☎ 02-6456 2224; www.kositreat.com.au; unpowered/powered sites from \$25/35, cabins from \$115), a tranquil place in bushland at Sawpit Creek, along the road to Perisher Valley.

### Getting There & Around

**Greyhound Ski Express** (☎ 13 14 99) buses run from Sydney and Canberra to Thredbo via Jindabyne and Bullocks Flat daily from June to October.

**Transborder** (☎ 6421 0033; www.transborder.com.au) runs a daily, year-round service from Canberra (\$65) to Thredbo and back that also stops at Jindabyne (\$45) and Bullocks Flat (\$60).

**Wayward Bus** (☎ 1300 653 310) runs a summer-only service to Melbourne (\$120) four times weekly.

In winter you can normally drive as far as Perisher Valley, but snow chains must be carried – even when there's no snow – and fitted where directed. The penalty if you're caught without them is \$300. The simplest, safest way to get to Perisher Valley and Smiggin Holes in winter is to take the Skitube train (p245).

### Skiing & Ski Resorts

Skiing or snowboarding in Australia is oft derided for its short season and unpredictable snowfalls. But don't be put off. Thredbo has forked out a fortune to automate its snow-making machines (ensuring 25% of rideable terrain is covered), and Perisher Blue has upgraded its facilities to enable more reliable connections between major chairlifts. If the outcome is not exactly 100%-guaranteed snow, it's a pretty good start.

Off the slopes there's lively nightlife, excellent restaurants, and a plethora of facilities and activities catering for families. Both

Thredbo and Perisher Blue have a designated kids' skiing program, crèches and daycare.

On the downside, the resorts tend to be particularly crowded at weekends and the short season means operators have to get their returns quickly, so costs are high.

For snow and road reports, contact the visitor centres at **Thredbo** (☎ 1900 934 320) and **Perisher Blue** (☎ 1900 926 664) or try www.ski.com.au. Also tune into 97.7 Snow FM locally.

### COSTS

During peak season at Thredbo, an adult two-/five-day lift ticket costs \$178/388. Children's tickets cost \$96/221. Group lessons including a lift ticket cost from \$178/128 for adults/children.

During peak season at Perisher Blue an adult one-/five-day lift ticket costs \$91/393, or \$112/479 including return Skitube tickets. Children's tickets cost \$50/228 or \$61/271. Group lessons including lift passes start at \$98 per person.

Boots, skis and stocks can be hired for \$58/31 per day for adults/children, and snowboards and boots for \$74/42 for adults/children.

### SEASONAL WORK

Thredbo employs about 200 year-round full-time staff and close to 750 in winter. For job vacancies and info, check out the recruitment page at www.thredbo.com.au. It's also worth checking the noticeboard at the supermarket in the village centre for jobs and accommodation.

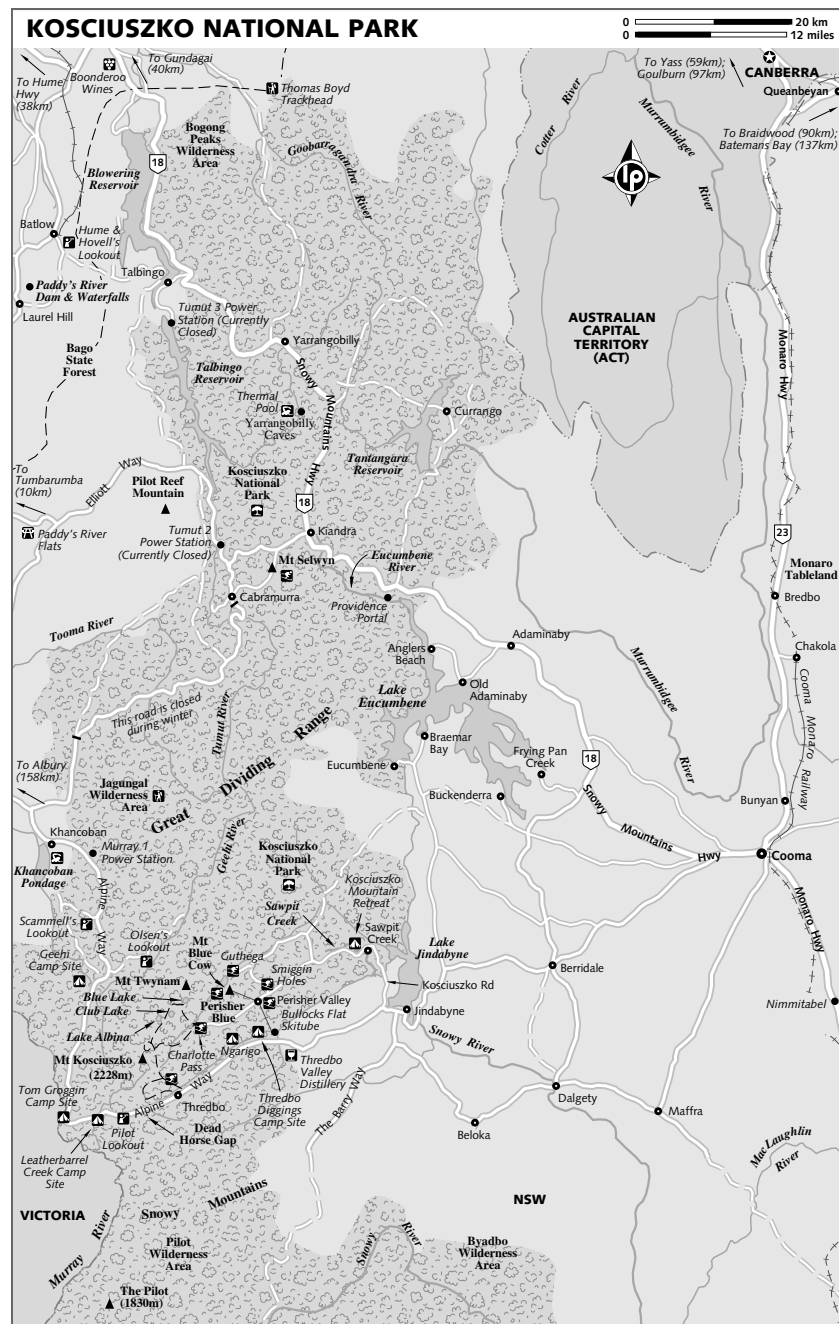
For seasonal job vacancies and information in Perisher Blue, check out the employment page at www.perisherblue.com.au. Most applicants need a working visa; however, Perisher Blue can apply for sponsored work visas.

Fruit-picking work is also available in Batlow; see p246.

### THREDBO

☎ 02 / pop 3000

At 1370m, **Thredbo** (☎ 1300 020 589; www.thredbo.com.au) has the longest runs and some of the best skiing to be had in Oz. The village itself is eye candy compared with other Australian ski villages, with blue, green and grey tones ensuring chalets and lodges blend with the surrounding snow gums and alpine flora. And of course Thredbo is an all-season resort, so if you can't afford it in winter, summer has a lot to offer too.



**Information**

**Hot Shots** (☎ 6457 6422; Level 1, Upper Concourse, Alpine Hotel; per hr \$25) Unfathomably expensive internet access.

**Snowflakes Bakery** (☎ 6457 7157; Village Sq; per 10 min \$2) Internet kiosk.

**Thredbo visitor centre** (☎ 6459 4294; Friday Dr)

**Activities**

Thredbo's skiing terrain is roughly 16% beginner, 67% intermediate and 17% advanced; no matter what category you fit into you should try to have a crack at a long run. The Supertrail (3.7km) begins at Australia's highest lifted point, then drops 670m through some pretty awesome scenery. From up here you can also take the 5km easy Village trail to Friday Flats, or black-run junkies can crank it up a notch on the 5.9km hair-raiser from Karels T-Bar right down to Friday Flats. These back-valley slopes are best in the morning; head to the front valley in the afternoon for more freestyle action.

The **Thredbo Leisure Centre** (☎ 6459 4100, 6459 4151; Friday Dr) organises all sorts of activities, summer and winter, including hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, white-water rafting, abseiling and horse riding. **Thredbo Snow Sports Outdoor Adventures** (☎ 6459 4044; www.thredbo.com.au) has a diverse range of high-energy activities including snowshoeing, snow climbing, telemark and back-country alpine touring. It also hosts a cool five-star snow-camping expedition (per person \$275) where you snowshoe to a secret camp site, feast on gourmet cuisine and test your snow-survival skills overnight.

**THREDBO TRAGEDY** Penny Watson

On a winter's night in July 1997, when most of Thredbo's residents were sleeping soundly, the Kosciuszko Alpine Way embankment, running across the upper edge of the village, collapsed, taking with it two snow lodges and 2000 cu metres of liquefied soil. Courtesy of a media throng that engulfed the ski village, Australians sat around the breakfast table the next morning and watched as rescue teams, working around the clock, removed victims from the debris. The only survivor, Stuart Diver, lay trapped under the rubble next to his dead wife for hours before being miraculously rescued. His courageous story became the subject of endless tabloid coverage and, somewhat inevitably, a TV movie. He remains the name and face of the first disaster of his kind in Australia.

For Thredbo folk, memories of that terrible night and the people who lost their lives remain in the tapestry of the landscape. The Thredbo Landslide Memorial can be seen along Bobuck Lane where the two lodges, Carinya and Bimbadeen, once stood. The 18 posts used in the construction of the platform signify the 18 lives lost.

Get out of the lodge with a self-guided walk – there's a map available from the visitor centre.

**Sleeping & Eating**

Prices at the following accommodation options drop by at least a third in the low season.

**Thredbo YHA Lodge** (☎ 6457 6376; thredbo@yhansw.org.au; 8 Jack Adams Path; dm/d/r incl bathroom \$145/163/179; ☎) The YHA is well appointed, with great common areas, a good kitchen and a balcony. Peak-season adults must be full YHA members.

**Aneeki Lodge** (☎ 0417-479 581; www.aneeki.com.au; 9 Bobuck Lane, d per person 2 nights \$170-340) One of the cheapest lodges on the mountain, this spot has a homely communal lounge with a big fireplace ideal for sipping mulled wine.

**Gourmet 42** (☎ 6457 7500; 100 Mowamba Pl, Village Sq; mains \$10-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Hung-over boarders and sleepy bar staff rock up to this small café for excellent coffee, soup and pasta. Coffee and dessert are available Thursday to Saturday evening.

Also available:

**Candlelight Lodge** (☎ 1800 020 900; www.candlelightlodge.com.au; 32 Diggings Tce; mains \$15-30; ☎ dinner) Fabulous fondue.

**Thredbo Alpine Hotel** (☎ 1800 026 333; Friday Dr; s/d incl breakfast from \$190/270; ☎) The only hotel on the mountain has suitably flash rooms.

**Drinking**

**Après Bar** (☎ 6457 6222; Diggings Tce) Cosy couches and crimson leather poufs are crammed together in this cosy over-25s atmosphere. The tunes are spot on and vino by the glass is affordable.

**KOSCIUSZKO & FIRE**

Six bushfires started in Kosciuszko National Park on 17 December 2002. Crews were easily containing these typical summer blazes when, on 8 January 2003, an electrical storm started 160 more in the park and surrounding region. Soon these fires combined and caused devastation over a vast area. By the time crews got control in March, over 321,000 hectares of the park's 690,000 hectares was damaged; 90% of the southern part of the park had burnt.

As you drive the Kosciuszko Alpine Way you will see kilometre after kilometre of scorched land. However, even amid this devastated earth there are signs of life. The eucalyptus trees are actually designed with fires in mind. The heat triggers dormant buds under the tough bark, which sprout and make the scarred trunks look as though they are covered with odd vines. The fate of the other major tree in this region, the Alpine ash, is more in doubt. A fire in 1984 wiped out much of the Alpine ash population, which triggered seeds in the ground to sprout. However, the new trees normally don't drop their own replacement seeds for 20 years, so the fires of 2002-03 may have wiped out the ash before it could reseed itself.

**Schuss Bar** (☎ 6459 4200; Upper Concourse, Alpine Hotel) Live bands give this place a bit of energy, as do the young folk fresh from the slopes. Beers are on tap and schnapps costs \$6. Monday is comedy night (\$10 entry from 8.30pm).

**PERISHER BLUE**

☎ 02 / elev 1680m

Perisher Valley, Smiggin Holes, Mt Blue Cow and Guthega make up the massive resort of **Perisher Blue** (☎ 6459 4495, 1300 655 811; www.perisherblue.com.au). Guthega (1640m) and Mt Blue Cow (1640m) are mainly day resorts, so they're smaller and less crowded. Mt Blue Cow is accessible via the **Skitube** (☎ 1300 655 822; same-day return adult/child \$38/21). It doesn't have the village ambience of Thredbo, but there's alpine and cross-country runs, valley and bowl skiing, snowboarding areas (dude!) and more.

Most accommodation is in Perisher Valley and Smiggin Holes. The following rates include either breakfast and lunch or breakfast and dinner.

**Sundeck Hotel** (☎ 6457 5222; sundeck@acr.net.au; Kosciuszko Rd; d/tw from \$165) One of the oldest lodges in Perisher, Sundeck has a comfy bar and great views from the guest lounge over the Quad 8 Express.

Other recommendations:

**Aurora Ski Club** (☎ 0412-363 206; auroraperisher@yahoo.com.au; Perisher Valley; dm from \$95) Budget – book early.

**Heidi's Chalet** (☎ 1800 252 668; www.heidis.com.au; Munyang Rd, Smiggin Holes; 2-night packages dm/tr/tw from \$236/236/260) A short snowplough to the ski lifts. Closed in summer.

**CHARLOTTE PASS**

☎ 02 / elev 1780m

At the base of Mt Kosciuszko, this is one of the highest, oldest and most isolated resorts in Australia, and in winter you have to 'snowcat' (use oversnow transport) the last 8km from Perisher Valley (\$30 each way; book ahead). Five lifts service rather short, but uncrowded, runs, and this is good skitouring country.

Accommodation includes the grand **Kosciuszko Chalet** (☎ 1800 026 369; www.charlottepass.com.au; Fri & Sat r per person incl 2 meals & lift pass per person \$693) and cheaper **Alitji Alpine Lodge** (☎ 6457 5223; enquiry@alitji.com.au; r incl 3 meals from \$85).

**THE KOSCIUSZKO ALPINE WAY**

From **Khancoban**, this spectacular route runs through dense forest, around the southern end of Kosciuszko National Park to Thredbo and on to Jindabyne. All vehicles have to carry chains, which can be hired at **Khancoban Lakeside Caravan Resort** (☎ 02-6076 9488; www.klcr.com.au; Alpine Way) and dropped off at **Margaritta Hire** (☎ 02-6456 1959; 8 Kosciuszko Rd, Jindabyne) or vice versa. Motorbikes are not permitted along the Alpine Way from June to October.

Two of the best mountain views are from **Olsen's Lookout**, 10km off the Alpine Way on the Geehi Dam dirt road, and **Scammell's Lookout**, just off the Alpine Way at a good picnic spot.

**Bullcoks Flat** is the site of the Skitube terminal, one of Perisher Blue's most underrated drawcards. Simply park the car, buy a ticket, board the train and within 15 minutes you're on the slopes. The **Skitube train** (☎ 1300 655 822; same-day return adult/child \$38/21).



In winter, check conditions at Khancoban or Jindabyne. There's no fuel available between Khancoban and Thredbo (71km). If you're driving between Khancoban and Jindabyne, you can get a free transit pass, but if you stop en route you must have a day pass (\$27).

### TUMUT AREA

☎ 02 / pop 6243

The **Tumut visitor centre & NPWS office** (☎ 6947 7025; www.tumut.nsw.gov.au; 5 Adelong Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) are in the refurbished Old Butter Factory north of the town centre.

**Batlow**, on one side of a bowl-shaped valley, is an apple-orchard town, where picking work is usually available from December to May. Contact **Riverina Community College** (☎ 02-6947 3886; Wynyard Centre, Wynyard St, Tumut; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) for info.

Nearby is **Hume & Hovell's Lookout**, where the two explorers did just that in 1824.

In Tumbarumba, the **Pioneer Women's Hut** (☎ 02-6948 2635; Wagga Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat & Sun, from 11am Wed) is lauded as one of Australia's most interesting small museums.

## SOUTHWEST & THE MURRAY

This wide, endlessly rolling country has some of the state's best farming areas and its most interesting history. The Murray River forms the boundary between NSW and Victoria, with most of the larger towns on the Victorian side. Part of this area is known as the Riverina because of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers and their tributaries.

### Getting There & Around

Several roads run through the southwest, the Hume Hwy being the major one. There are quieter routes such as Olympic Way, which runs through Cowra, Wagga Wagga and Albury. Routes to Adelaide include the Sturt Hwy through Hay and Wentworth. You'll also pass through the southwest if travelling between Brisbane and Melbourne on the Newell Hwy.

Major bus routes cross the region, running from Sydney and Brisbane to both Melbourne and Adelaide. Melbourne to Sydney bus services run on the Hume Hwy and trains run close to it.

### HUME HIGHWAY

Like all big swaths of four-lane bitumen, the Hume Hwy, running nearly 900km from Sydney to Melbourne, is somewhat lacking in aesthetic appeal. Sure, visitors will spot some of Australia's most beloved animals – kangaroos, wombats and koalas – but they're likely to be roadkill. Despite this, the highway is easily navigable and an effortless way to traverse the country by car. It also provides an opportunity to visit small towns, where a true picture of Australia – outside the big cities – can be seen.

Much of the highway is speed limited to 110km/h, and this is rigorously enforced by speed cameras and roadside police cars in an effort to reduce the Australian road toll. Drivers will do well to take heed for safety reasons but also for the sake of the back pocket. Speeding fines are hefty.

### SYDNEY TO GOULBURN

The large towns of **Mittagong** and **Bowral** adjoin each other along the Hume Hwy.

The **Southern Highlands Visitors Information Centre** (☎ 02-4871 2888, 1300 657 559; www.southern-highlands.com.au; 62-70 Main St, Mittagong; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) has comprehensive information.

For two weeks over September and October, Bowral bursts into vivid hues during the **Bowral Tulip Time Festival** (☎ 1300 657 559; www.tuliptime.net.au).

Bowral is also where the late great cricketer Sir Donald Bradman, undoubtedly Australia's greatest sporting hero and legendary to the threshold of sainthood, spent his boyhood. There's a cricket ground here and fans pay homage at the **Bradman Museum of Cricket** (☎ 02-4862 1247; www.bradman.com.au; St Jude St, Bowral; adult/child/family \$9/4/22; ☎ 10am-5pm), which has an engrossing collection of Ashes and Don-centric memorabilia that even cricket-loathers admit is worthwhile.

This pocket of the Hume is popular with Sydney day-trippers and overnighters, and has a good dining and B&B scene. **Ranelagh House** (☎ 02-4885 1111; www.ranelagh-house.com.au; Illawarra Hwy, Robertson; incl breakfast \$55-150) is a commanding English manor (1924) with lavish rooms.

The convoluted but spectacular limestone **Wombeyan Caves** (☎ 02-4843 5976; www.npws.nsw.gov.au; Wombeyan Caves Rd; adult/child/family \$13/8/30, with tour \$16/10/39; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) are

at the end of an equally convoluted mountain road 65km northwest of Mittagong. Nearby are walking trails and plenty of wildlife.

A little further south along the Hume is tiny but heritage-classified **Berrima** (Map p227), founded in 1829. It's full of art galleries, tourist-trapping antique shops, and fine food and wine. The gorgeous old sandstone **White Horse Inn** (☎ 02-4877 1204; www.whitehorseinn.com.au; Market Pl; s \$70-135, d \$80-150) has four tasteful B&B rooms and a fabulous restaurant (mains \$17 to \$24) serving French and Asian-influenced food.

Three kilometres north of Berrima, **Berkeley's Book Barn & Café** (☎ 02-4877 1370; www.berkelouw.com.au; Old Hume Hwy; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) stocks enough secondhand and antiquated tomes to satiate the biggest of bookworms.

South of Berrima is the small, appealing town of **Bundanoon** (Map p227), one of the gateways to the vast and unruly **Morton National Park**, which has the deep gorges and high sandstone plateaus of the **Budawang Range**. The **NPWS visitor centre** (☎ 02-4887 7270; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Nowra Rd, Fitzroy Falls; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) is at the park entrance.

**Bundanoon YHA** (☎ 02-4883 6010; www.yha.com.au; 115 Railway Ave; unpowered sites \$31, dm/d/f \$28/64/96) occupies a fastidiously restored Edwardian guesthouse, complete with shady veranda and galleons of gingham.

**CountryLink** (☎ 132 232; www.countrylink.info) has services from Bundanoon to Wollongong (one way adult/child \$12/8, two hours, twice daily), and **CityRail** (☎ 131 500; www.131500.com.au) trains run to/from Sydney (one way adult/child \$16/8, 2½ hours, six daily).

### GOULBURN & AROUND

☎ 02 / pop 27,200

Goulburn lays claim to being Australia's first inland city, and it has the history and architecture to prove it. The old town centre is worth a stroll, and alfresco dining and lattes are becoming mainstays of the city's food scene.

First stop should be the **Old Goulburn Brewery** (☎ 4821 6071; 23 Bungonia Rd; adult/child/concession \$6/3/4; ☎ tours 11am & 3pm), where you can see the workings of a brewery and, more importantly, sip on a beer.

The three-storey-high **Big Merino** (Cowper St; admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm) is soon to be put out to pasture (relocated) next to the Hume Hwy where all things 'big' belong.

The **Goulburn visitor centre** (☎ 4823 4492, 1800 353 646; www.igoulburn.com; 201 Sloane St; ☎ 9am-5pm) has regional information and free internet access.

About 40km southeast of Goulburn and abutting Morton National Park, **Bungonia State Conservation Area** (☎ 4844 4277; Lookdown Rd) has a dramatic forested gorge and some deep caves ideal for abseiling. Contact **Abseiling Adventures Goulburn** (☎ 0409-438 503; www.abseilingadventures.com.au; 11 Mannifera Pl). (If Goulburn's five-year drought breaks, canoeing also gets a thumbs-up).

### YASS

☎ 02 / pop 12,940

Yass is pretty and quiet (thanks to the highway bypass), but atmospheric, laced with heritage buildings, and shops and pubs of the wide-veranda variety.

**Yass visitor centre** (☎ 6226 2557; tourism@yass.nsw.gov.au; Comur St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) is in Coronation Park. Next door, the **Hamilton Hume Museum** (☎ 6226 2700; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun summer) has a model reconstruction of the town in the 1890s. Hume's house (1835), **Cooma Cottage** (☎ 6226 1470; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Mon), is on the Yass Valley Way on the Sydney side of town. **Riverbank Park** is a great place for a picnic or a quiet sit by the river. Check out the **Aboriginal murals** on the toilet blocks and underneath the bridge.

The **Hume & Hovell Walking Track**, which follows the route chosen by Hume and his sometime partner in exploration, William Hovell, has some half-day and longer walks that begin here.

About 57km southeast of Yass, along some partly dirt roads, the limestone **Careys Cave** (☎ 02-6227 9622; www.weejaspercaves.com; adult/child \$11/7) are at **Wee Jasper**. You can also join the Hume & Hovell Walking Track here.

### GUNDAGAI

☎ 02 / pop 2500

Gundagai, on the Murrumbidgee River, is relaxed and one of the more interesting small towns along (or bypassed by) the Hume.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6944 0250; www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au; 249 Sheridan St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat & Sun) is on the grand main street. Housed within is **Rusconi's Marble Masterpiece**, a cathedral model that relentlessly plays 'Along the Road to Gundagai', so that you'll likely hum it mindlessly for days.

## SAVING THE SNOWY

The Snowy River is perhaps the country's best known, etched into the Australian psyche by folklore, legend, and the sweat, blood and tears devoted to the Snowy Mountains Hydro scheme. This colossal project to channel water from east of the Great Divide through the Snowy Mountains to the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems took 25 years to complete (1949 to 1974) and is Australia's largest engineering project. The scheme was a huge success for the Murray River, but it left only 1% of the Snowy's headwaters for the Snowy River to survive, and the result has been slow and excruciating death. At the time of writing the Snowy River was only trickling at about 5% of its natural flow. In 2000 the Commonwealth, Victorian and NSW governments struck a deal to restore the Snowy's flows to 21% by 2012, eventually increasing to 28%.

Given that the clock is ticking, the state of the river is still dire, and the impending crisis now taking place in the Murray–Darling River network (see the boxed text, p60), the realisation of that promise remains to be seen. A win for the river and its surrounding towns and natural habitats was a decision by the NSW and Commonwealth governments in 2006 not to proceed with a proposed sale of the Snowy hydro scheme. At least for the moment the control of the Snowy, Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers remains in the hands of the respective governments and, to a lesser degree, their associated communities.

The **Prince Alfred Bridge** (closed to traffic, but you can walk it) is the star of Gundagai's sights. It crosses the flood plain of the Murrumbidgee River and provides a perfect spot for breathing in the country air.

**Green Dog Gallery** (☎ 6944 1479; Sheridan St; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Thu–Sat) and **Lannigan Abbey Art Gallery** (☎ 6944 2852; www.laniganabbey.com.au; 72 First Ave; ☎ 9am–5pm) are worth a bo peep.

Gold rushes and bushrangers were part of the town's colourful early history. The notorious bushranger Captain Moonlight was tried in Gundagai's 1859 **courthouse** and is now buried in the town.

The **Mt Parnassus lookout** has picnic facilities and good views over the town; take the steep walk (or drive) up Hanley St.

About 8km east of town, the **Dog on the Tuckerbox** is Gundagai's most famous monument. A sculpture of a dog from a 19th-century bush ballad, it is well-known along the Hume Hwy, but mostly as a petrol-and-sausage-roll pit stop.

Touches like slate bathrooms and comfy furniture make **Poet's Recall** (☎ 6944 1777; poets.recall@bigpond.com; cnr West & Punch Sts; s/d \$75/95; ☎) the best motel in town. Locals also rate the restaurant, which has an Irish chef.

**Old Bridge Inn** (☎ 6944 4250; 1 Tumut St), on the south of town, is a lovely old building with B&B accommodation and an excellent restaurant (mains \$13 to \$25; open for lunch and dinner). Ring ahead for availability and tariffs.

**Gundagai Tourist Park** (☎ 6944 1620; Junee Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$19/22, cabins \$44) has well-presented vans and cabins.

## ALBURY WODONGA

☎ 02 / pop 42,000

This major regional centre on the Murray River, just below the big Hume Weir, is a merging of two towns, although cross-border snobbery from the NSW locals may suggest that 'Albury' is all that's required. To be fair, Albury is the more interesting bit of the conurbation. It's a good base for trips to the snowfields and high country of both Victoria and NSW, the vineyards around Rutherglen (Victoria), and the tempestuous upper Murray River (the river becomes languid below Albury). It's also a good spot to break the journey between Sydney and Melbourne.

## Information

The **Gateway visitor centre** (☎ 1300 796 222; www.destinationalburywodonga.com.au; ☎ 9am–5pm) is part of a large 'island' on the Wodonga side of the bridge. **Cyber Heaven** (☎ 6023 4320; 505 Kiewa St; per hr \$9; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) has internet access.

## Sights & Activities

**Albury Regional Museum** (☎ 6021 3480; Wodonga Pl; admission free; ☎ 10.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun), in Noreuil Park, covers Aboriginal culture, the local ecosystem and 20th-century migration into the area. See the tree marked by explorer

William Hovell on his 1824 expedition with Hume from Sydney to Port Phillip.

The **Albury Regional Art Gallery** was closed in preparation for relocation at the time of writing. When it reopens you'll be able to see its small permanent collection featuring works by Russell Drysdale and Fred Williams, and contemporary Australian photography.

For a cleansing river swim, turn right into Noreuil Park in Albury, just before the Lincoln Causeway, where there's a **swimming pool** in the river, or try the **loop**, a magical 20-minute float (on your back) around a big bend that ends close to where you began.

The paddle steamer **PS Cumberoona** (☎ 6021 1113; adult/child \$16/8), moored on the river behind Noreuil Park, has one-hour weekend trips between October and April.

The **Botanic Gardens** (four hectares), at the northern end of Wodonga Pl, are old, formal and beautiful – somewhere the kids can run wild while mums and dads sink a tinnie.

In November the annual **Ngangirra Festival**, which features Aboriginal art, music, dance and language, is held at Mungabareena Reserve.

Near the visitor centre, a paved **bike & walk track** starts at Union Bridge and follows the winding river to Wodonga. For more river action, go **canoeing**. Popular day- and half-day trips begin at Mungabareena Reserve and end at Noreuil Park. The visitor centre has information on hiring canoes.

See over 120 bird species in their native habitat at the **Wonga Wetlands** (☎ 6051 3800; Riverina Hwy, Splitters Creek), an innovative project to restore local wetlands using treated waste water. Call for tour information.

**Oz E Wildlife** (☎ 02-6040 3677; Ettamogah; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 9am–5pm), 11km north on the Hume Hwy, is a sanctuary for sick and injured local wildlife. The roos will enjoy your company.

About 8km north, the lopsided **Ettamogah Pub** (☎ 02-6026 2366; www.ettamogah.com; Burma Rd, Tabletop), off the Hume Hwy towards Sydney, is a real-life re-creation of a famous Aussie cartoon pub by Albury-born Ken Maynard.

If the wineries and food producers of Victoria haven't made it on to your itinerary, the **farmers market**, held every second Saturday near the visitor centre, is an excellent means of scoping out the local food scene. On Sunday morning, the **Rotary market**, in the tax-office car park on Smollett St, is also worth browsing.

## Sleeping

Some motels are on busy streets such as Hume and Young and suffer from noise, especially from flatulent trucks.

**Sodens Hotel Motel** (☎ 6021 2400; cnr David & Wilson Sts; r \$45–60) Two blocks from the main street, this is an old-style pub with a grandiose veranda. It has 50 rooms within stumbling distance of the beer garden.

**Quality Resort Siesta** (☎ 6025 4555; www.siesta.com.au; 416 Wagga Rd; r from \$70–270; ☎) Garish-cum-luxurious – this vaguely Mexican-themed 4½-star resort has a bewildering array of options – spa, sauna, steam room, solarium, gym, a couple of decent restaurants and the Cantina Bar.

**Gundowring** (☎ 6041 4437; thudson@albury.net.au; 621 Stanley St; s/d incl breakfast \$110/130) This is the best B&B near the centre, in a gorgeous Federation house a short walk from the botanical gardens.

**Albury Motor Village YHA** (☎ 6040 2999; www.yha.com.au; 372 Wagga Rd; powered sites \$20, dm/d/cabins \$22/50/62; ☎) About 4.5km north of the centre, this is a tidy park with a range of cabins, vans and backpacker beds in clean dorms.

## Eating

Dean St is a long strip of takeaways, cafés, restaurants and nightlife.

**Electra Café** (☎ 6021 7200; 3/441 Dean St; mains \$10–17; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed–Sun) This place has excellent coffee, a sunny footpath eating area, and a poached eggs and grilled mushroom breakfast worth pulling off the highway for.

**Green Zebra** (☎ 6023 1100; 484 Dean St; mains \$12–20; ☎ 8am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm Sat) This modern café with a gourmet approach to food makes fresh fettuccini and tasty tagliatelle on site.

**Coffee Mumma** (☎ 6041 2600; 5/501 Olive St; mains \$10–15; ☎ 7.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–2pm Sat) Mumma brews the best coffee in town and has a handy footpath takeaway service area for travellers who don't want to stop for long.

**Star Hotel** (☎ 6021 2745; 502 Guinea St) This local favourite has a huge beer garden out the back and a front bar with pool tables where the gregarious owners will keep you entertained. It's a little off the main drag but worth the walk down Olive St.

Other recommendations:

**Paddy's Irish Bar** (☎ 6021 3599; 491 Kiewa St) Your typical Irish theme-bar.

**Zen X** (☎ 6023 6455; 467 Dean St; mains from \$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Excellent sushi and teppanyaki.



## Getting There & Away

The airport is 10 minutes out of town on Bor-ella Rd. **Rex** (☎ 13 17 13) flies to Sydney and Melbourne. **Brindabella Airlines** (☎ 1300 668 824; www.brindabellaairlines.com.au) flies to/from Canberra.

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) has coaches to Melbourne (\$43, four hours), Wagga Wagga (\$33, two hours) and Sydney (\$65, nine hours). **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) runs to Echuca (\$85) three times a week. CountryLink buses leave from the train station bus stop. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) coaches run to Mildura.

XPTs running between Sydney (\$98) and Melbourne (\$64) stop here. It's sometimes cheaper to fly. V/Line runs a cheaper, daily train to Melbourne (from \$50).

## WAGGA WAGGA

☎ 02 / pop 58,000

'Wagga' is the state's largest inland city, a pretty place with fine buildings, wide tree-lined streets and lovely riverside gardens. Though it sprawls across a large area, it has the feel of a relaxed country town.

The name means 'place of many crows' in the language of the local Wiradjuri people, but an alternative meaning is 'dancing like a drunken man'.

## Orientation & Information

The long main street, Baylis St, which runs north from the train station, becomes Fitzmaurice St at the northern end. The **visitor centre** (☎ 1300 100 122; www.tourismwagga.com.au; Tarcutta St; ☎ 9am-5pm) is close to the river.

There's internet access at **Civic Video** (☎ 6921 8866; 21 Forsyth St; per hr \$5; ☎ 10am-10pm).

## Sights & Activities

The Civic Centre houses the excellent **Wagga Wagga Art Gallery** (☎ 6926 9660; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun), home to the wonderful **National Art Glass Collection**, which provides an overview of the history and development of the studio glass movement in Australia from the 1970s.

The **Oasis Regional Aquatic Centre** (☎ 6937 3737; www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/oasis/; Morgan St; adult/child \$5/3.50; ☎ 6.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) has several pools and includes a wave ball with mats, and a fun free playground out the front.

The **Botanic Gardens** (Macleay St; ☎ sunrise-sunset) has a small **zoo**, geese and peacocks roam free, and there's a free-flight aviary. The entrance is just before the archway telling you you're

entering Lord Baden Powell Dr, which itself leads to a good lookout and the scenic **Captain Cook Drive**.

Wagga is a major centre for **livestock sales** (Boman industrial area); you can watch farmers sell cattle on Monday in an amphitheatre-style ring, and sheep by the thousands on Thursday.

The **Museum of the Riverina** (☎ 6925 2934; Baden Powell Dr; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) operates from both the Civic Centre and the Botanic Gardens; the latter site focuses on Wagga's people, places and events.

The **Wiradjuri Walking Track** is a 30km circuit beginning from the visitor centre (get your map there) that includes some good lookouts and places of Aboriginal significance.

The **Wagga Wagga Winery** (☎ 6922 1221; Gundagai Rd; ☎ 11am-10pm Wed-Sun) has delicious BBQ meals (from \$17). Charles Sturt University also has an award-winning **winery** (☎ 6933 2435; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun).

## Sleeping

There are many motels in town, especially along Tarcutta St.

**Romano's Hotel** (☎ 6921 2013; cnr Fitzmaurice & Sturt Sts; s/d \$38/50) This is an airy old pub with quaint rooms, grand beds and bleak bathrooms – ask for a room on the quieter 2nd floor.

**Club Motel** (☎ 6921 6966; theclub1@tpg.com.au; 73 Morgan St; s/d \$65/85; ☎) This is perfect if you want to walk to everything. The rooms are spacious enough and very clean.

**Manor** (☎ 6921 5962; 38 Morrow St; s/d incl breakfast \$70/98, with bathroom \$95/110, ste \$170; ☎) A charming well-restored guesthouse, the Manor is furnished with antiques like four-poster beds and leather-lined desks. Equally elegant is the Manor Restaurant (mains \$20 to \$32; open for dinner Monday to Saturday).

**Centralpoint Motel** (☎ 6921 7272; 164-6 Tarcutta St; s/d \$85/108; ☎) This motel uses 'allergy-conscious' cleaning products and all rooms are self-contained. Ask about weekly and family rates.

**Lawson Motor Inn** (☎ 6921 2200; www.thelawson.com.au; 117 Tarcutta St; standard/garden/river d \$125/145/165; ☎) Right on the Murrumbidgee, the Lawson is elegant and you can walk straight onto the riverbank walking tracks.

**Wagga Wagga Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 6931 0603; www.wwwbp.com.au; 2 Johnston St; sites per adult \$19, cabins standard/de luxe \$55/75; ☎) This park has a swimming beach fashioned from the river banks and plenty of cabins.

## Eating

**Café Lulaba** (☎ 6931 8903; 10 Best St; mains \$11-13; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Sat) It's known for its dhal curry, but how could you go past the quiche? It's a cheery spot with a large zebra watching over you.

**Indian Tavern Tandoori** (☎ 6921 3121; 81 Peter St; dishes \$11-19; ☎ dinner) Locals who love a vindaloo support this multi-award-winning eatery, which also serves a range of dishes from the tandoori oven.

**Maggies Nest Restaurant** (☎ 6933 1523; cnr Old Narrandera & Pine Gully Rds; dishes \$15-27; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) This is housed in restored stone stables, with sweeping views of the town. The focus is on local produce; vegetables come straight from the garden!

**Three Chefs** (☎ 6921 5897; 70 Morgan St; mains \$28-35; ☎ breakfast daily, lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) A white-tablecloth fine-dining place, Three Chefs has kept a warm and comfortable atmosphere. The sweet suckling pork with caramelised shallot tart is a taste treat.

## Getting There & Away

**QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantaslink.com.au) flies daily to Sydney, and **Rex** (☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies several times daily to Melbourne and Sydney.

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 42; www.countrylink.com.au) buses leave from **Wagga train station** (☎ 13 22 32, 6939 5488), where you can make bookings. The Melbourne/Sydney XPT service stops at Wagga twice daily (\$68 to each). **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) runs daily to/from Sydney (\$61, eight hours), and Melbourne (\$63, 6½ hours).

## JUNEE

☎ 02 / pop 5890

Once known as the 'Rail Centre of the South', Junee is a small, friendly country town with an extraordinary number of impressive buildings. Get tourist information and a map from the **shire offices** (☎ 6924 8100; Belmore St), opposite the police station.

Built in 1884, the mansion of **Monte Cristo** (☎ 6924 1637; www.montecristo.com.au; Monte Cristo Rd; adult/child/family \$10/5/2.50; ☎ 10am-4pm) was the home of a shrewd landowner named Christopher Crawley. The homestead has been faithfully decorated in high Victorian style, and is full of superb antiques. Entry includes an informative guided tour. You can get to Monte Cristo from John Potts Dr.

Built in 1947, the **Railway Roundhouse** (☎ 6924 2909; Harold St; adult/child/family \$6/4/16; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm, closed Mon & Fri) is the only surviving, working one of its kind in Australia. Railway enthusiasts should visit the Roundhouse Museum in the same complex.

Junee boasts some magnificent old pubs with massive verandas dripping with iron lace, but sadly many now stand empty. The 1915 **Commercial Hotel** (cnr Lorne & Waratah Sts) still has a busy bar crowded with after-work drinkers. The **Loftus** (☎ 6924 1511; 6 Humphreys St) was the town's grandest hotel, with a frontage running for an entire block. It was sold in late 1999 for only \$32,000!

Across the tracks, the **Junee Hotel** (☎ 6924 1124; Seignior St) was built by Christopher Crawley in 1876. The pub hasn't had a lot done to it over the years, but that means the original fittings are still intact.

The station's **Railway Refreshment Room** (Lorne St; sandwiches from \$4) is a glorious place with huge mirrors and soaring arched ceilings (and good sandwiches and cakes).

**Green Grove Organics** (☎ 6924 3574; www.green-groveorganics.com; 8-18 Lord St; adult/child \$4/2.50; ☎ 10am-4pm) make a show out of creating liquorice and chocolate in the old Junee Flour Mill (1935). So engaging is the spectacle that it won the Best Tourist Attraction 2006.

**Loftus B&B** (☎ 6924 1511; 6 Humphreys St; incl breakfast s/d \$60/90, d with bathroom \$105) is a 100-year-old pub located in the centre of town, complete with sweeping staircases and an endless balcony.

**Junee Caravan Park** (☎ 6924 1316; Broadway St; camp sites per adult \$22, cabins standard/de luxe \$65/85), a pretty caravan park by the lake, won the Inland Tourism Award 2006 for its range of attractive, spacious amenities such as pool, BBQ and playground.

Downstairs from Loftus B&B is **Betty & Muriel's** (☎ 6924 2555; mains \$20-31; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sat), where you dine with Hollywood stars. Try, if you dare, a Pamela Anderson (two half chicken breasts stuffed with smoked salmon and brie).

## NARRANDERA

☎ 02 / pop 6600

On the banks of Lake Talbot and the Murrumbidgee River, Narrandera is known for its beautiful green avenues and parks. The helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 672 392; Narrandera St; ☎ 9am-5pm) has the 'largest playable guitar in the southern hemisphere'. But you need long arms.

**Lake Talbot Complex** (☎ 6959 1211; Lake Dr; adult/child \$2.50/1.50; ☎ 6-8am, 10am-1pm, 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) is a beautiful but faded water-sports reserve with a 100m water slide, and a number of trails making up the **Bundidgerry Walking Track**.

## GRIFFITH

☎ 02 / pop 24,910

Griffith is small but sophisticated; its cultural mix of Europeans, Indians and South Pacific Islanders gives it a cosmopolitan atmosphere. The wine-and-food capital of the Riverina, Griffith's vineyards, cafés and restaurants offer renowned variety and quality.

## Information

Grapes and other crops provide year-round harvest jobs; **Griffith Oz-Jobs** (☎ 6964 3232; karin.penninga@chandlermacleod.com; 108b Yambil St) and the **Harvest hotline** (☎ 1300 720 126) can sort you out. **Griffith visitor centre** (☎ 6962 4145; www.griffith.com.au; cnr Banna Ave & Jondaryan Aves; ☎ 9am-5pm) Fronted by a life-size WWII Fairey Firefly plane.

**Library** (cnr Banna Ave & Kooyoo St; per hr \$6) Internet access.

**NPWS office** (☎ 6966 8100; www.npws.nsw.gov.au; 200 Yambil St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Information on nearby national parks.

## Sights & Activities

High on a hill north of the town centre, **Pioneer Park Museum** (☎ 6962 4196; cnr Remembrance & Scenic Drs; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is a re-creation of an early Riverina village, with an old hospital, a music room and other fascinating displays in original old buildings. The **Italian museum** even includes a very early knitting machine brought here by migrants.

Not far from Pioneer Park is the **Rotary Look-out**, with great views and a series of walking tracks.

**Riverina Grove** (☎ 6962 7988; www.riverinagrove.com.au; 4 Whybrow St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is a mecca of gourmet food, with everything from marinated fetta to rich nougat.

Though small, the Art Deco **Griffith Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 6962 5991; 167-185 Banna Ave; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) has a lovely sense of space and excellent changing exhibitions.

The Griffith area also has a large number of award-winning wineries, including:

**Australian Old Vine Wine** (☎ 6963 5239; Rosetto Rd, Beelbanger, ☎ 10am-4pm) Boutique, with wine to suit everyone.

**McWilliam's Hanwood Estate** (☎ 6963 0001; Jack McWilliam Rd, Hanwood; ☎ tastings 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) The oldest (1913).

**Westend Estate** (☎ 6964 1506; Brayne Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun)

## Sleeping

**Griffith International Hostel** (☎ 6964 4236; 112 Binya St; d nightly/weekly \$20/110; ☎) On a pleasant street near the town centre, this hostel is rough around the edges, with large dorms. Australians are welcome to an overnight bed only.

**Yambil Inn Motel** (☎ 6964 1233; 155 Yambil St; s/d \$86/93; ☎ ☎) This central, small place has a pretty tropical-garden feel with a good pool to relax by on hot Riverina days.

**Hotel Victoria** (☎ 6962 1299; 384 Banna Ave; s/d incl breakfast \$85/95; ☎ ☎) The Victoria features bright corridors, cheerful rooms, good bathrooms and friendly staff. If you like it quiet, ask for a room away from the pub noise.

**Tourist Caravan Park** (☎ 6964 2144; 919 Willandra Ave; caravans/sites with bathroom \$19/24, cabins \$49-66; ☎) This convenient caravan park is small and organised, and has grassy sitting areas.

## Eating

**Miei Amici Cafe** (☎ 6962 5999; 350 Banna St; dishes \$6-12; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) This tiny place is where everyone meets over the great breakfasts; try the bacon-and-pancake stack.

**La Tavola** (☎ 6962 7777; 188 Banna Ave; mains \$10-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) This cheery restaurant dishes up excellent Italian dishes like saltimbocca. The owner loves food and will be happy to advise.

**La Scala** (☎ 6962 4322; 455b Banna Ave; dishes \$21-7; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Hidden down steps and behind an old pink door, this cellar has a great reputation and a laid-back feel. The menu includes Italian favourites like *scallopine al funghi* and an extensive local wine list.

**Michelin** (☎ 6964 9006; 72 Banna Ave; dishes \$27-9; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat, brunch Sun) Chef Antony More prepares stunning Mod Oz meals in this elegant space, like spiced lamb rump with eggplant caviar, Persian fetta pepperoncini and olive-crust kipler potatoes.

## Getting There & Away

**Rex** (☎ 13 17 13; www.rex.com.au) flies between Griffith and Sydney.

All buses, except CountryLink (which stops at the train station), stop at the **Griffith Travel & Transit Centre** (☎ 6962 7199; 121 Banna Ave) in the Shell petrol station opposite the plane memorial. All

services run daily to Adelaide (\$108, 14 hours), Melbourne (\$98, nine hours), Sydney (\$98, 10 hours) and Mildura (\$80, six hours).

There's a **taxi service** (☎ 6964 1444) and an **airport express bus service** (☎ 0418 696 280).

## LEETON

☎ 02 / pop 12,030

As the headquarters of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme (MIA), Leeton is at the centre of one of Australia's largest regions for growing fruit, vegetables and rice. The first of the Walter Burley Griffin–designed towns, it remains close to the architect's original vision, and is developing into a thriving community centre.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6953 6481; www.leetontourism.com.au; 10 Yanco Ave; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun) has maps for forest drives and heritage walks.

Learn all about the Riverina's massive rice industry at the **SunRice Centre** (☎ 6953 0596; www.sunrice.com.au; Calrose St; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), which has presentations at 9.30am and 2.45pm.

**Lillypilly Estate** (☎ 6953 4069; www.lillypilly.com; Lillypilly Rd; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) and **Toorak Wines** (☎ 6953 2333; www.toorakwines.com.au; Toorak Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) are two local wineries open for tastings and sales.

## WILLANDRA NATIONAL PARK

This World Heritage–listed national park, on the plains 160km northwest of Griffith as the crow flies, has been carved from a huge sheep station on a system of lakes. Though often dry, the lakes, especially **Hall's Lake**, sometimes become temporary wetlands and **bird life** is abundant. During spring there are magnificent displays of **wild flowers**, and **emus** and **kangaroos** can be found on the open plains throughout the year.

The historical interest of Willandra centres on the wool industry and station life, although there were certainly Aboriginal civilisations in the area. In 1869 some enterprising Melbourne grocers formed the sheep station **Big Willandra** – the national park (about 19,400 hectares), formed in 1972, is less than 10% of Big Willandra.

The **Willandra Homestead** (r/ff/whole homestead \$60/80/350), built in 1918, is gloriously traditional and low-slung, with a wide veranda all the way around. The homestead was the centre of station life and the distance of accommodation from the homestead indicated the status

of the workers; furthest away is the tin-lined shearers' quarters (take time to explore the graffiti in each room) – much less comfortable in the heat than the thatched ram shed, where the kings of the station (the rams, who made all the money) lived. Book through **Griffith NPWS office** (☎ 02-6966 8100; fax 6962 5480). There are also several **camp sites** (adult/child \$3/2) along Willandra Creek, with pit toilets, fireplaces and showers. Bring your own drinking water.

## HAY

☎ 02 / pop 3550

This might be flat, one-tree plains country, but Hay is colourful, busy and very much the centre of this rural area – just watch the main street fill with utes (utility trucks) on Saturday morning as station hands from far and wide come to play in Hay's sporting teams.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6993 4045; www.visithay.com.au; 407 Moppett St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun) is helpful.

## Sights & Activities

Shearers enjoy legendary status in this part of Australia, and the innovative **Shear Outback** (☎ 6993 4000; cnr Sturt & Cobb Hwys; adult/child \$15/8; ☎ 9am-5pm) is devoted to these colourful characters.

Hay housed three internment camps during WWII, and the **Hay POW & Internment Camp Interpretive Centre** (☎ 6993 2112; Murray St; adult \$2; ☎ 9am-5pm), at the 1882 railway station, tells the stories of the 'Dunera boys', and Japanese and Italian internees.

Impressive old buildings in town include **Bishop's Lodge** (☎ 6993 1727; Roset St; adult \$4; ☎ 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec, 10am-12.30pm Jan-Mar), a mansion built entirely of corrugated iron as a residence for the Anglican bishop in 1888. It's set amid acclaimed heritage rose gardens.

From an insane asylum to a maternity hospital, the **Old Hay Gaol** (Church St; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 9am-5pm) has had many uses but is now a museum with a fascinating collection of local memorabilia.

The **Booilgal Sheep Races** (www.visithay.com.au) in September attract big crowds.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Bank B&B** (☎ 6993 1730; www.users.tpg.com.au/users/tsk; 86 Lachlan St; s/d \$80/120; ☎ ☎) On the main street, this charming B&B, in an 1891 mansion, has a gorgeous lounge and balcony area, oodles of character, and modern facilities.



**Hay Plains Holiday Park** (☎ 6993 1875; sites \$19, cabins standard/de luxe \$45/55; ♿) Small and central, this park has quaint little cabins and a pleasant swimming pool and BBQ area.

**Jolly Jumbuck** (☎ 6993 4718; Riverina Hotel, 148 Lachlan St; mains \$10-25; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This bistro serves great \$10 lunch specials, but lash out and order the fantastic lamb cutlets from the extensive country-style menu.

### Getting There & Away

**Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) buses stop at the Mobil station on the Sturt Hwy, and head to/from Adelaide (11 hours) and Sydney (13½ hours).

**CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 42) XPT train/bus services head to/from Sydney (\$110, 11½ hours), and Melbourne (\$119; 11 hours).

### DENILIQUIN

☎ 03 / pop 8220

Deniliquin is an attractive, bustling country town on a wide bend of the Edward River. It's also a place of pilgrimage for ute fetishists.

### Sights & Activities

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 650 712; www.deniliquin.nsw.gov.au; George St; 🕒 9am-4pm) is part of the attractive **Peppin Heritage Centre** (☎ 1800 650 712, 5898 3120; George St; adult/child \$2/free; 🕒 9am-4pm), which is devoted to the wool industry with interesting historical displays.

The **Island Sanctuary**, on the riverbank in town, has a pleasant walking track among the river red gums. It's home to plenty of wildlife including kangaroos, possums and birds.

The Greco Roman-style **courthouse** (Poitiers St) is an extremely imposing building constructed in 1883.

For swimming, head to **McLean Beach**, one of the finest riverside beaches in Australia with golden sand, picnic facilities and a walking track. There's also a spread of pools – Olympic size, toddler, learners – at **Deniliquin Swimming Pool** (Poitiers St).

Deniliquin holds an annual **Ute Muster** (www.denitemuster.com.au), when bush boys – and some girls – get together for an action-packed weekend in their utes, 6172 of them at last count! The event is part of the **Play on the Plains Festival** (☎ 5881 3388), held on the Labour Day long weekend in October, which celebrates Australian culture with country music, celebrity guests, carnivals and bull-wrestling (but no ute-wrestling).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Riverview Motel** (☎ 5881 2311; www.riverview.com.au; 1 Butler St; s/d \$65/75; ♿) Wake up to river views through a haze of gums from your lovely, spacious room with private porch overlooking the Edward River. Riverview Bistro (mains \$15 to \$20; open for dinner) serves hearty steaks.

**McLean Beach Caravan Park** (☎ 5881 2448; www.mcleanbeachcaravanpark.com.au; Butler St; camp sites per adult \$20, cabins standard/de luxe \$65/95; ♿) This is next to a magnificent sandy river beach with an outstanding children's play area, river red gums and excellent amenities.

**Crossing Café** (☎ 5881 7827; Peppin Heritage Centre; mains \$18-22; 🕒 9am-3pm daily, dinner Fri & Sat) It's like a chalet with an idyllic riverside setting, where wood-fired pizzas and fine local wines are featured. Weekend dinners include grilled blue-eye with sweet-chilli-and-lemonade sauce.

### Getting There & Away

Long-distance buses stop on Whitelock St, opposite Gorman Park. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 42) heads to/from Wagga (\$51, 3½ hours, four days a week) and Albury (\$29, 3½ hours, three days a week), both linking with the XPT train to Sydney (\$110, 10 hours). **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) coaches run daily to/from Melbourne (\$37, four hours).

### JERILDERIE

Some 92km east of Deniliquin and on the Newell Hwy, Jerilderie is immortalised by the bushranger Ned Kelly, who held up the whole town for three days in 1879. Kelly relics can be seen in the **Willows Museum & Ned Kelly Post Office** (☎ 03-5886 1511; Powell St; admission by donation; 🕒 9.30am-4pm). The town is 109km south of Narrandera (p251).

### ALONG THE MURRAY

Most of the major river towns are on the Victorian side (see p552), but it's easy to hop back and forth across the river. You can cross the border at the twin towns of Moama (NSW) and Echuca (Victoria).

The **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 804 446, 03-5480 7555; www.echucamoama.com; 2 Heygarth St) serves both towns and is located in Echuca beside the bridge that crosses into NSW. Ask about trips on the paddle steamers that ply these waters (reminders of when the Murray and Darling Rivers were the main highways of communication and trade).

Downstream from Albury (p248) is **Corowa**, a wine-producing centre, whose Lindemans winery dates from 1860. **Tocumwal**, on the Newell Hwy, is a quiet riverside town with sandy beaches and a big fibreglass Murray cod in the town square. The cod-stuffed Murray River has some good beaches.

### WENTWORTH

☎ 03 / pop 7240

The old river port of Wentworth lies at the impressive confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers, 30km northwest of Mildura. Enormous river red gums shade the banks, and there are numerous lookouts and walking tracks.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 5027 3624; www.wentworth.nsw.gov.au; 66 Darling St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is on the main road.

You can see some local history in the **Old Wentworth Gaol** (☎ 5027 3327; Beverley St; adult/child \$6/free; 🕒 10am-5pm) and across the road in the interesting **Rotary Museum** (☎ 5027 3337; adult \$2; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). The latter has a large collection of photos of the paddle steamers that once made this a major port.

The **Perry Dunes** are impressive orange sand dunes dating back 40,000 years. They're 6km north of town, off the road to Broken Hill.

**Harry Nanya Tours** (☎ 1800 630 864; www.harrynanyatours.com.au; 33 Darling St) is based in town and runs full- and half-day tours (from adult/child \$130/85) with Aboriginal guides into Mungo National Park (p262).

**Sportsmans Inn Motel** (☎ 5027 3584; 120 Adams St; s/d \$55/65; ♿) is a favourite with travellers, offering no-fuss value and spacious rooms.

## OUTBACK

Vast sunburnt plains, crimson sunsets and empty horizons – far west NSW is massive, rugged and oh so dry. But it's also fascinating and richly diverse. Should you get a chance to fly above its burnt swirls, dots and splotches, it will suddenly hit you: you're looking at Aboriginal art.

The NSW outback produces much of the state's wealth, particularly from the mines of Broken Hill, and its national parks boast stunning natural environments and significant Aboriginal heritage. It's sparsely populated, and the people you meet are special – larger than life – yet calm and caring.

From November to February the heat is intense – by 10am the Celsius landmark of 40°C is passed, and 51.7°C is the current daytime record.

There's plenty to see and do, and you can get into the towns and most national parks in a 2WD. But seek local advice if you want to venture onto unsealed roads, even in a 4WD. Although the country is flat to the horizon with small clumps of saltbush all over it, there are plenty of birds, mobs of emus, cattle, feral goats and kangaroos along the roadside to watch – and to watch out for!

### BOURKE

☎ 02 / pop 3924

Immortalised for Australians in the expression 'back of Bourke' – that is, anything remote – this easy-going town sits at the foot of the outback. Beyond Bourke, green pastoral lands stop abruptly, settlements are few, and the country is flat, brown and alluring. Bourke itself is gorgeous, historic and quaint, sprawled along the beautiful Darling River with river gums and water birds.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 6872 1222, 6872 2280; www.visitbourke.com; Anson St; 🕒 closed Sun summer) has an excellent leaflet called *Bourke Mud Map Tours*, detailing walks and drives of interest.

Seasonal fruit- and cotton-picking work is available between November and January, and May to October; contact **Bourke Joblink** (☎ 6870 1041; www.joblinkplus.com.au; 26 Oxley St) for information.

The fascinating **Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre** (☎ 6872 1321; www.backobourke.com.au; Kidman Way; stage 1 adult/child \$3.50/2.50) follows the legends of the back country from both indigenous and settler perspectives by using oral histories and innovative displays.

The historical and agricultural **Mateship Country Tours** (☎ 6872 2280; tourinfo@ozemail.com.au; adult/child \$25/11; 🕒 tours 2pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am Sat) last 3½ hours.

The impressive three-tiered wharf at the northern end of Sturt St is a faithful reconstruction of the original (built in 1897), and, on the river, the **PV Jandra** (☎ 6872 1321; Kidman's Camp Tourist Park; adult/child \$14/10; 🕒 cruises 9am & 3pm Mon-Sat, 2.30pm Sun) offers one-hour cruises on a replica of an 1895 paddle-wheeler. Contact the **NPWS office** (☎ 6872 2744; 51 Oxley St; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) if you plan to go to the Aboriginal art sites at **Mt Gunderbooka**.

**Bourke's Historic Cemetery** (Kidman Way) is peppered with epitaphs saying 'perished in the bush', and has a deeply moving headstone to Professor Fred Hollows, the eye surgeon who was determined to help restore the sight of people going needlessly blind.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Gidgee Guesthouse** (☎ 6870 1017; gidgee@auzzie.net; 17 Oxley St; dm/s/d \$28/40/58; 📍) The old London Bank building is now a great guesthouse with changing art exhibitions, music gear for use, and pleasant rooms around a peaceful sculpture garden.

**Port O' Bourke Hotel** (☎ 6872 2544; 32 Mitchell St; s/d incl breakfast \$40/55, d with bathroom \$75; 🍷) The pub's been renovated and is a cheerful place, serving breakfast in an elegant old dining room and excellent roasts for lunch and dinner (mains \$15; open for lunch Tuesday to Sunday and dinner Monday to Saturday).

**Bourke Riverside Motel** (☎ 6872 2539; www.bourke-riversidemotel.com; 3 Mitchell St; s \$75, d \$95-125; 🍷 📍) In an enchanting riverside garden, this friendly and historic place has unique rooms with antique furniture and four-poster beds.

**Kidman's Camp Tourist Park** (☎ 6872 1612; Kidman Way; powered sites/cabins from \$23/69; 🍷 📍) This quiet camping ground, just north of town, overlooks the Darling's banks and has glorious deluxe cabins with timber decks.

You can tuck into superlative pies and pizza at **Morrall's Bakery** (☎ 6872 2086; 37 Mitchell St; mains \$7.50-10; 🍷 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) or Oz-style Chinese at the **Bowling Club** (☎ 6872 2190; Richard St; mains \$12-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner).

### Getting There & Away

**Air Link** (☎ 13 17 13; www.airlinkairlines.com.au) has five flights a week to/from Dubbo. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) buses run to Dubbo (\$64, four hours, four days a week). **Bourke Courier Service** (☎ 6872 2092; cnr Oxley & Richard St) sells bus and plane tickets.

A **road condition report** (☎ 6872 2055, 0419-722 055) is posted at service stations. All unsealed roads are closed when wet.

### BACK O' BOURKE – CORNER COUNTRY

Out here, it's a different world; both harsh and peaceful, stretching forever to the endless sky. This far-western corner of NSW is a semidesert of red plains, heat, dust and flies. But it's also pastoral lands, with huge properties running beef cattle and sheep.

West of Bourke, the 413km to Tibooburra via Wanaaring is a challenging, unsealed road; north on the Silver City Hwy it's mostly sealed but monstrous after rain. Along the Queensland border is the dingo-proof fence, patrolled daily by boundary riders.

Tiny **Tibooburra**, the hottest town in the state, boasts two fine sandstone pubs and a small outdoor cinema. The large **NPWS office** (☎ 08-8091 3308; Briscoe St; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is a good source for information on many things local as well as **Sturt National Park**, on the northern edge of town. **Keeping Place** (☎ 08-8091 3435) features indigenous artefacts and art from the Wadigali, Wangkumara and Malyangaba peoples.

**Granites Motel & Caravan Park** (☎ 08-8091 3305; Brown St; sites \$18, cabins \$50-60, motel s/d \$56/70; 🍷 📍) has cheery rooms, pleasant cabins and virtually no shade.

The **Family Hotel** (☎ 08-8091 3314; motel unit s/d \$60/70; 🍷) has practical rooms.

**Dead Horse Gully** (sites \$7) is a basic NPWS camping ground 2km north of town; you'll need to bring drinking water (as you should everywhere).

You can normally reach Tibooburra (driving slowly and carefully) from Bourke or Broken Hill in a conventional vehicle, except after rain (which is pretty rare). The road from Broken Hill is partly sealed.

South of Tibooburra, **Milparinka**, once a gold town, now consists of little more than a solitary hotel and some old sandstone buildings.

### Sturt National Park

Taking in vast stony plains, the towering red-sand hills of the great Strzelecki Desert and the unusual flat-topped mesas around the Olive Downs, this park covers 340,000 hectares of classic outback terrain. Thanks to the protection of the dingo-proof fence, there are large populations of western grey and red kangaroos.

The national park has 300km of drivable tracks, camping areas and walks. The NPWS at Tibooburra has brochures for each. A favourite destination for visitors is **Cameron Corner**. A post marks the spot where Queensland, SA and NSW meet. The Corner is reached by a well-signposted dirt road (allow two hours). In the Queensland corner, vine-covered **Cameron Corner Store** (☎ 08-8091 3872) has fuel, meals, accommodation and good advice on road conditions.

### BARRIER HIGHWAY

The Barrier Hwy is the main sealed route in the state's west, heading from Nyngan 594km through to Broken Hill. It's an alternative route to Adelaide and the most direct route between Sydney and Western Australia.

**Cobar** is a bustling mining town with a productive copper mine. It's littered with interesting buildings, including the splendid **Great Western Hotel** (1898), with its enormous iron-lace veranda.

In the Great Cobar Heritage Centre, the **Cobar Museum** (adult/child/family \$7/5/15; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) has sophisticated displays on the environment, local Aboriginal life and the early Europeans.

The **Town & Country Motor Inn** (☎ 02-6836 1244; 52 Marshall St; s/d from \$79/90; 🍷 📍) has smart and crisply clean rooms behind a treed garden, and you can walk across the courtyard to Giovanni's (mains \$23 to \$28; open for dinner Monday to Saturday) – make sure you try the rack of lamb.

About 32km north of the Barrier Hwy (signposted), **Mt Grenfell Historic Site** protects well-preserved and brilliantly coloured Aboriginal rock art in several caves along a watered gully, an important place for its Aboriginal owners, the Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan people. For information, contact the **NPWS** (☎ 02-6836 2692) or the **Cobar Aboriginal Lands Council** (☎ 02-6836 1144).

There are few stranger places in Australia than the tiny opal-mining town of **White Cliffs**, located about 91km northwest of Wilcannia. Surrounded by some of the harshest country the outback has to offer, many residents have had to move underground to escape the heat. You can inspect some of their homes with **Parkers' Dug-Out Home Tours** (☎ 08-8091 6635; adult/child \$5/free; 🕒 10am-4pm). You can also try fossicking for opals around the old diggings, but watch the kids around those deep, unfenced holes.

Simmering in the sun, **White Cliffs Opal Pioneer Reserve** (☎ 08-8091 6649; powered sites \$9.50) has sites on flat dusty earth, but why not do as the locals do and stay at **White Cliffs Underground Motel** (☎ 08-8091 6677; www.undergroundmotel.com.au; s/d \$79/99; 📍). Custom built with a tunnelling machine, it has wide corridors, a lovely dining room (three-course set-menu dinner \$35), and delightfully comfortable silent rooms. Claustrophobics can stay in the two above-ground rooms.

### Mutawintji National Park

This exceptional 69,000-hectare park lies in the Byngnano Ranges – the eroded and sculptured remains of a 400-million-year-old sea bed. Its stunning gorges and rock pools teem with wildlife, and the mulga plains here stretch to the horizon.

The Malyankapa and Pandjikali people lived in the area for over 8000 years, and there are important rock engravings, stencils, paintings and scattered remains of their day-to-day life. Some rock art has been damaged by vandals but can still be seen on **Mutawintji Heritage Tours** (☎ 08-8088 7000; adult/child/family \$20/10/40; 🕒 tours 11am Wed & Sat) between April and November. There are also graded walks for all levels of fitness, where rock paintings can be seen.

You can camp at **Homestead Creek** (adult/child \$5/3), but you will need to bring your own fuel and food. Check road-closure info on ☎ 08-8082 6660, 13 27 01 or 08-8091 5155.

### BROKEN HILL

☎ 08 / pop 20,440

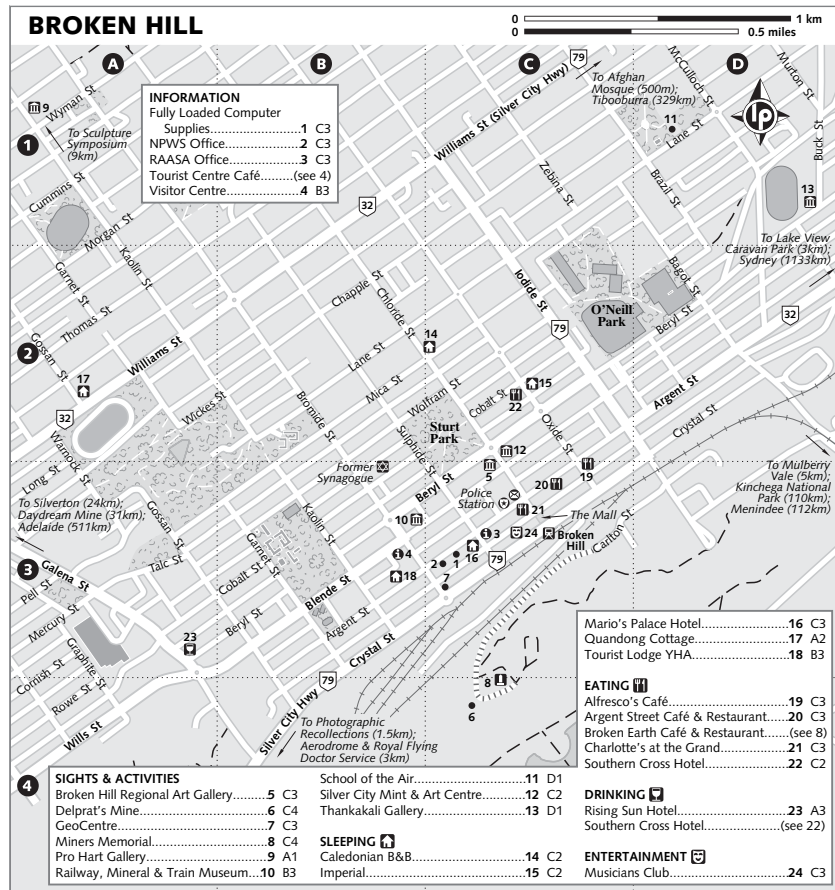
Known as the Silver City, Broken Hill is a fascinating destination for its comfortable, oasislike existence in an extremely unwelcoming environment. Some of the state's best national parks are in the area, plus interesting near-ghost towns. Elements of 'traditional' Australian culture that are disappearing in other cities can still be found in Broken Hill, showing the sensibilities that come with access to a huge, unpopulated landscape. This has also inspired a major arts centre, with poets, writers, artists and sculptors offering a surprisingly different and delightful view of the great outback.

### History

A boundary rider, Charles Rasp, laid the foundations in Broken Hill that took Australia from an agricultural country to an industrial nation. In 1885 he discovered a silver lode and formed the Broken Hill Proprietary Company (now goes by the name BHP Billiton), which ultimately became Australia's largest company and an international giant.

Early conditions in the mine were appalling. Hundreds of miners died and many more suffered from lead poisoning and lung disease. This gave rise to the other great force in Broken Hill, the unions. Many miners were immigrants, but all were united in their





efforts to improve conditions. The Big Strike of 1919–20 lasted for over 18 months, but the miners achieved a 35-hour week and the end of dry drilling.

Today the world's richest deposits of silver, lead and zinc are still being worked here, though zinc is of greatest importance. However, all of the mining operations are slowly being wound down and the gold of tourism is replacing the silver of the ground.

### Orientation & Information

The city is laid out in a grid, with the streets named after metals and their compounds. Argent St is the main street.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 8088 9700; www.visitbrokenhill.com.au; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; ☎ 8.30am–5pm) has the

excellent free booklet *Broken Hill, the Accessible Outback*, which is full of helpful regional information, and there is a handy guide to the art around town.

More useful information:

**Fully Loaded Computer Supplies** (☎ 8088 4255; www.fullyloaded.net.au; 195 Argent St; per 15/30/60min \$3/4/6; ☎ 10am–5pm) Internet access.

**NPWS office** (☎ 8080 3200; 183 Argent St; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) Local national-park inquiries and bookings.

**Royal Automobile Association of South Australia** (RAASA; ☎ 8088 4999; 261 Argent St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 11.30am Sat) Reciprocal service to other auto-club members.

**Tourist Centre Café** (☎ 8088 9700; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; per 10min \$1; ☎ 8.30am–5pm) Internet access.

### Sights MINING

There's an excellent underground tour at **Delprat's Mine** (☎ 8088 1604; adult/child over 5yr \$40/30; ☎ tours 10.30am Mon–Fri, 2pm Sat), where you don miners' gear and descend 130m in a cage for a two-hour tour. Delprat's is signposted across the railway tracks.

The first mines were walk-in, pick-and-shovel horrors. For an amazing experience, tour the historic **Daydream Mine** (☎ 8088 5682; adult/child \$15/8; ☎ 10am–3.30pm), where you squeeze down the steps with your helmet-light quivering on your head. Sturdy footwear is essential. It's a scenic drive off the Silverton road.

The huge silver skimp dump, which makes up Broken Hill's stark backdrop, also features the moving **Miners Memorial** (☎ 8087 1318; Federation Hill; admission \$4; ☎ 9am–6pm, later in summer). It houses the impressively stark Cor-Ten steel memorial to all the miners who have died since Broken Hill first became a mining town. Inside the monument, a sobering series of plaques for each year itemise an appalling litany of gruesome deaths. The visitor centre makes an excellent sunrise or sunset vantage point over Broken Hill, and the Broken Earth Café & Restaurant (p260) is attached.

### GALLERIES

With its dramatic scenery and empty spaces, Broken Hill is an inspiring place, and, unsurprisingly, is home to an abundance of galleries, including the **Pro Hart Gallery** (☎ 8088 2992; 108 Wyman St; adult \$4; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat). Pro Hart, who died early in 2006, was a former miner and is Broken Hill's best-known artist. Aside from housing his excellent work, the gallery holds a superb collection of Australian art (such as Whiteley's *Nude*, Lindsay's *Selena* and Tucker's *Australian Girl in Paris*) and several works by international artists such as Picasso and Dalí.

The must-see **Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery** (☎ 8088 6897; cnr Blende & Chloride Sts; entry by donation; ☎ 10am–5pm) is the oldest regional gallery in NSW and holds 1500 works in its permanent collection.

**Thankakali Gallery** (☎ 8087 6111; cnr Buck & Beryl Sts; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri) is the Aboriginal cultural centre, located in an old brewery. It has an extensive gallery and a range of hand-painted arts, crafts and didgeridoos by local artists.

On Argent St make sure you have a look at the murals in **Mario's Palace Hotel** (p260).

The **Sculpture Symposium** was an international project by 12 sculptors, who carved sandstone blocks on a hill top 9km from town. The colours of the stone change constantly with the light, so consider visiting either at dawn or sunset. The visitor centre has gate keys and directions to drive to the top (per car \$6), where there's also wheelchair access to the sculptures. Or it's a 20-minute climb to the sculpture site from the lower car park.

### ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE BASE

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (☎ 8080 1714; www.flyingdoctors.org; airport; adult/child \$5.50/2.20; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun) exhibition includes the fascinating Mantle of Safety Museum, with lots of quirky stories and things to see. The tour includes a DVD about the service, and you inspect the headquarters, aircraft and the radio room that handles calls from remote towns and stations. Tours run during the week, or visit the museum at any time.

### SCHOOL OF THE AIR

For a back-to-school experience, sit in on **School of the Air** (Lane St; admission \$4.40; ☎ broadcasts 8.30am Mon–Fri), which broadcasts to kids in isolated homesteads. You must book through the visitor centre the day before. During school holidays a tape will be played for you.

### OTHER SIGHTS

The wonderful **Photographic Recollections** (☎ 8087 9322; Old Central Power Station, Eyre St; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 1–4.30pm Sat & Sun) exhibition is a pictorial history of Broken Hill.

There is more local history at the **Railway, Mineral & Train Museum** (☎ 8088 4660; cnr Blende & Bromide Sts; adult/child \$2.50/\$2; ☎ 10am–3pm), in the Silverton Tramway Company's old station. The tramway was a private railway running between Cockburn (SA) and Broken Hill via Silverton until 1970.

**GeoCentre** (☎ 8087 6538; cnr Bromide & Crystal Sts; adult/child \$4/2.50; ☎ 10am–4.45pm Mon–Fri, 1–4.45pm Sat & Sun) is an interactive geology museum, with beautiful and rare minerals and crystals and lots of touch-and-feel exhibits. It's also home to a 42kg silver nugget.

**Silver City Mint & Art Centre** (☎ 8088 6166; 66 Chloride St; admission \$5; ☎ 10am–4pm) is home to the Big Picture, the largest continuous canvas in

Australia, an amazing 100m-by-12m diorama of the Broken Hill outback.

The **Afghan Mosque** (nr Williams & Buck Sts; admission \$2.50; ☎ 2-4pm Sun) is a simple corrugated-iron building erected around 1891. Afghan camelers helped open up the outback and the mosque was built on the site of a camel camp.

## Tours

Two-hour guided walks (for a donation) of Broken Hill commence from the tourist centre at 10am Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Plenty of companies offer tours of the town and nearby attractions, some going further out to White Cliffs, Mutawintji National Park and other outback destinations. The visitor centre has information and takes bookings.

**Bush Mail Run** (☎ 0411-102 339; adult \$88; ☎ 7am Wed & Sat) Outback mail-delivery service that covers over 550km, stopping at isolated homesteads for the occasional cuppa.

**Broken Hill's Outback Tours** (☎ 1800 670 120; www.outbacktours.net) De luxe 4WD tours of the area for up to nine days.

**Tri State Safaris** (☎ 8088 2389; www.tristate.com.au) Award-winning, half- to 20-day tours to places like Corner Country, Birdsville and the Simpson Desert.

## Sleeping

**Tourist Lodge YHA** (☎ 8088 2086; 100 Argent St; s/tw/d \$30/44/50; ☎ ☎ ☎) This popular and central YHA has a laid-back atmosphere and is set around a charming courtyard with a small pool. Tours can be arranged and bike rental is \$15 a day.

**Caledonian B&B** (☎ 8087 1945; www.caledonianbnb.com.au; 140 Chloride St; s/d \$55/69; ☎ ☎) This cosy B&B is in a beautifully refurbished pub (1898). Your charming hosts cook up gourmet breakfasts (\$5), served at an antique dining table.

**Mario's Palace Hotel** (☎ 8088 1699; nr Argent & Sulphide Sts; s/d/tr/q \$55/75/85/95; ☎ ☎) Star of the hit Australian movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, this is an impressive old pub (1888) with large TV screens, a great veranda and a coating of extravagant murals. Stay in the Priscilla Room for \$110, or there are \$22 rooms with shared facilities.

**Mulberry Vale** (☎ 8088 1597; Menindee Rd; cabin d \$77; ☎ ☎) About 5km out of Broken Hill, this small oasis has comfortable accommodation and a beautifully peaceful environment. It costs less the longer you stay.

**Quandong Cottage** (☎ 8087 1653; Lduffy@westnet.com.au; 78 Williams St; 4/6 people \$100/130; ☎ ☎) This gorgeous stone cottage (others are available) has thick walls for total peace and is set in a large native garden with a playground. Minimum two-night stay.

**Imperial** (☎ 8087 7444; imperial@pcpro.net.au; 88 Oxide St; d \$180; ☎ ☎) These rooms retain the feel of the grand old hotel the Imperial once was. There is a full-size billiard table in the guest lounge, and a help-yourself breakfast is provided.

**Lake View Caravan Park** (☎ /fax 8088 2250; 1 Mann St; sites \$19, cabins \$58, 2r from \$90; ☎ ☎) Looking down on Imperial Lake, you're high enough for cooling breezes, and the park is peppered with grass and trees.

## Eating

**Charlotte's at the Grand** (☎ 8087 2230; 317 Argent St; meals \$6-13; ☎ ☎ ☎) breakfast & lunch) A cosy place for lunch, with lots of tasty vegetarian and gluten-free options, sandwiches and smoothies.

**Southern Cross Hotel** (☎ 8088 4122; 357 Cobalt St; meals \$11-22; ☎ ☎ ☎) lunch & dinner) This spot has a good menu; the standout is the fresh fish, although the chicken with camembert and mango is also delicious. It's pleasant and friendly.

**Argent Street Café & Restaurant** (☎ 8087 2637; 343 Argent St; mains \$15-25; ☎ ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm & 6pm-midnight Tue-Sat) Bright and shiny new, with Badger Bates' protégés' artworks on display, this café has good Aussie tucker (like lamb shanks Italian style!), and a great range of dairy-, lactose-, gluten- and meat-free meals. Great all-day breakfast, BYO and dine-and-wine. And coffee to walk a mile for.

**Alfresco's Café** (☎ 8087 5599; nr Argent & Oxide Sts; mains \$17-24) Always busy, serving plates of pancakes, roasts, salads and pasta dishes, but it's best known for its gourmet pizzas.

**Broken Earth Café & Restaurant** (☎ 8087 1318; Line of Lode visitor centre; mains \$26-34; ☎ ☎ 8.30am-10pm) With its stunning views over Broken Hill, airy modern design and something-for-everyone menu, this gets a big thumbs up. There's all-day coffee and cakes, fab Sunday breakfast, and excellent grilled kangaroo on sweet-potato rosti for lunch.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Broken Hill stays up late and people feel safe here, so you'll find pubs doing a roaring trade until almost dawn on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

## PHONES, TIMES & FOOTBALL

When the NSW government refused to give Broken Hill the services it needed, saying the town was just a pinprick on the map, the Barrier Industrial Council replied that Sydney was also a pinprick from where it was and Broken Hill would henceforth be part of SA. Since the town was responsible for much of NSW's wealth there was an outcry, the federal government stepped in, and Broken Hill was told it was to remain part of NSW. In protest, the town adopted SA time, telephone area code and football, playing Australian Rules from then on.

Tourists beware: time in Broken Hill is Central Standard Time (CST), 30 minutes later than the surrounding area on Eastern Standard Time (EST); you're in the 08 phone-code region; and don't talk about soccer in the pub.

**Rising Sun Hotel** (☎ 8087 4856; 2 Beryl St) Has free games of pool and gets very lively on Friday night.

**Southern Cross Hotel** (☎ 8088 4122; 357 Cobalt St) Here you'll find a mellow atmosphere with '70s- and '80s-style music and an extensive cocktail list.

**Musicians Club** (267 Crystal St) A jolly place with a heaving mix of young and old. Country-music bands play at weekends while the drinks flow. Two-up (gambling on the fall of two coins) is played on Friday and Saturday night from 10pm to 2am.

## Getting There & Away

**Rex** (☎ 13 17 13) flies to/from Adelaide daily, and to/from Sydney via Dubbo (daily except Saturday).

Buses arrive at the visitor centre. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) runs the Broken Hill Outback Explorer to Sydney (\$106, 13½ hours, weekly). Dubbo XPT connects with a bus to Broken Hill (\$78, 16½ hours, daily). The **CountryLink booking office** (☎ 8087 1400; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is at the train station.

The **Indian Pacific** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au) goes through Broken Hill on Tuesday and Friday (departing at 6.30pm CST) bound for Sydney (\$200, 16 hours), and on Thursday and Sunday (8.20am CST) heading for Adelaide (\$87, seven hours) and on to Perth (\$425, 49 hours).

A free bus services some of the clubs from 6pm to midnight. **Murton's Citybus** (☎ 8087 3311) operates four routes around Broken Hill, or you can call a **taxi** (☎ 8087 2222).

## AROUND BROKEN HILL Silverton

☎ 08 / pop 50

It's absolutely obligatory to visit Silverton, an old silver-mining town, where you walk inside

a Drysdale painting and discover the charm of the outback. Silverton's fortunes peaked in 1885, when it had a population of 3000, but in 1889 the mines closed and the people (and some houses) moved to the new boom town at Broken Hill.

Today it's a ghost town with a new lease of life due to the spirits at the pub (beer too) and a small community of artists, several of whom have studios here. The **visitor centre** (☎ 8088 7566; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is in the original ice-cream shop, where you can pick up a walking-tour map.

Silverton is the setting of films such as *Mad Max II* and *A Town Like Alice*. The **Silverton Hotel** (☎ 8088 5313; ☎ 9am-9pm) displays photographs taken on the film sets; ask at the bar about the infamous 'Silverton test'.

**Barrier Range Camel Safaris** (☎ 8088 5316; www.silvertoncamels.com; tours from \$15, 2hr sunset trek \$50) runs a variety of camel tours from Silverton on friendly and quiet camels, including an unforgettable day/night safari (\$170).

Lush and well-treed **Penrose Park** (☎ 8088 5307; sites s/f \$7/15, bunkhouses/self-contained cottages \$40/65) was established as a picnic and camping ground for miners' families. The buildings sleep six to eight.

The **Friendly Café** (☎ 8088 6601; mains \$16; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun) has a menu with staples such as Stockman's Balls and damper. Not game? Then try the roast.

The road beyond Silverton becomes bleak and lonely almost immediately. The **Mundi Mundi Lookout**, 5km north of town, overlooks the vast expanse of the **Mundi Mundi Plain**. Further along, **Umberumberka Reservoir**, 13km north of Silverton, is a popular picnic spot.

## Menindee Lakes

Menindee Lakes are a series of nine natural, ephemeral lakes adjacent to the Darling River that have been dammed to ensure year-round



water. There's a helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 8091 4274; Menindee St; 🕒 10am-4pm) in Menindee, and Geoff Looney runs fishing and bird-watching **tours** (☎ 08-8091 4437; 2 people per hr \$50) on the lakes.

**Copi Hollow Caravan Park** (☎ 08-8091 4880; Menindee-Broken Hill Rd; camp sites/cabins \$18.50/40) is set around a lovely tree-lined swimming hole at the far end of the lakes and has great fishing, skiing and bushwalking.

**Kincheha National Park** is close to Menindee, and the lakes here are a haven for bird life. The visitor centre is at the site of the old Kincheha woolshed, about 16km from the park entrance. There are three well-marked driving trails through the park, and accommodation is available at the **shearers' quarters** (adult/child \$16.50/8.25), which you must book at the Broken Hill NPWS office (see p258). There are also plenty of camp sites (adult/child \$3/2). There's a daily-use fee of \$7 per vehicle.

If you're driving, call **roads info** (☎ 08-8087 0660, 08-8091 5155).

## MUNGO NATIONAL PARK

This remote, beautiful and most important place, full of great significance for the human species, covers 27,850 hectares of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area. The echoes of over 400 centuries of continuous human habitation are almost tangible in **Lake Mungo**, a dry lake that is the site of the oldest archaeological finds in Australia: human skeletons and artefacts dating back 46,000 years or possibly more. A 25km semicircle ('lunette') of huge sand dunes has been created by the

unceasing westerly wind, which continually exposes fabulously ancient remains. These shimmering white dunes are known as the **Walls of China** and their story traces that of humans in Australia.

Mungo is 110km from Mildura and 150km from Balranald on good, unsealed roads that become instantly impassable after rain. These towns are the closest places selling fuel.

Award-winning **Harry Nanya Tours** (☎ 1800 630 864, 03-5027 2076; www.harrynanyatours.com.au) runs daily tours to Mungo National Park from Mildura and Wentworth, and employs Aboriginal guides who give cultural information.

The **NPWS office** (☎ 03-5021 8900; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), on the corner of the Sturt Hwy at Buronga, near Mildura, has park information. There's a visitor centre (not always staffed) in the park, by the old Mungo woolshed. Pay your day-use fee of \$7 per vehicle here.

From here a road leads across the dry lake bed to the Walls of China, and you can drive a complete 70km loop of the dunes when it's dry. There's a self-guided drive brochure at the visitor centre.

Accommodation fills up during school holidays.

**Mungo Lodge** (☎ 03-5029 7297; mungoldg@ruralnet.net.au; cabins/d \$88/118), on the Mildura road, about 4km from the visitor centre, is a comfortable, quiet spot with a restaurant (book ahead).

In the park, Main Camp is 2km from the visitor centre, and Belah Camp is on the eastern side of the dunes. Book both (sites adult/child \$3/2) through the NPWS office in Buronga (see above).