

Victoria



It may be pint-sized compared to the colossal kilometres of some states, but Victoria packs just as much variety, wilderness, remoteness, guts and urban mayhem as its beefier neighbours. Melbourne, Australia's second largest city, occupies a southern bay, and is a hybrid of global influence. The art, music, theatre, cinema and cuisine in this city of culture junkies is accessible to every budget, and though fuelled by the best baristas in the country, the Melburnian pace is set to an affable amble.

Scalloping its way around coves, beaches and cliffs, the Great Ocean Rd is great indeed. Wild surf pounds the shoreline and enigmatic coastal towns mingle with lush national parks. Around Melbourne the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula are latticed with grapevines.

In the High Country, brilliant autumn colours segue into snowfields and back again to sleepy summer towns, haunted by pale ghost gums. Skis get a work-out in winter, and cycling, horseback riding and cheeky weekends are the mainstays of the summer bliss. Dry plains in the Western District are home to farmland and breathtaking bushwalking in the Grampians National Park. The most-southern mainland tip is in the spiritually reviving Wilsons Promontory National Park. The exquisite empty of the outback creeps into the deserts of the northwest and the mighty Murray cuts a verdant swathe high above.

Such geographic extremes nurture a bipolar climate, which oscillates from windy gales to sunny skies, all between leaving the house and catching a tram! This too has become part of Victoria's charm; the locals here are up for anything, anytime.

HIGHLIGHTS

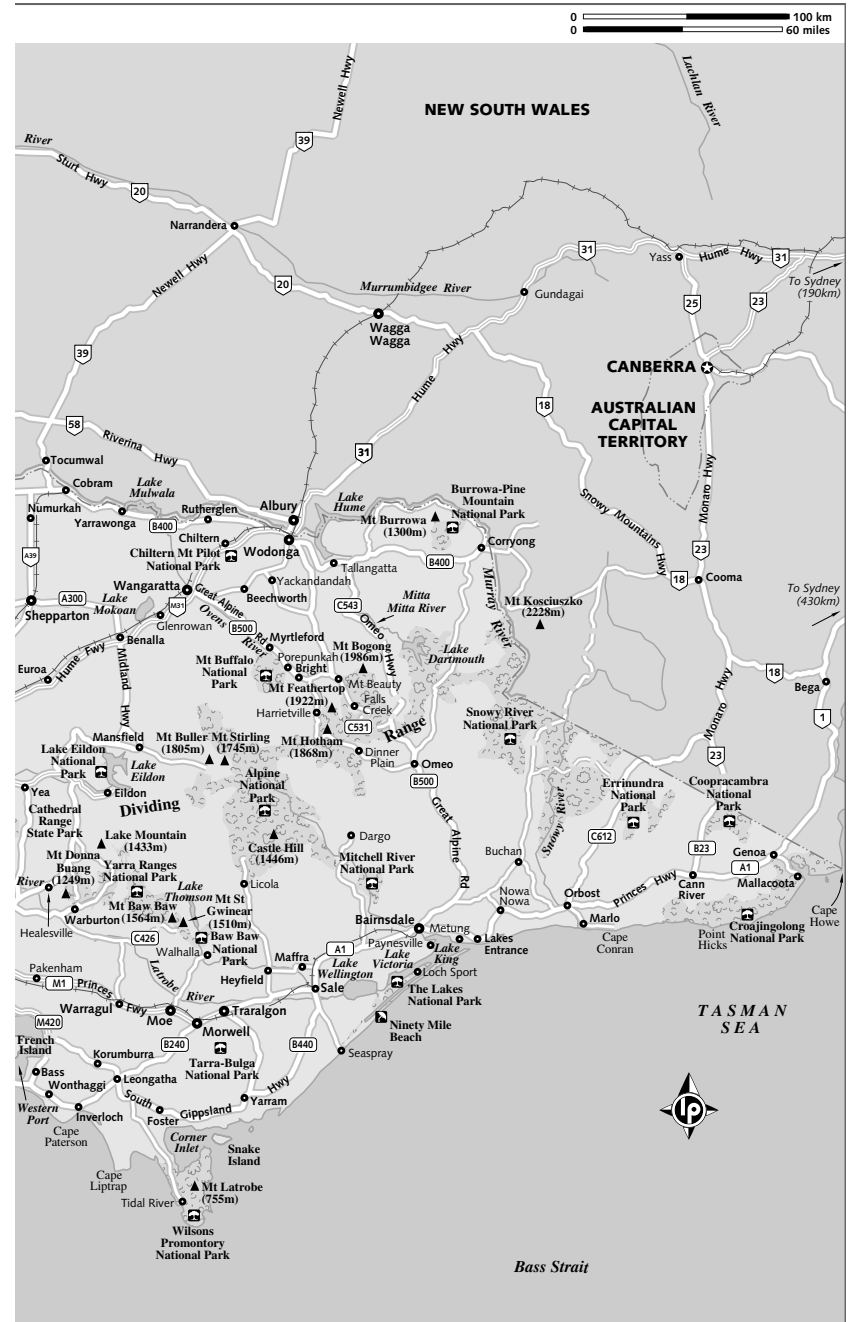
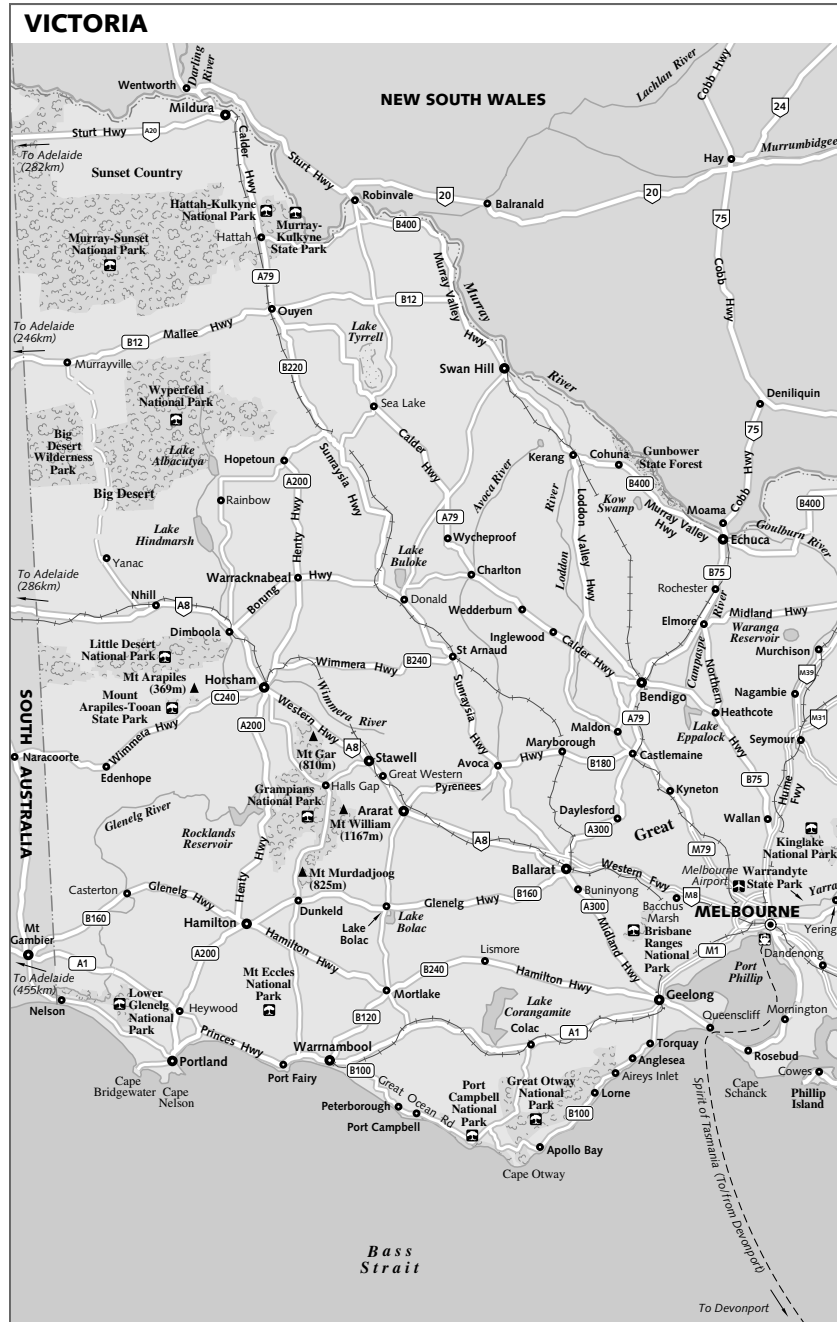
- Navigate the glorious twists and turns of the **Great Ocean Road** (p528)
- Experience Aboriginal culture and breath-taking hikes in the **Grampians** (p545)
- Gorge on multicultural **eats** (p500) and enigmatic **bars** (p504) in Melbourne
- Meander the Murray on a paddle steamer in **Mildura** (p553)
- Tackle the ski slopes of **Mt Buller** (p579) and **Falls Creek** (p585)
- Sup on crisp Chardonnay in the **Yarra Valley** (p523)
- Roar till it hurts for the footy or cricket at the **MCG** (p487)
- Hire a boat, drop anchor, and skinny dip in the delicious waters of **Mallacoota** (p603)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ POPULATION: 5,038,000

■ AREA: 237,629 SQ KM



HISTORY

European history has left tangible remains in many of Victoria's cities and towns. In 1803 a party of convicts, soldiers and settlers arrived at Sorrento (on Port Phillip Bay), but the settlement was soon abandoned. The first permanent European settlement in Victoria was established in 1834 at Portland (in the Western District) by the Henty family from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), some 46 years after Sydney was colonised. In 1851 Victoria won separation from New South Wales (NSW), and in that same year, the rich Victorian goldfields were discovered, attracting immigrants from around the world. Towns like Beechworth and Ballarat boomed during the gold rush, and are veritable museum pieces today. Melbourne was founded in 1835 by other enterprising Tasmanians and it retains much Victorian-era charm and gold-boom 1880s architecture to this day.

The latter-half of the 20th century saw a huge influx of immigrants into Victoria, particularly Melbourne, and the city is now widely regarded as Australia's most multicultural city. It has one of the largest Greek populations per capita in the world and is heavily influenced by Italian, Eastern European and Southeast Asian cultures.

The 1990s saw a period of ferocious development begin – a process that continues today, and the face of the CBD (central business district) has changed and spread markedly with the boom of the Docklands, and new architectural landmarks, such as Federation Sq.

GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Victoria has a temperate four-seasons climate, although the distinctions between the seasons are often blurred by the unpredictability of the weather. There are three climatic regions: the southern and coastal areas, the alpine areas, and the areas north and west of the Great Dividing Range. Winter is from June to August; summer December to February.

Daily summer temperatures in coastal areas average 25°C, in alpine areas 20°C, and in the northwest 35°C. Daily winter temperatures average 14°C along the coast, a chillier 10°C in alpine areas, and 17°C in the northwest.

Rainfall is spread fairly evenly throughout the year, although mid-January to mid-March tends to be the driest period. Victoria's wettest areas are the Otway Ranges and the High Country. Because of exposure to frequent cold

fronts and southerly winds, the coastal areas are subject to the most changeable weather patterns.

The weather is generally more stable north of the Great Dividing Range. The Wimmera and Mallee regions have the lowest rainfall and the highest temperatures.

It snows during the alpine high country winter; the closest snow to Melbourne is on Mt Donna Buang (p521).

INFORMATION

Information Victoria (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 366 356; 356 Collins St, Melbourne) A government-run bookshop stocking a wide variety of publications about Melbourne and Victoria.

Melbourne Visitor Information Centre (Map pp478-9; ☎ 03-9658 9658; www.visitmelbourne.com; Federation Sq, Melbourne; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) Manages Victoria's national parks.

Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV; Map pp478-9; ☎ 13 11 11, TTY 03-9790 3186; www.racv.com.au; 438 Little Collins St, Melbourne) Produces the excellent *Experience Victoria* guide, full of accommodation and touring information.

Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria (Map pp478-9; ☎ 03-9654 2600; Level 2, 169 Swanston St, Melbourne) Free assistance for stranded travellers, information, advice, showers and wheelchair-accessible toilets.

NATIONAL PARKS

Victoria may be petite (by Australian standards anyway), but it has 39 national parks, 30 state parks, three wilderness parks, and dozens of marine and metropolitan parks. The whole lot amounts to approximately 4.1 million hectares, 17% of the state's total area, and the diversity of weather and terrain is vast. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), which has a useful 24-hour information line, manages Victoria's national parks.

The Grampians National Park (Gariwerd; p545) is accessible year-round and is popular for walking, rock climbing, and camping. Its staggering beauty and abundant wildlife also lends itself to long, slow drives and sight-seeing. The Grampians are also excellent for an insight into Koorie heritage and culture, with the impressive Brambuk Cultural Centre, Gariwerd Dreaming Theatre and numerous rock-art sites.

The Alpine National Park (p576) is the state's largest at 646,000 hectares. In winter its frostbitten peaks lure downhill and cross-

VICTORIA FACTS

Eat Vietnamese, Thai, African, Lebanese, Greek, Italian...for a tenner

Drink Holgate Mt Macedon Ale (see p506)

Read *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner, *True History of the Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey, or *Cafe Scheherazade* by Arnold Zable

Listen to The Cat Empire, Nick Cave, Something for Kate, Paul Kelly's classic ballad 'From St Kilda to Kings Cross' or his CD *Songs from the South*

Watch *Kenny, The Castle, Death in Brunswick, The Hard Word, Ghost Rider*

Avoid Hook-turns, tram inspectors, jay-walking tickets

Locals' nickname Mexicans

Swim at Bells Beach (p529) for the best surf breaks

Strangest festival Harrietteville's Lawnmowing Grand Prix (p586)

Tackiest tourist attraction Crown Casino (p486)

country skiers, and in summer the wildflowers and heavy forests produce great walking and mountain biking.

Another top-biller is Wilsons Promontory National Park (p594) on Australia's southern-most point. Dominated by rugged mountains, prolific wildlife and isolated coastline, it offers superb walking, remote camping, swimming, surfing and ample wombat-spotting.

Mt Arapiles (p550), in the Western District near Horsham, is world famous for its huge variety of rock climbing.

Head to the Lakes National Park (p597), popular for boating, fishing and walking. It also encompasses breeding colonies for many bird species and there are bird hides to enjoy the view.

If you're looking for extreme isolation head to the Snowy River National Park (p600) for rugged bushwalking and canoeing. In the same region and similarly remote is Errinundra National Park (p602), which contains Victoria's largest cool-temperate rainforest and is known for fantastic 4WDing, mountain biking and remote camping.

Croajingolong National Park (p604) is one Australia's finest, with a huge stretch of wilderness coast, rivers, inlets, and abundant flora and fauna. The fishing, swimming and canoeing are excellent.

More information about these and other parks can be found under individual sections.

ACTIVITIES

Boating & Sailing

Scenic cruises and boating options are a speciality of the Murray, and you can get out and about on the river at Mildura (p553), Swan Hill (p556) and Echuca (p558).

In the High Country you can rent boats in Eildon (p577) to explore Lake Eildon National Park, and there are fishing trips and cruises in at Lakes Entrance (p599); Mallacoota Inlet is also popular with boat-folk (p603).

There is a whole flotilla of yacht clubs based around Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay, and plenty of schools where you can learn to sail (p490).

Bushwalking

For national park news and updates, and detailed descriptions of national park trails, see the website of **Parks Victoria** (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au). For bushwalking clubs, contact the **Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs** (☎ 03-9455 1876; www.vicwalk.org.au).

The High Country (p576), with its spectacular alpine scenery and spring wildflowers, has a wide range of walks for different fitness and skill levels. Serious trekkers should head to Harrietteville (p586) and Mt Hotham (p586).

If coastal treks are more your pace, head south to Wilsons Promontory National Park (p594), with marked trails that can take anywhere from a few hours to a couple of days. The landscape encompasses swamps, forests, squeaky white-sand beaches, pristine bushland teeming with wildlife, ferned-valleys and coastal vistas. Some of the finest walks include the 45km Great Prom Walk, and the 7km Mt Oberon Summit (see p596 for more information on these and other walks).

Other popular areas to flex your calf muscles are the Otway Ranges (p531) and the Grampians National Park (p545), with more than 150km of well-marked walking tracks past waterfalls and sacred Aboriginal rock-art sites.

Middle-distance walks in Victoria include the 22km Mahogany Walking Trail (p538), which begins near Warrnambool; the 19km O'Keefe Rail Trail, which begins in Bendigo (p574); and the 18km Mitchell River Walking Track in Mitchell River National Park (p598). If you really want to work the pins, set out on the Great South West Walk (p543), a 250km loop that starts near Portland, or the Australian Alps Walking Track, a 655km walk that traverses the Alpine National Park and starts near Walhalla (p596).

Cycling

Victoria is a great state for on- and off-road cycling and mountain biking. There is a whole network of routes that follow disused railway lines, including the Mountains Rail Trail (p590) connecting Wangaratta with Beechworth and Bright, and the 30km East Gippsland Rail Trail (p598). **Railtrails Australia** (☎ 03-9306 4846; www.railtrails.org.au) describes these and other routes.

If you're up for a bigger challenge try the spectacular, 250km Wilderness Bike Ride (p602) in Errinundra National Park.

Lonely Planet's *Cycling Australia* guide covers five multiday rides in Victoria, the Great Ocean Rd and the High Country. For more information on bicycle hire in Melbourne, see p490.

A few more sources of information for pedal-pushers:

Bicycle Victoria (☎ 03-8636 8888; www.bv.com.au)

Bike Paths Safe Escapes (www.bikepaths.com.au) A comprehensive guide to the state's best cycling tracks.

Melbourne Bicycle Touring Club (☎ 03-9517 4306; www.mbtc.org.au)

Skiing & Snowboarding

Skiing in Victoria has come a long way from its modest beginnings in the 1860s when Norwegian gold miners started sliding around Harrierville in their spare time. Today it's a multimillion-dollar industry with three major and six minor ski resorts. The season officially commences the first weekend of June; skiable snow usually arrives later in the month, and often stays until the end of September. For more information see www.visitvictoria.com/ski, and consult the **Victorian Ski Report** (www.vicsnowreport.com.au).

The snowfields are northeast and east of Melbourne, scattered around the High Country. The two largest ski resorts are Mt Buller (p579) and Falls Creek (p585). Mt Hotham (p586) is smaller, but has equally good skiing,

while Mt Baw Baw (p589) and Mt Buffalo (p582) are smaller resorts, popular with families and less-experienced skiers.

For more information see the Ski Resorts boxed text, p587.

Surfing

With its exposure to the Southern Ocean swell, Victoria's coastline provides quality surf.

Local and international surfers gravitate to Torquay, while the nearby Bells Beach (p529) plays host to the Rip Curl Pro Tour festival every Easter.

The Shipwreck Coast (p542), west from Cape Otway as far as Peterborough, offers possibly the most powerful waves in Victoria. It faces southwest and is open to the sweeping swells of the Southern Ocean. The swell is consistently up to a metre higher than elsewhere, making it the place to go if you're after big waves.

There's also good surfing at Wilsons Promontory National Park (p594) and on Ninety Mile Beach (p597) for the less experienced; popular places with surf schools include Anglesea (p530), Lorne (p531) and Phillip Island (p526).

Useful resources:

Surfing Australia (www.surfingaustralia.com)

Peninsula Surf (www.surfshop.com.au)

Telephone surf reports (☎ 1900 931 996, Mornington Peninsula 1900 983 268) Updated daily.

TOURS

Eco-Certified Tours

The following companies are all eco-certified (www.ecotourism.org.au) and offer recommended tours.

Eco Adventure Tours (☎ 03-5962 5115; www.ecoadventuretours.com.au) Offers fascinating guided night walks in the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges. Ideal for animal lovers.

Go West (☎ 1300 736 551, 03-8508 9008; www.gowest.com.au) Great Ocean Rd and Phillip Island Penguin Parade tours.

GOGO Tours (☎ 03-8967 4851) Day tours to the Grampians, Great Ocean Rd and Wilsons Promontory.

Groovy Grape (☎ 1800 661 177; www.groovygrape.com.au) Three-day backpacker trips (\$325) between Adelaide and Melbourne, taking in the Great Ocean Rd and the Grampians.

Other Tours

More recommended tours offering day trips to popular destinations, including the Grampians, the Great Ocean Rd and the Phillip

ABORIGINAL VICTORIA

Aboriginal people have lived in Victoria for an estimated 40,000 years. They lived in some 38 different dialect groups that spoke 10 separate languages. These groups were further divided into clans and subclans, each with its own customs and laws, and each claiming ownership of a distinct area of land. Before British colonisation, the Yarra Valley region was occupied by members of the Woiworong clan of the Kulin Nation, known as the Wurundjeri.

As many as 100,000 Aboriginal people lived in Victoria before Europeans arrived; by 1860 there were as few as 2000 left alive. Today around 27,000 Koories (Aborigines from southeastern Australia) live in Victoria, and more than half live in Melbourne.

Many cultures have been lost, but there has been a strong movement to revive Aboriginal culture in Victoria and there are cultural centres around the state, including the excellent **Brambuk Cultural Centre** and **Gariwerd Dreaming Theatre**, both in Halls Gap (p547) in the Grampians National Park. Run by local Koorie communities, these centres provide insights into Koorie history, culture, art, music and dance, and provide tours to local rock-art sites. The smaller **Dharnya Centre** in the Barmah State Park (p559) is run by the Yorta Yorta people and portrays their heritage in the area.

In Sale the **Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation** (p597) can direct you to the **Bataluk Cultural Trail**, a walking trail following Kurnai trading routes between Sale and the Cann River.

Based in Mildura, **Harry Nanya** (p553) provides acclaimed tours into Lake Mungo National Park with excellent commentary about the traditional occupants of the land.

In Melbourne, the **Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria Australia** (p483) has a renowned collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, and the **Aboriginal Heritage Walk** (p493) takes you through the story of the Boonwurrung and Woiworong peoples, on whose ancestral grounds the Royal Botanic Gardens now sit.

Melbourne itself is divided into the Kulin Nation (Wurundjeri) and the Boonwurrung peoples, and both groups are represented by female elders – Aunty Joy Murphy and Aunty Carolyn Briggs.

For more information about the history of the Victorian indigenous people, visit the **Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre** (p485) or the interesting and comprehensive Bunjilaka indigenous centre at **Melbourne Museum** (p488).

A 'Welcome to Country' ceremony, which can vary from a speech to a traditional dance or a smoking ceremony, by an Aboriginal community is now common protocol across the state and performed at a diverse range of functions. An 'Acknowledgement Ceremony' is common at forums, whereby the first speaker pays recognition and respect to the traditional owners of the land. Similarly, a gum-leaf ceremony is common at dinners and events.

The website of **Visit Victoria** (www.visitvictoria.com) has an excellent link to Aboriginal culture, heritage, history and sites in Victoria. Another good resource is the **Aboriginal Tourism Marketing Association** (www.seeaboriginaltourism.com).

Aboriginal Melbourne – The Lost Land of the Kulin People, by Gary Presland (re-released 2001), also gives valuable insight into the culture and life of the region's original inhabitants.

Island Penguin Parade (from around \$90 per person):

Autopia Tours (☎ 1800 000 507, 03-9419 8878; www.autopiatours.com.au) Day tours to popular destinations around Melbourne.

Echidna Walkabout (☎ 03-9646 8249; www.echidnawalkabout.com.au) Small-group nature tours run by devoted conservationists and wildlife lovers.

Ecotrek: Bogong Jack Adventures (☎ 08-8346 4155; www.ecotrek.com.au) Wide range of cycling, canoeing and walking tours through the Grampians, and the Murray River and High Country regions.

Wild-Life Tours (☎ 1300 661 730; www.wildlifetours.com.au) Day tours to the Great Ocean Rd, Grampians and Phillip Island Penguin Parade.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Unless you're driving, Melbourne is usually the main entry and exit point for Victoria. Bus and train services within country Victoria are operated by **VLine** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au); fares and routes are quoted throughout this chapter. Major bus companies operating throughout Victoria include **Greyhound**

(☎ 13 1499; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Firefly** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au). **Viclink** (☎ 13 61 38; www.viclink.com.au) operates a thrice-weekly service connecting towns along the Great Ocean Rd up to the Grampians.

Note that there are border restrictions preventing fruit being carried into or out of Victoria in an effort to stop the spread of fruit fly (see the boxed text, p1034, for more information).

See the Transport chapter (p1020) and Melbourne's Getting There & Away (p512) and Getting Around (p513) sections for more comprehensive details about boats, buses, trains and flights in and out of the state.

MELBOURNE

☎ 03 / pop 3.7 million

Sophisticated and slick, edgy and rough, Melbourne's physical and cultural landscape is shaped by a dynamic population, ever-ravenous for a bite of global culture. The result is Australia's most accessible multiculturalism. Ornate Victorian-era architecture and leafy, established boulevards reflect the city's history, and cutting-edge developments such as Federation Sq exemplify its enigmatic contemporary style. But, Melburnians still keep their urban frenzy to a deliciously sedate pace. Trams lumber back and forth on routes radiating out like spokes from central Melbourne, and cycling is a common way to get from A to Z.

Character-filled neighbourhoods, such as Fitzroy, St Kilda and Carlton, hum with life and the city produces some of the best art, music, cuisine, fashion, performance, design and ideas in the world. Melburnians are also devoted to their sport and they go ballistic around the Australian Football League (AFL; 'footy' to the locals) finals (p494) and during Spring Racing Carnival (p494). They love to shop, eat and attend the myriad festivals that the city offers. You'll even find them defending the city's temperamental weather, and if you've ever experienced Melbourne's inclination to plummet from searing heat to drizzling rain in the space of an hour, you'll understand that this must be the true definition of unconditional love.

HISTORY

In May 1835 John Batman 'bought' around 240,000 hectares of land from the Aborigines of the Kulin Nation, the traditional owners.

The concept of buying or selling land was foreign to the Aboriginal culture and in an extremely one-sided exchange they received some tools, flour and clothing as 'payment'.

By 1840 there were more than 10,000 Europeans living in the area around present-day Melbourne. The wealth from the goldfields built this city, known as 'Marvellous Melbourne', and this period of prosperity lasted until the depression at the end of the 1880s.

Post-WWII, Melbourne's social fabric has been greatly enriched by an influx of people and cultures from around the world. Several building booms have altered the city physically so that it's now a striking blend of ornate 19th-century buildings sitting alongside towering skyscrapers, and what seems like a million modern apartment complexes.

Today the city constantly rejuvenates itself through urban redevelopment. Inner city suburbs, once the haunt of a seedy underworld are now fashionable, hip and pricey to live in (and still a haunt of the seedy underworld).

ORIENTATION

Melbourne Airport (p512), 22km from the city centre, is Melbourne's main entry point, but Jetstar airlines also utilises Avalon Airport (p512) near Geelong. See p513 for information on travelling to/from the city's airports. If arriving by bus, you'll be dropped at the Southern Cross Railway Station's bus terminal (p513). Flinders St Station (Map pp478-9) is the main station for suburban trains.

Melbourne hugs the shores of Port Phillip Bay, with the city centre on the north bank of the Yarra River, about 5km inland. The main streets running east-west in the city's block-shaped grid are Collins and Bourke Sts, crossed by Swanston and Elizabeth Sts. The heart of the city is the Bourke St Mall, a pedestrianised shopping strip, and Chinatown along Little Bourke St.

Most places of interest to travellers are in the CBD or inner suburbs and are easily accessed by public transport.

Maps

The *Melbourne Visitors Map* is available at the **Melbourne Visitor Information Centre** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9658 9658; www.visitmelbourne.com; Federation Sq; ☎ 9am-6pm) or the **Melbourne Visitor Information Booth** (Map pp478-9; Bourke St Mall). For more comprehensive coverage, Lonely Planet also publishes a *Melbourne City Map*.

Street directories published by Melway, Gregory's and UBD are detailed and handy if you're driving. They can be purchased from newsagents and bookshops.

Map Land (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9670 4383; 372 Little Bourke St) has a wide selection of mapping materials.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Brunswick St Bookstore (Map p482; ☎ 9416 1030; 305 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; ☎ 10am-11pm) A Fitzroy fixture with contemporary titles, art, literature and design tomes, and cosy seating.

Foreign Language Bookshop (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 2883; 259 Collins St, Melbourne) Foreign-language books, dictionaries, magazines and even board games.

Readings (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 6633; 309 Lygon St, Carlton; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) Australian literature and music, plus art-house tomes and contemporary sellers.

Travellers Bookstore (Map p482; ☎ 9417 4179; 294 Smith St, Collingwood) Specialises in travel literature.

Emergency

Dial ☎ 000 for ambulance, fire or police.

Lifeline Counselling (☎ 13 11 14; ☎ 24hr)

Police station (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 7077; 226 Flinders Lane; ☎ 24hr)

Royal Women's Hospital Centre Against Sexual Assault Unit (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9344 2210; Royal Women's Hospital, 132 Grattan St, Carlton)

Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 2600; Level 2, 169 Swanston St, Melbourne) Particularly helpful centre for travellers with special needs. Also has showers, lockers and wheelchair-accessible toilets.

Internet Access

There are internet cafés dotted about the CBD and inner-city suburbs, and most hostels and guesthouses have a few portals. Almost every hotel will have a phone jack in the room and many now have broadband or wireless access, although the latter is likely to cost you \$10 per hour.

There are over 100 wi-fi hotspots around town; see **Azure Wireless** (www.azure.com.au) for a full list. Or, for an internet café, try:

efiftyfive (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9620 3899; 55 Elizabeth St, Melbourne; per hr from \$2)

Global Gossip (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 0511; 440 Elizabeth St, Melbourne; per hr from \$2)

World Wide Wash (Map p482; ☎ 9419 8214; 361 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; per hr \$6) Wash your clothes while you surf.

Media

In Melbourne, the *Age* (www.theage.com.au) is the daily broadsheet newspaper and the *Herald Sun* (www.heraldsun.com.au) is the major tabloid.

Street press thrives in Melbourne – pick up a free copy of *Beat* and *Inpress* from cafés, pubs, bookshops and record stores. They're the main music rags with listings of gigs playing around town, music news and events.

Medical Services

Alfred Hospital (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9276 2000; Commercial Rd, Prahran) Twenty-four-hour emergency.

Mulqueeny Midnight Pharmacy (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9510 3977; cnr Williams Rd & High St, Prahran; ☎ 9am-midnight)

Royal Melbourne Hospital (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9342 7000; Grattan St, Parkville) Twenty-four-hour emergency.

St Vincent's Hospital (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9288 2211; 41 Victoria Pde, Fitzroy) Twenty-four-hour emergency.

Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre (TMVC; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9602 5788; Level 2, 393 Little Bourke St, Melbourne) Travel-related medical advice and immunisations.

Money

Foreign-exchange booths at Melbourne Airport's international terminal are open to meet all arriving flights. In the city try:

American Express (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 139 060; 233 Collins St, Melbourne)

Travellex (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1800 637 642; 233 Collins St, Melbourne)

Post

All suburbs have an Australia Post branch.

Melbourne GPO (General Post Office; Map pp478-9; ☎ 13 13 18; 250 Elizabeth St, Melbourne; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Post restante available.

Tourist Information

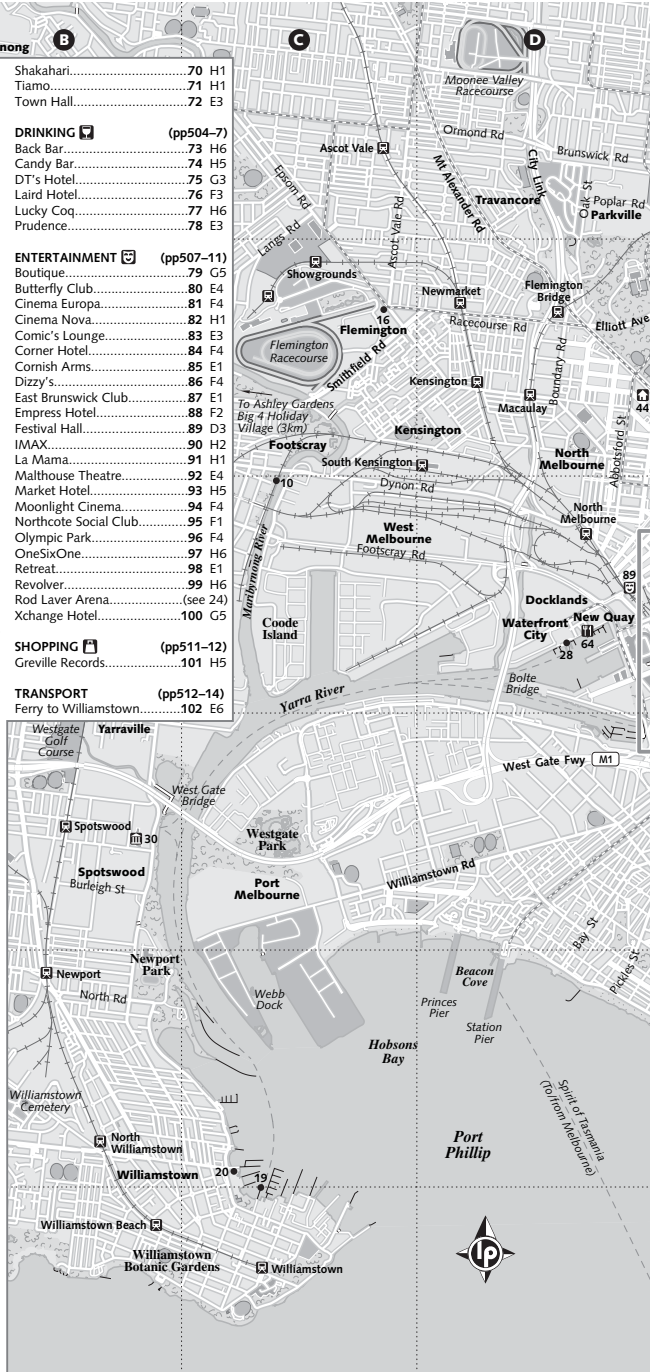
Information Victoria (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 366 356; 356 Collins St, Melbourne) Government-run bookshop with a wide variety of publications about Melbourne and Victoria.

Melbourne Visitor Information Booth (Map pp478-9; Bourke St Mall, Melbourne)

Melbourne Visitor Information Centre (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9658 9658; www.visitmelbourne.com; Federation Sq, Melbourne; ☎ 9am-6pm) Multilingual assistance, internet access, tour and accommodation services. It also produces *The Official Visitor Guide*, an excellent guide to Melbourne.

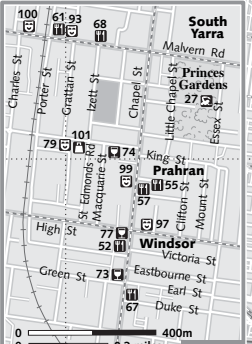
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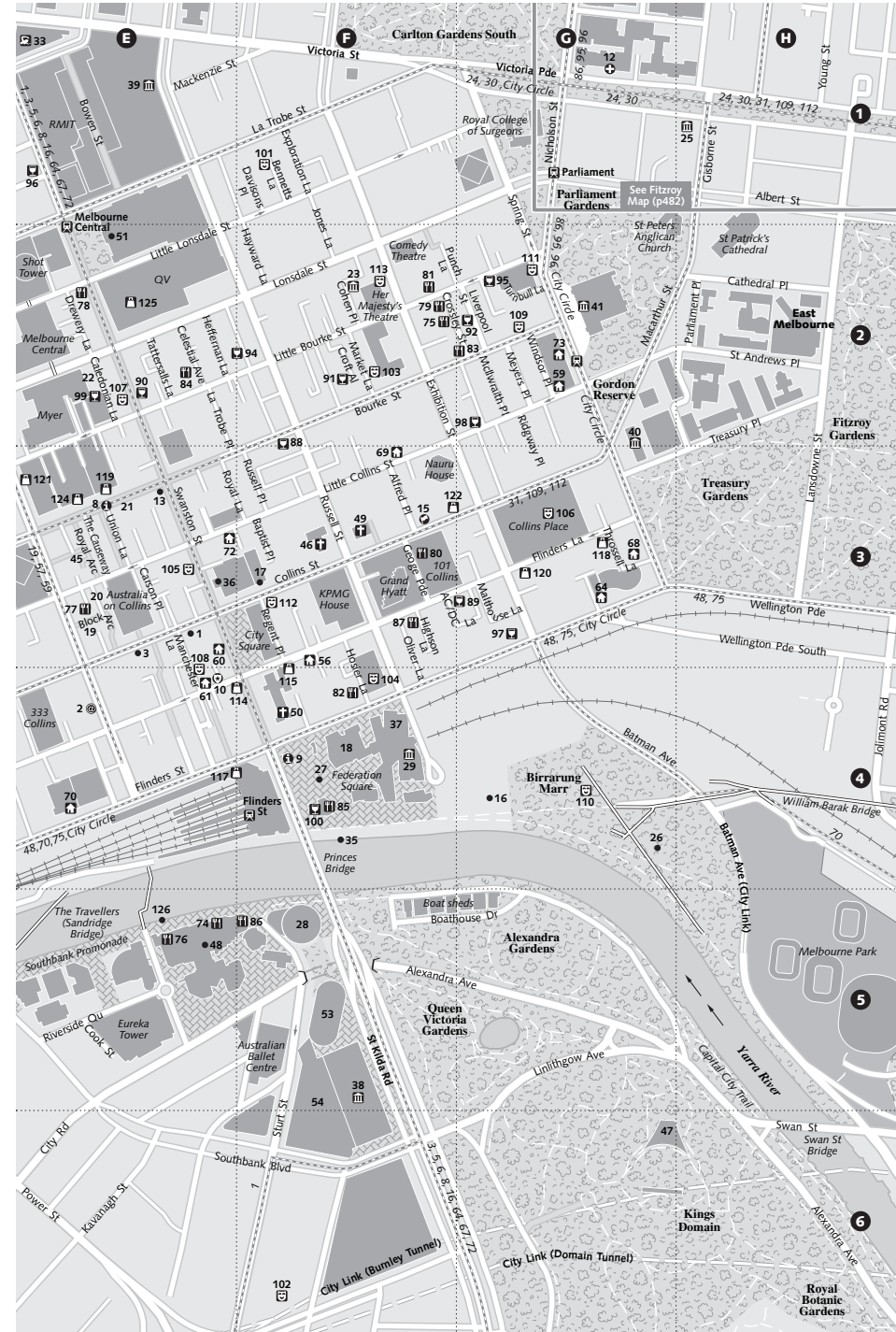
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SIGHTS

Most of Melbourne's best-known sights are clustered around the city centre, but the surrounding suburbs are thick with their own character. In the alternative north you'll find Fitzroy with its fashionable Brunswick St, and Collingwood the edgier sibling. Seaside St Kilda lures weekend day-trippers for lattes and people. Carlton is the Italian district where Alpha Romeos growl along Lygon St, and Williamstown is a village-style seaside port.

**City Centre
FEDERATION SQUARE**

A riotous explosion of steel, glass and abstract geometry, **Federation Square** (Map pp478-9; www.federationsquare.com.au) has become the city's new hub, creating a focal point for the city centre and connecting it with the Yarra River. Thousands of visitors and tourists gather in the undulating forecourt each year for regular cultural events, sporting telecasts, t'ai chi classes, Twilight Jazz and Afrobeats, and much more.

The **Australian Centre for the Moving Image** (ACMI; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 2583; www.acmi.net.au; ☎ 10am-6pm) is an ambitious centre dedicated to the interpretation and analysis of the moving image. Four storeys in height, it houses two cinemas, a screen gallery and holds workshops. Catch a cinematic gem, script reading or film festival at the regular **Popcorn Taxi** (www.popcorn taxi.com.au) events.

The **Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria Australia** (NGVA; Map pp478-9; ☎ 8662 1553; www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvaustralia; Federation Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) houses more than 20,000 pieces of Australian art, from the colonial to contemporary periods. There's an excellent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection on the ground floor and Antipodean masters, including Sydney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Brett Whiteley elsewhere. It's family friendly and hosts art classes and film screenings. Admission is charged for temporary exhibitions.

On the banks of the Yarra, **Birrarung Marr** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9658 9955; Batman Ave) is a creative addition to Melbourne's parks and gardens. In its centre, the **Federation Bells** (Map pp478-9) play a variety of compositions. **ArtPlay** (Map

pp478-9; ☎ 9664 7900; www.artplay.com.au) hosts creative weekend and holiday workshops for children aged between five and 12 years – bookings are essential.

The **National Design Centre** (NDC; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 6335; www.nationaldesigncentre.com) sells, displays and interprets international and local design wares.

SWANSTON STREET

The 1874 **Melbourne Town Hall** (Map pp478-9; ☎ tour bookings 9658 9658; cnr Swanston & Collins Sts) was once the main concert venue in town, and has enjoyed tea with the Queen in 1954 and thousands of psychotic Beatles fans (along with the lads themselves; they made a brief appearance on the balcony) in 1964. Free one-hour tours are conducted at 11am and 1pm weekdays.

Built in stages starting in 1854, the **State Library of Victoria** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8664 7000; www.slv.vic.gov.au; 328 Swanston St; admission free; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri-Sun) boasts a Classical Revival façade, millions of maps, pictures, books and other publications, and the striking, octagonal, domed **La Trobe Reading Room** to savour them in.

Further along, the Edwardian Baroque **Melbourne City Baths** (p490) originally served as the public baths in a bid to stop locals from washing themselves in the grotty Yarra. That was 1860; today they're a lovely spot to swim, sweat, play squash, and avoid bathing in the Yarra.

Opposite Federation Sq is the ornate and imposing **St Paul's Cathedral** (1880).

COLLINS STREET

Collins St is one of Melbourne's most elegant streetscapes. Its fashionable 'Paris end' is lined with plane trees (lit up beautifully with fairy lights at night), grand buildings and upmarket

CARS & TRAMS

Melbourne's notoriously confusing road rule is the 'hook turn'. To turn right at most city intersections, pull into the left lane, at the corner of the intersection, wait until the light of the street you're turning into changes from red to green, then complete the turn. A black-and-white sign that reads 'Right Turn from Left Only' hangs from the overhead cables, identifying these intersections.

You can only overtake a tram on the left and *always* stop behind a tram when it halts to drop off or collect passengers.

European boutiques (Chanel, Hermès etc). From Elizabeth to Spencer Sts, it's the haunt of bankers and stockbrokers.

Facing each other on the corners of Russell and Collins Sts are the 1873 decorative Gothic **Scots Church** (Map pp478-9; 140 Collins St) and the 1866 **St Michael's Uniting Church** (Map pp478-9; 120 Collins St), built in the Lombardic Romanesque style. The renovated **Athenaeum Theatre** (Map pp478-9; 188 Collins St) dates back to 1886 and is topped by a statue of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Across the road is the opulent **Regent Theatre** (Map pp478-9; 191 Collins St).

Block Arcade (Map pp478-9), which runs between Collins and Elizabeth Sts, was built in 1891 and is a beautifully intact 19th-century shopping arcade. It features etched-glass ceilings and mosaic floors, and magnificently detailed plasterwork. Connecting Block Arcade with Little Collins St, **Block PI** (Map pp478-9) keeps hip city cats topped up with lattes and café fare.

In the block between William and King Sts, the **Le Meridien at Rialto** (Map pp478-9; 495 Collins St) is an imaginative five-star hotel behind the façades of two marvellous, old Venetian Gothic buildings. These older buildings are dwarfed by the soaring **Rialto Towers** (Map pp478-9; 525 Collins St), with the justifiably popular **Melbourne Observation Deck** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9629 8222; www.melbournedeck.com.au; adult/child/family \$14.50/9.90/39.50; ☹ 10am-10pm) offering spectacular 360-degree views from the 55th floor.

BOURKE STREET

Between Swanston and Elizabeth Sts, the pedestrianised **Bourke St Mall** (Map pp478-9) is thick with the scent of department store money laundering, and the sounds of Peruvian, New Age and unidentifiable buskers. On the corner of Bourke and Elizabeth Sts is the **GPO** (Map pp478-9; www.gpomelbourne.com), which suffered a fire in September 2001 and has risen from the ashes in its new incarnation as an agglomeration of high-end boutiques (see p511). On the other side of the mall, the **Royal Arcade** (Map pp478-9; www.royalarcade.com.au), completed in 1870, is Melbourne's oldest arcade.

Behind Little Bourke St is **Caledonian Lane** (Map pp478-9), an unofficial canvas for local street artists.

SPRING STREET

The **Old Treasury** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9651 2233; www.citymuseummelbourne.org; Spring St; adult/concession/family

\$8.50/5/18; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is an elegant edifice built in 1862 with basement vaults to store much of the £200 million worth of gold mined from the Victorian goldfields. The **City Museum**, housed within, has three permanent exhibitions.

The 1856 **Parliament House of Victoria** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9651 8911; www.parliament.vic.gov.au; Spring St; ☹ Mon-Fri) is a striking monolith of a structure preceded by a grand flourish of steps. Free half-hour tours are conducted from Monday to Friday when parliament isn't in session.

CHINATOWN

Between Spring and Swanston Sts on Little Bourke, ruby-hued archways usher city-goers into a bustling strip of clattering woks, glowing neon, exotic shopfronts laced with juicy, florid ducks, and floor-to-ceiling chambers of medicinal herbs and tinctures. Melbourne's Chinatown has thrived since the 1850s, and although the opium dens, brothels and boarding houses have long made way for more salubrious enterprises, the area still maintains its entrepreneurial air.

The interesting **Chinese Museum** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 2888; www.chinesemuseum.com.au; 22 Cohen Pl; adult/concession \$6.50/4.50; ☹ 10am-5pm) documents the long history of Chinese people in Australia over five levels. The entrance of the museum is guarded by the 218kg Millennium Dragon, which snakes its way through the city streets during Chinese New Year (see p493).

QUEEN VICTORIA MARKET

Chaotic, friendly, multicultural – the **Queen Victoria Market** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9320 5822; www.qvm.com.au; 513 Elizabeth St; ☹ 6am-2pm Tue & Thu, 6am-6pm Fri, 6am-3pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) is one of the largest open-air markets in the southern hemisphere and the grand dame of all Melbourne markets. Over 600 traders hock their wares here and it's been pushing trade for more than 125 years. You'll find everything from perfectly ripe Brie to perfectly rank moccasins. The bustling **night market** (☹ 5.30-10pm Wed) runs between late November and mid-February. The **Queen Victoria Market Cooking School** (☎ 9320 5835) also holds excellent and diverse cooking classes that change with the seasons.

OLD MELBOURNE GAOL

Behind its bluestone façade, this penal museum (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 7228; Russell St; adult/child/family \$12.50/7.50/33.50; ☹ 9.30am-5pm) is a study in the

MELBOURNE IN...

Three Days

Start in the thick of things and do a cultural round of the central business district (CBD). Head to **Federation Square** (p483) and worship the moving image at the **Australian Centre for the Moving Image** (p483), then dose up on more culture at the **Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria Australia** (p483). Lunch with trendy suits at **Movida** (p500) and then amble over to the **Immigration Museum** (below). Finish things up with shopping in the city's laneways and beers and dinner at **Cookie** (p500).

Day two: take your pick from a morning at the **Melbourne Aquarium** (p487) or the **National Gallery of Victoria: International** (p486), then plant yourself beneath a tree in the **Royal Botanic Gardens** (p487). Top the day off in St Kilda for a gloriously messy dinner at **Claypots** (p504) and drinks at the **George Public Bar** (p506) or a gig at the **'Espy'** (p507).

Day three needs to be a northern adventure. Start at the **Melbourne Museum** (p488), and then wander over to **Brunswick St** (p488) for the city's finest café and bohemian culture. If you've got time continue the foray into **Smith Street** (p488) for edgier appeal and then scoot back to the city for **Chinatown** (opposite) chow, a bout of theatre, or a bar hop.

One Week

Stretch your Melbourne escapade into a week and start day four at the **Queen Victoria Market** (opposite). Sample the multicultural deli goods, stock up on organic fruit and then traipse the aisles for bargain clothing/music/shoes/souvenirs. Head to the **Melbourne Cricket Ground** (MCG; p487) and take a tour to see why this city is so nuts about sport, then pop over to **Southbank** (p486) for lunch and river views. Finish the day with a visit to the **Australian Centre for Contemporary Art** (p486).

Your schedule's been hectic, so slow things down and spend day five at the **Royal Melbourne Zoo** (p488), where you can picnic on all the goodies you bought the day before. Once you've visited all the wonderful wild beasts head to Carlton for pizza and pasta and a **Cinema Nova** flick (p509).

Day six and seven are for the leftover must-dos. Take a day's excursion to the **Great Ocean Road** (p528) or the **Yarra Valley** (p521). Hit **South Yarra** (p489) for shopping, eats and drinks on Toorak Rd, Chapel St and Greville St. Tuck into fabulous Vietnamese or Thai in **Richmond** (p503) and fudge an afternoon away at the beach in **St Kilda** (p489).

small leaps humankind has made towards enlightenment. The dark, dank and tiny cells display plaster casts of some of the 135 prisoners who were hanged here. Ned Kelly's iconic armour and the very gallows from which he was hanged are also here. Ghostly **night tours** (not recommended for children under 12, adult/child \$25/16.50) ham it up on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday; book through **Ticketek** (☎ 13 28 49).

IMMIGRATION MUSEUM

The inspiring **Immigration Museum** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9927 2700; 400 Flinders St; adult/concession & child \$6/free; ☹ 10am-5pm), in the Old Customs House (1858-70), provides a heart-rending account of Melbourne's immigration history and the tears, joy, separations and reunions, and difficult journeys that continue to contribute to

the city's multicultural mix. The multimedia displays are insightful and clever and the building's Renaissance Revival architecture is reason enough for a visit.

KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST CULTURAL CENTRE

Devoted to southeastern Aboriginal culture, this **centre** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8622 2600; 295 King St; entry by donation; ☹ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) preserves and popularises Koorie artefacts and art. Three galleries house significant items such as possum-fur cloaks, and contemporary Aboriginal art is displayed in temporary exhibits.

DOCKLANDS

Near the rear of Southern Cross Station, **Docklands** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 663 008; www.docklands.vic.gov.au) was once a wetland and lagoon area

used by Koories as a hunting ground. Until the mid-1960s it was the city's main industrial and docking area. In recent years the area has been hijacked by entrepreneurial developers and it's now a confluence of residential high rises, skirted by restaurants, businesses and bars. On paper it sounds great but the reality is sterile. One interesting landmark to note on your visit here is the **Webb Bridge** (Map pp478-9), a sinuous structure reminiscent of a Koorie eel trap.

The 52,000-seat **Telstra Dome** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8625 7700) is the city's alternative footy arena, with a state-of-the-art sliding roof. Other sporting and entertainment events take place here on a regular basis. **Tours** (☎ 8625 7277; adult/child/family \$13/6/33) of the stadium are conducted on weekdays.

FITZROY GARDENS

The leafy **Fitzroy Gardens** (Map pp476-7; www.fitzroygardens.com; btwn Wellington Pde & Clarendon, Lansdowne & Albert Sts) provide a luscious divide between the city centre and East Melbourne. Stately avenues lined with English elms are flanked by expansive lawns, flowerbeds and urban fugitives suffering office fatigue.

In the northwestern corner of the gardens is the **People's Path**, a circular path paved with 10,000 individually engraved bricks.

Captain Cook's Cottage (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9419 4677; www.cookscottage.com.au; adult/child/family \$4/2/11; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the former Yorkshire home of the distinguished English navigator's parents (although the jury is still out on whether or not he ever slept there). It was dismantled, shipped to Melbourne, and reconstructed stone by stone in 1934.

Southbank

Across the Yarra River from the city centre you'll find the arts precinct; the **Southgate** (www.southgate-melbourne.com.au) complex has three levels of restaurants, cafés and bars, all with city skyline and river views. Further west is the 24-hour, nonstop cavalcade of illuminated excess that is the **Crown Casino & Entertainment Complex** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9292 8888; www.crowncasino.com.au; Southbank; ☎ 24hr). It's one of the largest casinos in the southern hemisphere – you'll be either spellbound or nauseated. Keep your peepers peeled for kids locked in cars out the back.

Across the road, the **Melbourne Exhibition Centre** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9235 8000; www.mecc.com.au;

2 Clarendon St, Southbank) hosts everything from Sexpo to Santa's Kingdom.

Further west again is the low-key **Polly Woodside Maritime Museum** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9699 9760; Lorimer St E, Southbank; adult/child/concession \$10/6/8; ☎ 10am-4pm) featuring a restored iron-hulled sailing ship dating from 1885. The museum is scheduled to be closed for renovations until late 2008.

ARTS PRECINCT

This small area on St Kilda Rd is the high-culture heart of Melbourne.

Behind an iconic waterwall, the **National Gallery of Victoria: International** (NGVI; Map pp478-9; ☎ 8620 2222; www.ngv.vic.gov.au; 180 St Kilda Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) boasts an international collection that is world-renowned and arguably Australia's finest. Permanent members include Rembrandt, Picasso, Rubens, Monet and Modigliani. Temporary exhibitions are provocative and dynamic, and tours, talks and workshops are regular features.

The **Victorian Arts Centre** (VAC; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9281 8000; www.theartscentre.net.au; 100 St Kilda Rd) is made up of two separate buildings: Hamer Hall and the Theatres Building. The interiors of both buildings are stunning. **Hamer Hall** (Map pp478-9) is a major performance venue and base for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO). The **Theatres Building** (Map pp478-9) is topped by a distinctive Eiffel-inspired spire (illuminated at night), underneath which are housed the State Theatre, the Playhouse and the George Fairfax Studio. Here you'll also find the **George Adams Gallery** and the **St Kilda Road Foyer Gallery**; both are free and have changing exhibitions. One-hour tours of the centre (adult/concession/family \$11/8/28) are offered at noon and 2.30pm from Monday to Saturday, and a special backstage tour for over-12s only (\$14) is offered at 12.15pm on Sunday. Call for bookings. There's an arts and crafts **market** (☎ 10am-5pm Sun) in the Arts Centre undercroft, with a variety of goods on offer, many with an Australian bent.

Embodying Melbourne's unapologetic persona, the **Australian Centre for Contemporary Art** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9654 6422; www.accaonline.org.au; 111 Sturt St; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is an obese, rust-coloured cathedral-esque structure. It hosts shifting exhibitions in a range of artistic mediums.

MELBOURNE AQUARIUM

A mesmerising marine menagerie slinks within the crystal ball of this waterside **aquarium** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9620 0999; www.melbourneaquarium.com.au; King St; adult/child/concession/family \$24/14/16/65; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Feb-Dec, 9.30am-9pm Jan). Get an eye-ful of moray eels, giant cuttlefish, delicate sea dragons, sharks, starfish and much more. Vivid tropical fish flirt with onlookers and majestic rays soar above the domed perspex tunnel. It's hard to beat a dive with the sharks (\$124 to \$264, depending on your experience and equipment needs).

Kings Domain

Beside St Kilda Rd, which runs past the huge **Kings Domain**, stands the massive **Shrine of Remembrance** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 10am-5pm), which was built as a memorial to Victorians killed in WWI. Its design was partly based on the Temple of Halicarnassus, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world.

Near the shrine is **Governor La Trobe's Cottage** (Map pp476-7; Dallas Brooks Dr; admission by donation; ☎ 1-4pm Sun), the original Victorian government house sent out from the mother country in prefabricated form in 1840. It's positively quaint in comparison to the stretched Italianate **Government House** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9654 4711; Government House Dr; adult/child \$15/10; ☎ guided tours Mon & Wed by appointment only), where Victoria's current governor resides; it's a copy of Queen Victoria's palace on England's Isle of Wight.

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS

The finest botanic gardens in Australia, and among the best in the world, the beautifully designed **Royal Botanic Gardens** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9252 2300; www.rbg.vic.gov.au; admission free; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm Nov-Mar, to 6pm Apr, Sep & Oct, to 5.40pm May-Aug) sprawl beside the Yarra River. Plants from Australia and around the world feature in mini-ecosystems, such as the cacti and succulents area, herb garden and Australian rainforest. Take a book, a picnic or Frisbee; most importantly, take your time.

Along with the abundance of plant species there's a surprising amount of wildlife, including ducks, swans and eels in and around the ornamental lake, and cockatoos and possums throughout the park.

The gardens are encircled by the **Tan**, a 4km running track and one of Melbourne's favourite venues for joggers and walkers (and

talkers). During the summer months, **Moonlight Cinema** (p509) flickers in the dark and theatre performances are staged.

A range of tours depart from the **visitors centre** (☎ 9252 2429; Birdwood Ave; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun).

Along the Yarra River

Melbourne's prime natural feature, the 'mighty' Yarra River, is the butt of countless jokes but it's actually a scenic river. Parks, promenades, cycling paths, bridges and major attractions line its banks and boat cruises depart from the banks of Federation Sq (p493).

YARRA BEND PARK

Northeast of the city centre, the Yarra River is bordered by **Yarra Bend Park** (Map pp476-7; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), much loved by runners, rowers, cyclists, picnickers and strollers.

The **Studley Park Boathouse** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9853 1972; Boathouse Rd, Studley Park; ☎ 9am-5pm) dates back to the 1860s, and houses a restaurant, kiosk and café. There are also boats, canoes and kayaks available for hire (\$28 per hour per two-person canoe). Kane's suspension bridge takes you across to the other side of the river, and it's about a 20-minute walk from here to **Dights Falls** (Map pp476-7).

Yarra Park & Melbourne Park

Yarra Park contains the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the Richmond Cricket Ground. The adjoining Melbourne Park contains the Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre, Olympic Park, Vodafone Arena and several other ovals.

MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND

The **MCG** ('the G'; Map pp476-7; ☎ 9657 8888; www.mcg.org.au; Brunton Ave) is the temple in which sports-mad Melburnians worship their heroes. The devoted come regularly, filled with hope, to watch their contemporary gladiators triumph or fall. It's one of the world's great sporting venues, and is imbued with an indefinable combination of tradition and atmosphere. You scoff? The stadium seats almost 100,000 and at a full-house AFL match or the Boxing Day test cricket the atmosphere is electric and the crowd deafening.

The first Australian Rules football game was played here in 1858, and in 1877 it hosted the first test cricket match between Australia

THE ART OF HEIDE

Heide Museum of Modern Art (Map p515; ☎ 9850 1500; www.heide.com.au; 7 Templestowe Rd, Bulleen; adult/concession/child \$12/8/free, extra for exhibitions; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) is on the site of the former home of John and Sunday Reed, under whose patronage the likes of Sir Sidney Nolan, John Perceval and Albert Tucker created a new movement in the Australian art world. Set in a sprawling, riverside park, Heide has an impressive collection and exceptional temporary exhibits. The museum is signposted off the Eastern Fwy. Otherwise, take an Eltham-line train to Heidelberg station, and catch National Bus 291 to the corner of Manningham and Templestowe Rds, and walk from there.

and England. Half-hour **tours** (☎ 9657 8879; adult/concession/family \$14.50/10/40; 🕒 10am-3pm) are conducted on nonmatch days.

Parkville & Carlton

Up the north end of town you'll find a cosmopolitan area that blends the intellectual with the recreational, the multicultural with the mainstream.

Carlton is home to the bustling café strips of Drummond and Rathdowne Sts, and most importantly, Lygon St. This is the backbone of Melbourne's Italian quarter, where thousands of Italian immigrants settled when they came to Melbourne after WWII. The strip remains one of Melbourne's liveliest, often teeming with shoppers, diners, macchiato-sippers, students, film buffs and any other stereotype (or non) you can conjure.

Also in Carlton are the **Melbourne General Cemetery** (Map pp476-7) and the gothic-style stone buildings of the **University of Melbourne** (Map pp476-7).

ROYAL MELBOURNE ZOO

The **Royal Melbourne Zoo** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9285 9300; www.zoo.org.au; Elliot Ave, Parkville; adult/child/concession/family \$22/11/16.50/53; 🕒 9am-5pm, to 7.30pm Sat & Sun late-Jan-late-Mar), has been operating for more than 140 years, is the oldest zoo in Australia, and the third oldest in the world. Set in spacious and attractively landscaped gardens, the enclosures are simulations of the animals' natural habitats. Walkways pass through towering bird aviaries, a wide-open lion park, a tropical hothouse full of colourful butterflies, and a gorillas' rainforest. There's also a large collection of native animals in a bush setting, a platypus aquarium, fur seals, tigers, plenty of reptiles and lots more.

In the summer months, the zoo hosts twilight concerts and there are various opportunities to sleep over inside the zoo.

MELBOURNE MUSEUM

In the middle of Carlton Gardens, **Melbourne Museum** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 13 11 02; www.melbourne.museum.vic.gov.au; 11 Nicholson St, Carlton; adult/concession & child \$6/free; 🕒 10am-5pm) is billed as 'the southern hemisphere's largest and most innovative museum'. The emphasis is on education and interaction, and the main attractions include Bunjilaka, the Aboriginal Centre; a living forest gallery; and the Australia gallery, with an exhibit dedicated to that great Aussie icon Phar Lap, and another dedicated to the TV show *Neighbours* (filmed in Melbourne). The Children's Museum is a great way to keep the kids entertained awhile.

Fitzroy & Collingwood

Fitzroy is where Melbourne's bohemian subculture moved when the lights got too bright in Carlton. The café set is beginning to impinge, but thankfully it still needs to share this inner-north plot with the anti-establishment, lip-studded and crimson-haired.

Brunswick St is probably Melbourne's liveliest street, and where you'll find some of the best food, weirdest shops, most interesting people and unique clothes. In particular, the blocks on either side of the Johnston St intersection have a fascinating collection of young designer and retro clothes shops, bookshops, galleries, nurseries, pubs (the most per capita in Victoria) and, of course, more eateries than you can poke a fork at (see p502).

Smith St forms the border between Fitzroy and Collingwood. It has an edgier milieu than Brunswick St.

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (Map p482; ☎ 9419 3406; www.gertrude.org.au; 200 Gertrude St, Fitzroy; 🕒 11am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 1-5.30pm Sat), is one of Melbourne's most exciting galleries. Sixteen studios promote emerging contemporary artists and the temporary exhibitions regularly provoke critical debate.

In **North Fitzroy** there are more interesting, quirky shops to explore, more historic buildings, the **Edinburgh Gardens** (Map pp476-7) and a host of gorgeous, local pubs.

Richmond

As Carlton is to Italy, so Richmond is to Vietnam; there are still also many Greek Australians living here, hangers-on from the previous wave of immigrants to adopt the suburb.

The **Bridge Rd** and **Swan St** areas are something of a discount fashion centre, with shops where Australian fashion designers sell their seconds and rejects alongside the outlets of some of Melbourne's popular young designers.

South of the River

Welcome to the 'right' side of the river – the high-society side of town. Toorak is the ritziest suburb in Melbourne, and neighbouring suburbs Prahran and South Yarra follow closely behind. **Toorak Rd** and **Chapel St** are the main strips; both are crammed with cafés, bars, restaurants, boutiques and shops, and ample ventures designed to keep the beautiful folk beautiful.

The excellent **Prahran Market** (Map pp476-7; Commercial Rd), established in 1881, still packs in the city's gourmants today and **Commercial Rd** is a focal point for Melbourne's gay and lesbian communities.

Running west off Chapel St, **Greville St** has a quirky collection of off-beat retro/grunge clothing shops, record shops and bookshops, and some good bars and cafés. Definitely go for a wander.

St Kilda

Melbourne's most famous seaside suburb maintains a perpetual state of fascinating flux. Home to Russian and Polish émigrés in the 1940s, it shifted from a prestigious address for colonial entrepreneurs to the haunt of the raffish, unkempt and experimental in the 1960s and '70s. By the '90s, the suburban-macchiato crowd had begun to muscle in and a dingy flat suddenly became Melbourne's hottest property. Hotels, dance halls, sea baths, theatres, galleries and fun parks have all found their place here over the decades, and this seedy and glam, alternative and mainstream pocket remains a place of extremes. Sniff hard and you'll catch the scent of cakes, pasta, beer, roadies, sex, yoga, hair product...and the sea.

Fitzroy St and **Acland St** are the main strips, and are packed with cafés, bars, sprawling old-school pubs and pavement tables. Acland St is particularly famed for its continental cake shops. Following **Carlisle St**, across St Kilda Rd and into Balaclava, you'll find some great Jewish bakeries and some natty boutiques and cafés.

The **Linden Art Centre & Gallery** (Map p481; ☎ 9209 6794; www.lindenarts.org; 26 Acland St; admission free; 🕒 1-6pm Tue-Sun) has contemporary art and a sculpture garden for children; and the excellent **Jewish Museum of Australia** (Map p481; ☎ 9534 0083; www.jewishmuseum.com.au; 26 Alma Rd; adult/child \$7/4; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Thu, 11am-5pm Sun) has interactive displays relating to Jewish history and culture.

St Kilda pier is a favourite spot for strollers, who used to reward themselves with a coffee or a snack at **St Kilda Pier Pavilion**, a 19th-century tearoom at the junction of the pier, which burnt down in 2003 but has recently been rebuilt. On weekends and public holidays, a **ferry** (☎ 9682 9555; return adult/child \$15/7.50) runs from the pier, across the bay to Williamstown, departing St Kilda hourly between 11.30am and 3.30pm, and leaving Williamstown hourly from 11am to 4pm.

South of the pier the Moorish-style **St Kilda Sea Baths** (☎ 9525 3011; 10-18 Jacka Blvd) contains shops, cafés and restaurants, and a 25m, salt-water pool (admission \$11).

Luna Park (Map p481; ☎ 9525 5033; www.lunapark.com.au; Lower Esplanade; unlimited ride ticket adult/child/family \$36/26/109; 🕒 11am-6pm Sat & Sun winter; 7-11pm Fri, 11am-11pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun summer; 11am-6pm school holidays year-round), a St Kilda symbol since 1912, is an old-fashioned amusement park that maintains a whiff of carny atmosphere. The old wooden roller coaster and beautifully crafted carousel are highlights, but the famous façade, Mr Moon laughing at the entrance, has been the object of many a nightmare.

The **Esplanade Sunday Market** (Map p481; Upper Esplanade; 🕒 10am-5pm Sun) lines the street, featuring a range of open-air stalls selling arts and crafts, often with a New Age or Australian slant.

Williamstown

'Willy' (Map pp476-7) is a gracious seafaring town with scenic promenades heaving with day-trippers on the weekend. Back in 1837 it was designated the main seaport on Port Phillip Bay but became a secondary port by the 1880s.

Nelson Pl, lined with historic buildings, follows the foreshore, winding around the docklands and shipyards – the yacht clubs and marinas along the waterfront add to the maritime flavour.

Between Nelson Pl and the waterfront is **Commonwealth Reserve**. Nearby, moored at Gem Pier, the **HMAS Castlemaine** (www.hmascastlemaine.com; adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Sat & Sun) is a WWII minesweeper built in Williamstown in 1941 which has been converted into a maritime museum.

Williamstown Railway Museum (☎ 9397 7412; Champion Rd; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 10am–4pm Wed, noon–5pm Sat & Sun) has a fine collection of old steam locomotives and mini steam train rides for kids.

The **Scienceworks Museum & Melbourne Planetarium** (☎ 9392 4800; www.scienceworks.museum.vic.gov.au; 2 Booker St, Spotswood; adult/concession \$6/free, planetarium \$5/3; ☎ 10am–4.30pm) incorporates three historic buildings and keeps inquisitive grey matter occupied with interactive displays. Figure out the mysteries of the universe (or your own anatomy) by poking buttons, pulling levers, lifting flaps and learning all sorts of weird facts. The planetarium splashes the universe onto a 16m-domed ceiling.

Williamstown Ferries (☎ 9506 4144; www.williams townferries.com.au) runs ferries between Gem Pier and Southgate, stopping at sites along the way. A ferry also runs to St Kilda pier (p489).

ACTIVITIES

Cycling

The **Main Yarra Trail** is one of Melbourne's many inner-city bike paths along the riverside green belts. At least 20 other long, urban cycle paths exist, all marked in the *Melway Greater Melbourne Street Directory*. In addition, **VicRoads** (www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) has printable maps.

Bike hire:

Rentabike (Map pp476–7; ☎ 0417 339 203; Waterfront City, Docklands; per day \$35)

St Kilda Cycles (Map p481; ☎ 9534 3074; www.stkilda cycles.com.au; 11 Carlisle St, St Kilda; per day from \$25)

Golf

Melbourne's sandbelt courses, such as **Royal Melbourne** (rated No 6 in the world), **Huntingdale** and **Kingston Heath** are world famous. It is tough to get a round at these members' courses, but there are also plenty of public courses where anyone can play. You'll need to book on weekends. Green

fees are around \$20 for 18 holes, and most courses have clubs and buggies for hire. These are some good public courses close to town:

Albert Park Public Golf Course (Map pp476–7; ☎ 9510 5588; www.golfvictoria.com.au; Queens Rd, Albert Park; ☎ dawn–dusk) Championship course alongside the Australian Formula One Grand Prix circuit.

Yarra Bend Public Golf Course (Map pp476–7; ☎ 9481 3729; Yarra Bend Rd, Fairfield; ☎ dawn–dusk) Pick of the bunch; bookings essential.

In-line Skating

The best in-line skating tracks are found around St Kilda. **Rock 'n' Skate Shop** (Map p481; ☎ 9525 3434; 22 Fitzroy St, St Kilda; per hr/day \$8/25; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–7pm Sat & Sun) hires equipment that's in pretty good condition.

Lawn Bowls

Don't laugh – lawn bowls now attracts an even measure of the too-cool-for-skool gang alongside pensioners in starched white. Barefoot, with a beer in one hand and a bowl in the other, they congregate on Sunday afternoons for an alternative to the pub session. And the kids aren't much better. A game costs \$5–10 and in summer it's one of the finest ways to spend an afternoon.

Inner-city clubs:

North Fitzroy Bowls (Map pp476–7; ☎ 9481 3137; www.fvbowls.com.au; 578 Brunswick St, North Fitzroy) Bowls, barbecues and a beer garden. Bewdiful. Call for opening hours.

St Kilda Bowling Club (Map p481; ☎ 9537 0370; 66 Fitzroy St, St Kilda; ☎ noon–sunset Tue–Sun) A no-shoes dress code and you can also try your hand at boules.

Sailing

There are plenty of yacht clubs around the bay and races are held most weeks. Some clubs welcome visitors as crew on racing boats. The following are some of the biggest clubs:

Hobsons Bay Yacht Club (Map pp476–7; ☎ 9397 6393; www.hbyc.asn.au; 268 Nelson Pl, Williamstown) Volunteers get a go on Wednesday nights.

Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (Map p481; ☎ 9534 0227; Pier Rd, St Kilda) Postcard-perfect location and crewing opportunities on Wednesdays (\$15).

Swimming

The bay beaches are popular during summer. St Kilda beach is busy at the first ray of sunlight, but they all get packed bum-to-bum on scorches.

Pools near the city:

Fitzroy Swimming Pool (Map p482; ☎ 9417 6493; Alexandra Pde, Fitzroy; adult/concession \$4.10/1.70; ☎ 6am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun) A local fave with a toddlers' pool.

Prahran Aquatic Centre (Map pp476–7; ☎ 8290 7140; Essex St, Prahran; adult/child/family \$4.20/2.20/11; ☎ 6am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun Oct–Apr)

Melbourne City Baths (Map pp478–9; ☎ 9663 5888; www.melbournecitybaths.com.au; 420 Swanston St; admission \$4.50; ☎ 6am–10pm Mon–Thu, 6am–8.30pm Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun) This stately swimming hall has a 25m indoor pool plus a gym, spas, saunas and squash courts.

Melbourne Sports & Aquatic Centre (MSAC; Map pp476–7; ☎ 9926 1555; www.msac.com.au; Albert Rd, Albert Park; adult/child \$5.90/4.40; ☎ 6am–10pm Mon–Fri) With a fantastic indoor 50m pool, wave pool, water slides, spa-sauna-steam room and spacious common areas. Childcare is available.

Windsurfing & Kitesurfing

South of St Kilda, Elwood is a very popular kitesurfing and windsurfing area. **RPS – the Board Store** (Map pp476–7; ☎ 9525 6475; www.rpsboardstore.com; 87 Ormond Rd, Elwood) can teach you the basics of either sport for \$55/130 respectively

per introductory outing. All gear is included in the price.

Yoga

The following places all offer drop-in classes to unkink your body. Check websites for class timetables.

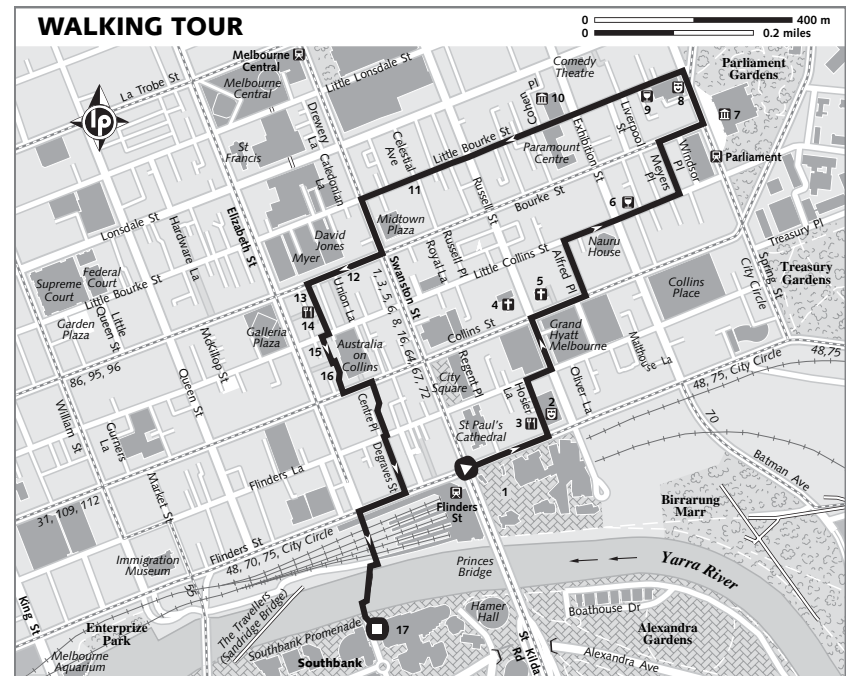
Action School of Yoga (Map p482; ☎ 9415 9798; www.actionyoga.com; Level 1, 275 Smith St, Collingwood) Teaches Iyengar yoga and has a solid reputation.

Ashtanga Yoga Centre of Melbourne (Map p482; ☎ 9419 1598; www.ashtangamelbourne.com.au; Level 1, 110 Argyle St, Fitzroy) Rigorous Mysore-style classes, and courses for kids and teens too.

Bikram Yoga (☎ 9416 4422; www.bikramyogafitzroy.com.au; 24 Johnston St, Fitzroy) Adherents of the Bikram method will be able to sweat it out in style here.

WALKING TOUR

Melbourne's CBD is a warren of beautiful alleys and laneways, some cobblestoned, some bluestoned, and all laden with character. Start your foray into them at an obvious point – **Federation Square** (1; p483). Head east on Flinders St and then turn left onto Hosier Lane, keeping the **Forum Theatre** (2; p507) on



your right. Depending on the hunger pangs you could pop into **Movida** (3; p500) for a scrummy round of tapas, or keep moving. Turn right at Flinders Lane, left onto Russell St and then right onto Collins St. Stop to admire **Scots Church** (4; p484) and **St Michael's Uniting Church** (5; p484) and make your way east along the 'Paris' end of the Collins St.

Find respite from the main strip and take a left onto Alfred Pl, which leads to Little Collins St. Turn right and take a beer-breather at **Pony** (6; p505) or continue along Little Collins, turning left onto Meyers Pl. Turn right onto Bourke St and you'll hit the eastern border of the CBD, where **Parliament House** (7; p484) strikes a pose.

Turn left on Spring St and left again onto Little Bourke, past **Princess Theatre** (8; p509) and **Mrs Parmas** (9; p506), where any self-respecting beer-lover will linger. Head down Little Bourke St and stop in at the **Chinese Museum** (10; p484) before heading into the heart of **Chinatown** (11; p484).

Turn left at Swanston St and then right on Bourke St to amble through **Bourke St Mall** (12; p484). Ogle at the shops and people and then potter through the glorious old **Royal Arcade** (13; p484), stopping in at **Koko Black** (14; p502) for a to-die-for chocolate break. Dogle from Little Collins to **Block Pl** (15; p484) and into **Block Arcade** (16; p484). Cross Collins St and head down Centre Pl and Degraeves St for shoulder-to-shoulder boutiques, cafés and bars. Turn right onto Flinders St and then cross it via the pedestrian tunnel beneath the railway tracks to reach the Yarra River. Cruise across the pedestrian bridge to **Southgate** (17; p486) and finish the day up with a bite to eat and a well-earned vino.

MELBOURNE FOR CHILDREN

Melbourne lays on a good spread of activities geared solely towards youngsters, from low-flying raptors and kooky science exhibits to seven-gilled sharks. During school holidays many places have tailor-made early-childhood programmes, and you can always head to one of the many parks for a grassy romp.

Sights that give 'what I did on my holiday' stories backbone include the **Royal Melbourne Zoo** (p488), where meerkats cause great hilarity; the **Werribee Open Range Zoo** (p514), with its spot-the-zebra/rhino/giraffe/etc bus safari; and **Healesville Sanctuary** (p521), the best option for getting up close to Australian native animals. Overnight camps at the zoos,

such as **Melbourne's 'Roar 'n' Snore'** and the **Open Range's 'Slumber Safari'**, are also lots of spooky fun.

Other educational options include **Science-works** (p490), with lots of hands-on activities, and the **Melbourne Aquarium** (p487), where sharks hovering overhead in the 360-degree aquarium may add weight to parental threats.

Less threatening encounters with wildlife include penguin spotting on a cruise with **Penguin Waters** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9386 8488; www.penguinwaters.com.au; Berth 1 Southbank; adult/child \$55/30) or at **Phillip Island** (p525). Then there's the **Collingwood Children's Farm** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9417 5806; St Heliers St, Abbotsford; adult/concession/family \$8/4/16; ☎ 9am-5pm), a bucolic spot right by the Yarra River, with grazing goats, cows, lambs and ponies, all of which tolerate tiny petting hands. The farm also runs a **Farmers' Market** (☎ 5657 2337; admission \$2; ☎ 8am-1pm 2nd Sat of month), where you can stock up on local organic produce. In a similar vein, **Ceres Community Environment Park** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9387 2609; 8 Lee St, East Brunswick) has plenty of room for youngsters to chase chooks while parents can chow down on delicious organic breakfasts and lunchtime thalis.

The **Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria Australia** (p483) and **ArtPlay** (p483) both have workshops and art classes for budding Rembrandts. Alternatively, take them to the **Eastern Hill Fire Museum** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 2907; 48 Gisborne St, East Melbourne; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 9am-3pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sun), where they can clamber on a fire truck and indulge their fire-fighter fantasies. The Children's Museum at the **Melbourne Museum** (p488) has hands-on exhibits and a squealy-creepy-crawly Bugs Alive! exhibit.

For something more riotous, **Luna Park** (p489) rides summon nerves of steel, and, in the depths of the Dandenongs, a day trip on steam train **Puffing Billy** (p522) is always a huge hit.

Get them out and about – take a frisbee, a football and a picnic and head to the **Children's Garden** (Observatory Precinct, Birdwood Ave; ☎ Wed-Sun) at the Royal Botanic Gardens, or any of the multitude of parks in every neighbourhood. Alternatively head to the beach for a day of slip, slop, slap sea and sun, or to the wave pool and waterslides of the **Melbourne Sports & Aquatic Centre** (p490). Sporty young tackers will enjoy a trip to **AFL World** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8660 5555; www.aflworld.com.au; 292 Swanston St, Melbourne; ☎ 10am-6pm) where activities will have them playing like little Chris Judds.

For more information about local attractions and events, look for the free monthly publication **Melbourne's Child** (www.melbourneschild.com.au), which can be found in cafés and kid-oriented businesses all over town. The Melbourne Visitor Information Centre (p475) stocks **KidFriendly**, a seasonal brochure listing activities, sights and information in Victoria.

TOURS

ABC Melbourne Podtours (www.abc.net.au/melbourne/podtours/) The technological revolution has caught up with local tourism; download these quirky, entertaining and insightful podcasts for insider tours of Melbourne's CBD.

Aboriginal Heritage Walk (☎ 9252 2300; www.rbg.vic.gov.au; Royal Botanic Gardens; adult/child/concession \$15.50/6.50/11; ☎ tours 11am Thu & Fri, 10.30am alternate Sun) This 90-minute tour takes you through the story of the Boonwurrung and Woioorong peoples, the ancestral owners of the Royal Botanic Gardens. Tours depart from the visitor centre.

Bats About Melbourne (☎ 9380 5062; www.batsaboutmelbourne.com; tour \$35) See and hear Melbourne's colony of grey-headed flying foxes under the guidance of a dedicated conservationist.

Blackbird Cruises (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9689 6431; www.blackbirdcruises.com.au; Wingfield St, Footscray; adult/child from \$7/4; ☎ Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun) Offers one- and two-hour cruises along the Maribyrnong River (past the Lonely Planet office).

Chinatown Heritage Walk (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 2888; www.melbournechinatown.com.au; 22 Cohen Pl; adult/concession from \$18/15) Tours of historic Chinatown, with its atmospheric alleys and bustling vibe.

City Circle trams (www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm daily, to 9pm Thu-Sat Dec-Feb) Free trams with informative commentary running every 10 minutes around the city centre.

Hidden Secrets Tours (☎ 9329 9665; www.hiddensecretstours.com; tours \$45-70) Insider tours of the city's bars, boutiques, laneways, cafés and architectural highlights.

Melbourne City Tourist Shuttle (www.thatsmelbourne.com.au; ☎ 10am-4pm) Free and informative 50-minute tour that loops around 15 inner-city sights, including the Melbourne Museum, the Arts Precinct, and Chinatown.

Melbourne River Cruises (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9614 1215; www.melbcruses.com.au; Federation Wharf; adult/child/family \$20/11/50) Yarra cruises.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There's always a festival of some sort happening in Melbourne. Many are thematic, with film, comedy, theatre, sport, food and

wine enticing locals and visitors to revel in Melbourne life. Check out the free, weekly *What's on in Melbourne* guide available at visitor information centres, and click onto www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/events.

January

Australian Open (www.australianopen.com) One of the four Grand Slam tennis events, held at the Melbourne Park Tennis Centre.

Big Day Out (www.bigdayout.com) Nearly 40,000 revellers cut sick to over 40 alternative international and Australian rock bands at this January event.

Midsumma Festival (www.midsumma.org.au) Held Mid-January to early February. Melbourne's annual gay and lesbian arts festival has over 100 events across the city.

February

Chinese New Year (www.melbournechinatown.com.au) The smell of firecrackers mingles with aromas from food stalls as the red dragon dances past. One not to be missed.

St Kilda Festival (www.stkildafestival.com.au) This week-long celebration of local arts and culture is best when the sun's out – bring a hat and your drinking legs.

March

Antipodes Festival (www.antipodesfestival.com.au) Celebrates Greek art, food, culture and music.

Australian Formula One Grand Prix (www.grandprix.com.au) Albert Park gets invaded by the thoroughbreds of the automotive world and their party-loving hangers-on.

St Patrick's Day The mother of all piss-ups is celebrated at pubs (on the 17th) throughout the city.

Melbourne Fashion Festival (www.mff.com.au)

Australia's most beautiful rags adorn catwalks and runways for a week in early March.

Melbourne Food & Wine Festival (www.melbournefoodandwine.com.au) The main gastronomic event of the year takes place in February or March and is highly regarded in Australia and overseas.

Moomba (www.thatsmelbourne.com.au) Ten days of carnivals, fireworks and an outdoor art show, as well as water skiing, a Dragon Boat Festival, and a papier-mâché laden street parade.

Melbourne Queer Film Festival (www.melbournequeerfilm.com.au) The 10-day festival showcases gay artists, with everything from full-length features and animations, to experimental works.

April

Anzac Day Held on the 25 April, the day begins with a dawn service at the Shrine of Remembrance, followed by a march for returned servicemen through the city and two-up with Diggers late into the night.

International Comedy Festival (www.comedyfestival.com.au) Locals are joined by a wealth of international acts performing at venues all over the city.

May

Next Wave Festival (www.nextwave.org.au) Celebrates unpopular culture from Melbourne's next generation of artists. Run biannually and almost entirely by 16- to 25-year-olds.

St Kilda Film Festival (www.stkildafilmmfestival.com.au) Showcasing a selection of contemporary Australian short films and videos.

July

Melbourne International Film Festival (www.melbournefilmfestival.com.au) Two weeks of the newest and the best in local and international film.

August

Melbourne Writers' Festival (www.mwf.com.au) This 10-day festival covers a wide range of literary genres and issues, with local and international authors speaking, reading, quaffing and writing.

September

AFL Grand Final (www.afl.com.au) The AFL final is played on the last Saturday in September and packs pubs, bars and outdoor TV screens to brimming with festive locals.

Melbourne Fringe Festival (www.melbournefringe.com.au) Late September to mid-October. Starts with a parade and street party on Brunswick St. Events to suit a range of tastes and interests.

Royal Melbourne Show (www.royalshow.com.au) The country comes to town for this large-scale agricultural fair at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds in Flemington.

October

Lyon St Festa Italian culture is celebrated with food stalls, bands and dancers on Lyon St.

Melbourne International Arts Festival (www.melbournefestival.com.au) The city's major arts event has a programme that covers theatre, opera, dance and music and revolves around an annual theme.

November

Spring Racing Carnival (www.springracingcarnival.com.au) Held October to November. There are two feature races: the Caulfield Cup (Caulfield Racecourse) and the Melbourne Cup (Flemington Racecourse).

December

Carols by Candlelight (www.rvibcarolsbycandlelight.com.au) Christmas carols under the stars at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

Boxing Day Test (www.mcg.org.au) Held at the MCG, the first day of this annual international test match is Boxing Day.

SLEEPING

Melbourne's sleeping options are broad and of a high standard. During major festivals and events accommodation is scarce, so book in advance. Similar to Sydney and other well-touristed areas, midrange listings in Melbourne cost between \$100 and \$175 for a double room with bathroom. Anything higher than \$175 is regarded as top end; anything less than \$100 is classified as budget. Prices listed in this chapter are for nonpeak seasons. Expect to pay a little more in summer.

Budget

There are backpacker hostels in the city centre and most of the inner suburbs. Several of the larger hostels have courtesy buses that will pick you up from the bus and train terminals.

If you're planning to work or study in Melbourne it's worth looking at **TravelandLive** (www.travelandlive.com.au), which specialises in short- and medium-term apartment accommodation for travellers between the ages of 20 and 35 on study or working holiday visas.

CITY CENTRE

Melbourne Connection Travellers Hostel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9642 4464; www.melbourneconnection.com; 205 King St; dm \$18-27, d & tw \$65-75) This ordered hostel sticks to the smaller-is-better mandate, and comes up trumps. Simple, clean and uncluttered dorms, twins and doubles all come with linen and shared bathrooms; the basement lounge provides a comfy night.

King St Backpackers (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1800 671 115, 9670 1111; www.friendlygroup.com.au; 192-199 King St; dm \$22-28, d \$72-80; ☑) Friendly it is indeed, as well as efficient, clean and supersafe. Pancakes on Sunday, free breakfasts, and half-price AFL tickets are bonuses to the four- to eight-bed dorms, cheery doubles and spotless bathrooms. There's a choice between mixed and single-sex dorms.

Urban Central Backpackers (Map pp476-7; ☎ 1800 631 288, 9639 3700; www.urbancentral.com.au; 334 City Rd, Southbank; dm/d/f from \$23/90/120; ☑) This just-south-of-the-river hostel is pretty much the perfect package. It's new and trendy, houses bright, alabaster dorms, has a great bar

JUST FOR NEIGHBOURS FANS *Alan Fletcher*

For many travellers to Australia, particularly those of British origin, Melbourne is a 'must-see' destination because it is home to the internationally renowned TV programme *Neighbours*. A trip to Melbourne would not be complete without a visit to the legendary Ramsay St – Pin Oak Ct in Vermont South is the suburban street that has been the home of the show for 23 years.

The best way to see Ramsay St and have a true *Neighbours* experience is by taking the **Official Neighbours Tour** (☎ 03 9629 5866; www.neighbourstour.com.au; \$45) It's the only licensed tour and is approved by the residents of Pin Oak Ct. If you're lucky you might see us filming and have the chance to grab a photo and an autograph! Two tours are available: Tour A runs twice daily, Monday to Friday, and visits Ramsay St, Erinsborough High School and includes an exclusive meeting with a *Neighbours* actor! The second, more comprehensive, tour (\$65) visits the street, the school and the outside studio sets of the Lassiter's Complex, Lou's mechanics and Grease Monkeys. This tour runs on the weekends and starts at the **Neighbours Centre** (570 Flinders Street, Melbourne) where you can check out and purchase official *Neighbours* memorabilia.

There are a variety of ways to make the pilgrimage yourself: if you don't have wheels, take the train to Glen Waverley station, then bus 888 or 889 north (get off at Vision Dr near Burwood Hwy). Alternatively, tram 75 from Flinders St will take you all way to the corner of Burwood and Springvale Rd: a short walk brings you to Weeden Dr and Pin Oak Ct is the third street on the left. If you do make the trip, please remember to respect the privacy of residents. Don't do anything in their street or front yards that you wouldn't be happy with in your own street or home!

The Backpacker King also runs a hugely popular **Official Neighbours Trivia Night** (☎ 03 9629 5866; www.neighboursnight.com.au; \$40; Mon & Fri Nov-Apr) at the **Elephant & Wheelbarrow** (Map p481; 169 Fitzroy St, St Kilda), where you have the opportunity to rub shoulders and have your photo taken with some of your favourite *Neighbours* stars. The night is full of entertainment and prizes – call the Backpacker King to book. After meeting the stars, fans are entertained with a one-hour concert by my band The Waiting Room.

Alan Fletcher has worked in every branch of the performing arts for 30 years. He has played Dr Karl Kennedy on Neighbours since 1994.

downstairs (with dangerously cheap happy hours) and the staff are quite fabulous. You'll need to contend with several floors of fellow guests, but that might be just what you're after.

Hotel Bakpak (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9329 7525; www.bakpakgroup.com; 167 Franklin St; dm \$24-30, d with/without bathroom \$95/80, f \$100; ☑) This behemoth offers nearly all the budget traveller could ask for – straightforward rooms sandwiched between the basement bar and rooftop entertainment area with city views. A resource centre assists in job hunting. Reception is open 24 hours, and you get a free (um very light) brekkie.

Greenhouse Backpacker (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1800 249 207, 9639 6400; www.friendlygroup.com.au; Level 6, 228 Flinders Lane; dm/s/d incl breakfast \$30/65/80; ☑) Owned by the same group as King St Backpackers (p486), this low-key, relaxed hostel

is more akin to a hotel. Tucked into a historic laneway, it has spic-and-span facilities, a bevy of freebies and a great rooftop area.

Kingsgate Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 734 171, 9629 4171; www.kingsgatehotel.com.au; 131 King St; d with/without bathroom from \$85/60; ☑) This inner-city hotel was treated to a refurbishment in 2006 and offers budget-savvy guests central, non-nonsense accommodation without the city price tag. Rooms are functional and ideal for those simply in need for spotless digs to rest the head.

City Centre Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 5401; 22 Little Collins St; s/d/f \$70/\$85/110) Catering to all types of holidaymaker, this independent and inconspicuous hotel is great value. The 38 rooms are fresh and sun-kissed with white linen and breezy windows – yes, real air. All share bathrooms and a rooftop boasting swing seats and a true Aussie icon – the Hills hoist.

GAY & LESBIAN MELBOURNE

Melbourne's GLBTI (gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender-intersex) scene is like Melbourne itself – understated, slightly hard to find, but most definitely out! Free street press is a good source of information – look for *Melbourne Star*, **MCV** (www.mcv.net.au), **Bnews** (www.bnews.net.au) and **Lesbiana** (www.lesbiana.com.au) in various bars, clubs and cafés.

The **ALSO Foundation** (☎ 9827 4999; www.also.org.au) is a very helpful community-based organisation whose website boasts a great services directory. If it's gay sounds you're after, tune in to **Joy FM** (www.joy.org.au), Melbourne's gay radio station (and sadly enough, Australia's only gay radio station) – you'll find it at 94.9FM.

Most of the newer generation of bars and clubs in Melbourne are gay- and lesbian-friendly. St Kilda, South Yarra and Prahran are the city's main 'gay precincts', with Prahran's Commercial Rd being the traditional centre of Melbourne's gay culture. Melbourne certainly doesn't rival Sydney when it comes to gay nightlife, but it's much more relaxed than its northern sister. Other gay-friendly neighbourhoods include Collingwood and Abbotsford, with Northcote being a popular spot for lesbians.

Candy Bar (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9529 6566; 162 Greville St, Prahran) is a grinding Greville St fixture. By day it's a sceney café; by night gay-flavoured patrons drink and dance to DJ-played music. Come to watch the balls drop at drag bingo on a Monday night; Sunday is gay and lesbian night.

DT's Hotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9428 5724; 164 Church St, Richmond) This small and intimate gay pub hosts some of Melbourne's best drag shows, retro nights and happy hours.

Girl Bar (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1177; www.theprince.com.au; Prince of Wales, 29 Fitzroy St, St Kilda; admission \$15; ☎ one Fri a month) This popular ladies' night will have you partying with the cliterati 'til the sun comes up. The Prince also has a ground-level gay bar that dates back to the 1940s – it's open daily and is free.

Peel Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4762; cnr Peel & Wellington Sts, Collingwood; admission free) The Peel is one of the best-known and most popular gay venues in Melbourne, but it also attracts a lesbian crowd. It's the last stop of a big night.

Laird Hotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9417 2832; 149 Gipps St, Abbotsford; admission free) Men only. Lots of leather, moustaches, beer and brawn. Who's yer daddy?

XchangeHotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 98675144; 119 Commercial Rd, Prahran; admission free-\$10) A long-standing fixture on the Prahran scene, the Xchange plays host to a variety of customers and covers all the gay bases. A good, fail-safe meeting spot.

Market Hotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9826 0933; 143 Commercial Rd, South Yarra; admission \$10-20) A perennially popular nightclub with good house music keeping things going till the sun comes up, and then some.

NORTH & WEST MELBOURNE

Bev & Mick's Backpackers (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9329 7156; 312 Victoria St, North Melbourne; dm from \$15; ☎ ☎) It ain't flash but this backpackers is so friendly that travellers tend to bunk down for weeks. If you want to feel like one of the family and aren't too fussed about amenities it's a great option.

Melbourne Metro YHA (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9329 8599; www.yha.com.au; 78 Howard St, North Melbourne; dm \$26-30, tw & d with/without bathroom \$88/80, apt \$125; ☎ ☎) A YHA showpiece, this huge hostel is an award-winner and everyone – *everyone* – raves about it. The generous rooms and common areas provide ample space, the rooftop area is breathtaking and facilities include BBQs, a pool table and superfriendly staff.

Melbourne Oasis (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9328 3595; www.yha.com.au; 76 Chapman St, North Melbourne; dm \$27-29 s/tw/d \$56/58/65; ☎ ☎) This YHA is smaller and older than the Melbourne Metro but more intimate and personal in its scope. Rooms are clean and facilities include a BBQ and lovely outdoor area, bike hire, pancake brekkies and movie nights.

FITZROY

ourpick Nunnery (Map p482; ☎ 1800 032 635, 9419 8637; www.nunnery.com.au; 116 Nicholson St; dm \$26-30, s \$65-75, d & tw \$75-110) Easily one of Melbourne's most atmospheric accommodation options, the Nunnery offers a range of non-en suite rooms in three different buildings. All are Victorian-era and sweeping staircases and

ornate stained-glass windows are the norm. Dorms are immaculate and the guesthouses and townhouses are great for those wanting more space and style.

SOUTH YARRA

Hotel Claremont (Map pp476-7; ☎ 1300 301 630, 9826 8000; www.hotelclaremont.com; 189 Toorak Rd; dm/s/d incl breakfast \$35/72/80, apt \$150; ☎ ☎) There's a splash of style about this 1868 heritage building, and the high ceilings and comfortable rooms are a departure from clinical chain motels. It's clean, welcoming and simply decorated, and the sublime lattes of South Yarra are right outside.

ST KILDA

Ritz (Map p481; ☎ 9525 3501; www.ritzbackpackers.com; 169 Fitzroy; dm \$20-25, d from \$50; ☎ ☎) A backpacker institution, this hostel is well proportioned and brilliantly located, opposite Albert Park Lake and five minutes' walk to St Kilda's heart. Ladies will love the female-only area, which includes a kitchen and bathroom.

Coffee Palace (Map p481; ☎ 9534 5283; www.coffeepalacebackpackers.com.au; 24 Grey St; dm \$22-25, tw from \$60; ☎ ☎) But wait, there's more; this hostel has been putting a roof over nomads' noggins for eons, and continues to offer loads of charm, activities and facilities (including a travel desk). Dorms are four- to ten-bedded and there are also doubles with en suite.

Base (Map p481; ☎ 9536 6109; www.basebackpackers.com; 17 Carlisle St; dm \$24-30, d from \$95; ☎ ☎) Easily the flashiest hostel in St Kilda, this well-run place has a colour-coded and seamless interior, a good range of leisure options, natty communal areas and a party vibe. It's also *right* in the thick of things.

Cooee on St Kilda (Map pp476-7; ☎ 1800 202 500, 9537 3777; 333 St Kilda Rd; dm \$24-30, d/f from \$95/125; ☎ ☎) This spanky new and hospital-spotless hostel has outstanding facilities. Dorms are snug but thick comfy mattresses compensate, and families do well in sunny en suites containing three single beds and a double. The bright, timber-clad lounge has plenty of places to park yourself and there's even a sunny beer garden.

Olembia Guesthouse (Map p481; ☎ 9537 1412; www.olembia.com.au; 96 Barkly St; dm/s/d \$26/50/80; ☎ ☎) An elegant option for the quieter traveller, Olembia has cosy rooms, a spacious courtyard and a tidy lounge. It's small and comfortable and bookings are strongly advised.

Cabana Court Motel (Map p481; ☎ 9534 0771; www.cabanacourtapartments.com; 46 Park St; apt \$100; ☎ ☎) Low-rise and low-fuss, this motel has functional apartments that sleep a squishy six or a comfy four. It's in a residential street close to Fitzroy St and great value for groups or families.

SOUTH MELBOURNE

Nomads Market Inn (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9690 2220; 115 Cecil St; dm/d from \$15/40) Close to South Melbourne Market and in a well-pubbed suburb, this modest hostel has plain accommodation, a small kitchen and communal area, and free use of bikes.

ELSEWHERE

Motel Formule 1 (☎ 8336 1811; Caldwell Dr, Tullamarine; r \$70) If you're stuck at the airport for a night with odd-houred flights, this basic hotel has formulaic rooms that suffice for a pitstop.

Midrange

Most of the hotels and motels in this section are rated three stars, and they're comfortable but sometimes a little cramped. Doubles usually cost the same as singles.

There are some excellent B&Bs in Melbourne, many of which are at least as comfortable as a four-star hotel but charge much less.

Melbourne also has a generous range of apartment-style hotels and serviced apartments, with self-contained facilities.

Useful contacts for apartment deals:

Oakford (☎ 1800 811 118; www.oakford.com)

Quest (☎ 1800 334 033; www.questapartments.com.au)

Punt Hill (☎ 1300 731 299; www.punthill-apartments.com.au)

CITY CENTRE

Victoria Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9653 0441; www.victoriahotel.com.au; 215 Little Collins St; s/d from \$80/115; ☎ ☎ ☎) Melbourne was just a spring chicken when 'the Vic' opened its doors in 1880, and this hotel has managed to age just as gracefully. Brilliantly located, it offers a flexible range of rooms with the option of shared or private bathrooms.

Hotel Enterprize (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9629 6991; www.hotelenterprize.com.au; 44 Spencer St; r \$85-160; ☎ ☎) The Enterprize is a small and reasonably priced hotel, with good facilities for the business traveller. The budget rooms are plain and well-maintained and the business rooms have elegant wood furnishings, baths, views and more space. Aim for a room on the 4th floor.

Astoria City Travel Inn (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9670 6801; www.astoriainternational.com; 288 Spencer St; r \$100-130; (P) (♿)) Swathed in those matching pastel bedspread-and-curtain combos that afflict so many Australian midrange hotels, the Astoria manages to rise above the identikit doldrums by offering evidence of an admirable love of cleanliness. Rooms have microwaves and small bathrooms. Longer stays are worth a haggle.

Rendezvous Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9250 1888; www.rendezvous.com; 328 Flinders St; r \$130-190; (♿)) Built in 1913, this regal property has the exclusive and personal ambience of a boutique hotel, but the contemporary and sleek rooms you would now expect. Sweeping staircases, a stunning interior balcony and heritage listing add to the charm.

Robinsons in the City (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9329 2552; www.robinsonsinthecity.com.au; 405 Spencer St; r from \$135; (P)) Sweet, neat and petite, Robinsons sits quietly on the city fringe and dishes up six bedrooms with modern, stylish furnishings. The classic brickwork exterior belies the classy innards.

Atlantis Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9600 2900; www.atlantishotel.com.au; 300 Spencer St; r from \$140; (P) (♿)) The rooms at this conveniently situated hotel are pretty damn smart, with not a whiff of chintz or froufrou. Instead you get designer-styled, low-slung interiors and subtle lighting. The Docklands and Southern Cross Station are super close.

Batman's Hill (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9614 6344; www.batmanshill.com.au; 66-70 Spencer St; r \$155-175; (P)) Beneath a heritage-listed façade you'll find a trendy interior and great value. Standard rooms are diminutive, but the newbie Club rooms and apartments boast excellent views, furniture and space.

Quest Hero (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8664 8500; www.questapartments.com.au; 140 Little Collins St; apt from \$175; (♿) (♿)) These apartments are so well-equipped that the dishwashers, beautifully-kitted kitchens, stereos and videos will dazzle you into ignoring the utterly nondescript décor. Fabulous value for families (with a babysitting service).

Also available:

City Square Motel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 7011; www.citysquaremotel.com.au; 67 Swanston St; s/d/tr/f \$80/105/115/125) Central and no-fills motel.

Mercure Hotel Melbourne (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9205 9999; www.accorhotels.com.au; 13 Spring St; r from \$125; (P) (♿)) Clinical charm in the 'Paris' end of town.

NORTH MELBOURNE

Punt Hill (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9650 1299; www.northmelbourne.punthill.com.au; 113 Flemington Rd; apt from \$150; (P) (♿)) Choose from a studio, one- or two-bedroom apartment at this reasonable property just north of the CBD. All are sun-kissed and well-equipped and there's a communal laundry. Good for longer stays.

CARLTON

Rydges Carlton (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 7811; www.rydges.com; 701 Swanston St; r from \$145; (P) (♿) (♿)) Polished, no-nonsense and four-star; Rydges prides itself on good amenities and justly so. Rooms are semirenovated and sleep up to three. The pricier 'Parkview' versions have views and more space and there's a heated rooftop pool and spa-sauna room.

Downtowner on Lygon (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9663 5555; www.downtowner.com.au; 66 Lygon St; r from \$150; (P) (♿) (♿)) This popular, amicable and perpetually busy hotel has a central courtyard for parking and a variety of rooms. Unfortunately most are pretty dark, but the more you pay the brighter they get; you should be out and about, gorging on pasta down the road anyway.

FITZROY

Quest on Lygon (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9345 3888; www.questapartments.com.au; 700 Lygon St; apt from \$130; (P) (♿)) These one- and two-bedroom apartments are opposite the Melbourne General Cemetery and have been refurbished to a good standard (with fully equipped kitchens and laundries). The pantry shopping and babysitting services, and tour desk, make them ideal for families.

King Boutique Accommodation (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9417 1113; www.kingaccomm.com.au; 122 Nicholson St; r incl breakfast \$150-195) The very embodiment of boutique, this elegant building has just three individually styled rooms and communal areas with designer flourishes. The fabulous location, between Fitzroy's main strip and the Carlton Gardens prompts early bookings.

EAST MELBOURNE

George Powlett Apartments (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9419 9488; www.georgepowlett.com.au; cnr George & Powlett Sts; apt \$95-105; (P) (♿)) These studio apartments are a tad frumpy and weary, but at these rates who cares. All come with kitchenettes and some have balconies. Access to the CBD is by foot through the glorious Fitzroy Gardens

and you're close enough to hear the crowds roar at the MCC.

Georgian Court (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9419 6353; www.georgiancourt.com.au; 21 George St; s \$90-110, d \$110-140; (P) (♿) (♿)) Like nanna's china – some things maintain their charm despite a few chinks around the edges. This gently crumbling mansion has small rooms and wonderful communal areas, reminiscent of a British period comedy. It's popular with families, rates include breakfast, and the pricier rooms are with en suite.

Knightsbridge Apartments (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9419 1333; www.knightsbridgeapartments.com.au; 101 George St; apt \$115-200; (P) (♿)) This spot provides well-equipped and well-furnished studio apartments, replete with thick carpets, four-poster beds and modern facilities. If you're not quick enough to score a room with a teensy courtyard, try for Room 7, 8 or 9 for the flourish of sunlight.

TOORAK & SOUTH YARRA

Albany South Yarra (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9866 4485; www.thealbany.com.au; cnr Toorak Rd & Millslyn St, South Yarra; r \$95-180; (P) (♿)) Myriad sleeping configurations range from old-world mansion-wing glamour to functional, Aussie-style motel rooms suited to less fussy travellers. The airy and minimal 'Executive' rooms are best, and there are shared kitchen and laundry facilities.

Toorak Manor (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9827 2689; www.toorakmanor.citysearch.com.au; 220 Williams Rd; r \$155-220; (P)) This graceful boutique hotel is set in a historic mansion and decked to the hilt in chintz and chiffon. Rooms are period-style and comfortable, and there are lovely gardens and cosy lounges.

ST KILDA

Hotel Tolarno (Map p481; ☎ 9537 0200; www.hoteltolarno.com.au; 42 Fitzroy St; r from \$120; (♿) (♿)) Tolarno has etched itself into the St Kilda psyche and the wised staff will be more than willing to assist you get under the suburb's skin. The retro rooms are snug and vividly coloured, and encompass standard rooms, two-room suites with kitchenettes, and a spiffy penthouse.

Fountain Terrace (Map p481; ☎ 9593 8123; www.fountainterrace.com.au; 28 Mary St; r incl breakfast from \$140) There are only seven rooms at this boutique B&B, and they've all been spectacularly appointed in honour of famous Aussies, so book ahead. Top billing goes to the lavish Melba Suite (after Dame Nellie) with three rooms accessing the front veranda.

More options:

Novotel St Kilda (Map p481; ☎ 9525 5522; www.novotel.com; 14-16 The Esplanade; r from \$150; (P) (♿)) Generic and dependable chain hotel in a superb location.

Marque (Map p481; ☎ 8530 8888; www.rendezvous-hotels.com; 35 Fitzroy St; r from \$180; (P) (♿) (♿)) Small, sassy and oozing with 'pamper me' style.

Top End

Melbourne's top-end accommodation is varied and plentiful. There are dozens of five-star chain hotels that will find you before you find them. Generally, you'll find a range of packages and deals on offer via the internet. Parking is often of the valet variety and can incur a charge of between \$12 and \$25 per day.

CITY CENTRE

Hotel Lindrum (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9668 1111; www.hotel.lindrum.com.au; 26 Flinders St; r \$240-500; (P) (♿) (♿)) This opulent establishment is bathed in rich tones, sueded furnishing and deliciously low lighting. Once, the pool hall of legendary player Walter Lindrum, it now boasts a range of indulgent rooms, some of which have wheelchair access. Exclusive to the hilt, it's devoid of attitude or pretension.

Windsor Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9633 6000; www.thewindsor.com.au; 103 Spring St; r from \$350; (P) (♿) (♿)) The queen of the scene is the stately Windsor, Melbourne's 'Grand Lady', graced by old-fashioned, haute-luxe embellishments. Built in 1883 she has hosted the who's who of royalties – from Buckingham Palace to the West End to heavy metal. Her five-star rooms are simply fabulous, and no request is too great.

Adelphi (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 7555; www.adelphi.com.au; 187 Flinders Lane; r \$560-1250; (P) (♿) (♿)) The landmark Adelphi is superlative quality packaged in architectural splendour. Open plan rooms contain furnishings and fittings by internationally acclaimed architects, and the cantilevered lap pool allows you to swim right past the edge of the building and suspend yourself over Collins St.

SOUTH YARRA

The Lyall (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9868 8222; www.thelyall.com; 14 Murphy St; r from \$400; (P) (♿) (♿)) This slick and elegant boutique property sits in a quiet, leafy street in one of Melbourne's priciest pockets. The earthy colour scheme is offset by dramatic art and the commodious rooms are appointed with fine mod cons and five-star luxuries.

ST KILDA

Prince (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1111; www.theprince.com.au; 2 Adland St; r \$200-630; 📍 📺 📶) This beautifully furnished boutique hotel seeps minimalist luxury – the fabulous location only adds to its appeal. Service is discreet, smart and considerate, and eating and entertainment options on the premises mean you need never leave its environs.

Camping

Ashley Gardens Big 4 Holiday Village (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9318 6661; www.ashleygardens.com.au; 129 Ashley St, Braybrook; powered sites from \$31, cabins from \$70-135; 📍 📺 📶 📶) Only 9km from the city centre, this is a well-run, spacious park with excellent facilities. The priciest digs are state-of-the-art cabins. You can get here from the city centre via bus 220, which departs from Flinders St Station.

EATING

In this country of fabulous dining, Melbourne is unsurpassed. Not only for the diversity of cuisines, restaurants, cafés, delicatessens, markets, bistros, brasseries and takeaways, but the sheer value for your buck. For \$10 to \$20 you can fuel up on bum-burning curry, a pub roast, gourmet pizza, fragrant Vietnamese, hearty Burmese, tangy Middle Eastern, Spanish tapas, spicy African...flavours from every corner of the globe. The variety comes in authentic packages or moulded and fused into the city's very own version of Mod Oz. Fine contemporary dining is also abundant for gastronomes with hard-to-please palates and carefree wallets.

City Centre & Docklands

Melbourne's Chinatown runs along Little Bourke St from Spring St to Swanston St. Chinese restaurants predominate, but you can also find Greek, Indian, Japanese and Mod Oz cuisines.

Flinders Lane, Centre Pl, Degraives St, Hardware Lane and their adjoining alleyways are packed with cafés, hole-in-the-wall favourites, restaurants and wonderful little bars. Federation Sq and the Docklands also have a host of glam eateries.

Lounge (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 2916; 1st fl, 243 Swanston St; mains \$10-15) This student stomping ground teems with next generation's visual artists and sound engineers, all perfecting their pool and social skills. No-fuss bar service

and a scrummy menu of lamb salad, chicken parma, Massaman curry and overflowing nachos keeps them seated.

Movida (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 3038; 1 Hosier Lane; tapas \$10-15; 📍 lunch & dinner) Pull together a small group, nab a table and share a round of the innovative tapas this subtly slick restaurant is known for; rabbit meatballs braised with calamari and lemon myrtle, spicy steak tartare, or slow-cooked organic lamb Pyrenees-style. The wine list is suitably fabulous.

Pellegrini's Espresso Bar (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 1885; 66 Bourke St; mains \$12-14; 📍 lunch & dinner) This family-run 1950s-style espresso bar hasn't changed in years. A gleaming coffee machine (allegedly the first in Melbourne) churns out the good stuff and mama brews good honest pasta and sauces from scratch out the back.

Supper Inn (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 4759; 15 Celestial Ave; mains \$15-30; 📍 dinner) Open until late (2.30am) and serving some of the best late-night congee, noodles, dumplings and other Cantonese standards to a mixed crowd. Get in very early, or very late; otherwise you'll be queuing with the devoted.

our pick **Ginger Boy** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 4200; 27-29 Crossley St; mains \$25-35; 📍 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Carving a new niche of chic, Ginger Boy indulges demanding city punters with aromatic cocktails at a slick bar, and contemporary Asian hawker dishes in a decadent restaurant with a touch of disco to it. Aesthetics aside the food is superlative; steamed half-shell scallops with green chilli sambal, minced pork *nam prik ong*, corn cakes worth fasting for and a signature ox cheek dish that quite literally melts in the mouth.

Becco (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 3000; 11-25 Crossley St; mains \$25-30; 📍 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This sexy little package rolls a bar and restaurant into one and serves classic and modern Italian cuisine. It's cool and comfortable and draws an eclectic crowd.

Taxi (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 8808; www.transporthotel.com.au; 1st fl, Transport Hotel, Federation Sq; mains \$35-40; 📍 lunch & dinner) Within an industrial-chic hangar of glass, steel and concrete, this award-winning restaurant treats diners to river views and some of the country's finest Mod Oz, like tamarind-scented gazpacho with crayfish and avocado, or roast duck citrus salad with sour plum dressing.

The city is treated to some great Japanese eateries, from hole-in-the-wall sushi joints to student hangouts with heartier fare. Among

PUB GRUB

Melbourne's pub grub competes with the city's abundant restaurants so the standard of a counter meal here is high. Most locals can fill the belly with anything from a burger to seared swordfish for \$10 to \$20. The following are highly recommended.

Union (Map p482; ☎ 9417 2926; 164 Gore St, Fitzroy; mains \$12-18; 📍 lunch & dinner) Multicultural nosh mixes chickpeas, curries, seafood and pasta in surprise packages of nummits.

Napier Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4240; 210 Napier St, Fitzroy; mains \$12-20; 📍 lunch & dinner) Eclectic, global menu and Melbourne's best steak sanga, served overflowing on Turkish bread.

Standard (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4793; 293 Fitzroy St, Fitzroy; mains \$12-25; 📍 lunch & dinner) Chicken parmans so big they outdo the plate, fabulous pizzas, tangy salads and spiffy bar bites.

Town Hall (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9328 1983; 33 Errol St, North Melbourne; mains \$15-20; 📍 lunch & dinner) Scuzzy rock pub with good honest pub nosh.

London Tavern (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9428 8074; 238 Lennox St, Richmond; mains \$15-25; 📍 lunch & dinner) Vegetarian hotpots, couscous and prawn salads, dependable fish and chips, and all in a fabulous beer garden.

Grace Darling Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9416 0055; 114 Smith St, Collingwood; mains \$15-27; 📍 lunch & dinner) Culinary excellence – the seafood risotto is one of the city's best, the bar menu is cheap and inventive and the hearty mains feature European, Asian and Mod Oz influence.

the best are **Kuni's** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 7243; 56 Little Bourke St; mains \$13-27; 📍 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri), for delicate noodle dishes, **Don Don** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9670 3377; 321 Swanston St; mains \$5-7.50; 📍 lunch Mon-Fri) for great *ben-tō* (boxed lunches) and **Yu-u** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9639 7073; 137 Flinders Lane; mains \$8-15; 📍 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri), which is so popular you may need to book.

More good central eats:

Mecca Bah (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9642 1300; 55a NewQuay Promenade, Docklands; mains \$16-20; 📍 lunch & dinner) Spicy Middle Eastern fare.

Il Solito Posto (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 4466; 113 Collins St; mains \$24-35; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A basement favourite serving sensational Italian staples.

Southbank

Southgate's river and city skyline views make it a prime eating destination for visitors to Melbourne. It's also only a short stroll to the galleries, theatres and gardens of Kings Domain.

Blue Train (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9696 0111; Mid Level, Southgate; mains \$8-18; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Semi-alfresco with great river and city views, this loud, gay-friendly and hugely popular place dishes up earnest salads, curries, stir-fries, wood-fired pizzas and seafood at good prices. It's ideal for families and groups.

Bearbrass (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9682 3799; Ground fl, Southgate; mains \$15; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This casual riverside snug has the full compliment for beautifully boozy afternoons; long bench seating for groups, outdoor tables with river and promenade views, global bar bites and

inventive mains, laid-back staff and a delicious selection of local and imported beers.

Walter's Wine Bar (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9690 9211; Upper Level, Southgate; mains \$25-35; 📍 lunch & dinner) Wine is Walter's passion and there's over 20 pages of it on the menu. You can compliment that glass of Grange Hermitage with moreish Italian fare and a delicious bar menu.

North Melbourne

Courthouse Dining Room (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9329 5394; 86 Errol St; mains \$22-27; 📍 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Fans of nouveau gastropub fare will be in heaven here – the international menu features succulent food and fine wine, and service is helpful.

Carlton

Tagged 'Little Italy' many moons ago, Lygon St now infuses a host of multicultural flavours alongside the pasta bars and Italian restaurants. You won't have difficulty getting a meal or a table here and a stroll usually involves ample invites from restaurateurs plying for business.

Tiamo (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 5759; 303 Lygon St; mains \$11-16; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This historic Lygon St institution dishes up generous portions of tasty pasta and traditional Italian cuisine. The older Italian gentlemen fastened to their espressos at the front window aren't part of the décor but they certainly add to it.

Shakahari (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 3848; 201-203 Faraday St; mains \$15-17; 📍 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Vegetarians unite. Long-running Shakahari offers

THE CHOCOLATE SNOWBALL *Katie Horner*

Wandering around Melbourne's laneways you may come across people with a glazed look in their eyes and a trace of chocolate on their lips. More than likely, they've been wolfing down a Belgium Chocolate Mousse Martini or Chocolate Tapas at one of Melbourne's newest dining experiences – the chocolate café. Read on if you dare to give into your hankerings ...

- **Koko Black** Melbourne (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9639 8911; Shop 4, Royal Arcade, 335 Bourke St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 8.30pm Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat, 10am-5.30pm Sun); Carlton (☎ 9349 2775; 167 Lygon St; ☎ as above) The name alone has your mouth watering before you step into their 'salons' so you'd better watch out for previous patrons' drool near the rows of chocolate treats. A classy establishment serving coffee with a choccy bent, as well as selling boxes of goodies to take away for presents – or for yourself!
- **Max Brenner** Melbourne Central (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 4442; Shop OE5, Menzies Alley, 300 La Trobe St, Melbourne; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, 10am-10pm Sun); QV (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 6000; 25-27 Red Cape Lane, Level 2, QV Sq, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon & Tue, to 10pm Wed & Thu, to 11pm Fri, 10am-11pm Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) Enormous tubs of swirling chocolate goodness. Chilli chocolate concoctions; waffles to make you weep; Max Brenner knows how to treat the sweetest tooth. Two locations within waddling distance of each other; it's almost wrong not to experience both.
- **Chocolate Fire** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 5881; Shop 8, The Hub Arcade 318 Little Collins St, Melbourne) If you are a reclusive chocoholic, this little gem is off Block Arcade, tucked away from the madding crowd. Enjoy your chocolate-covered fruit and other quirky delicacies sneakily. A choice find.
- **Chocolateria San Churro** (Map p482; ☎ 9419 9936; 277b Brunswick St, Fitzroy) Chocolate is an international language and if the sign on the door is anything to go by, worshipping it is not pushing the boundaries either. San Churro prides itself on the 60% cocoa content in their goods and their chocolate tapas plate is to be admired. Undo a notch on the belt and get stuck in!

inspired and delicious veggie food, including some mock-meat dishes.

Abla's (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 0006; 109 Elgin St; mains \$20; ☎ lunch Thu & Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Melbourne's best-loved Lebanese restaurant is often booked solid, and the culinary genius of chef and proprietor Abla Amad's is so good it's inspired an entire cookbook. On Friday and Saturday nights there's a compulsory 13-course banquet; BYO vino and don the elasticised pants.

Jimmy Watson's (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 3985; 333 Lygon St; mains \$25-30; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Wine and talk are the order of the day at this long-running wine bar-restaurant. The fare is European, Middle Eastern and a dash of Mod Oz, with a nod to ingredients such as kangaroo.

Fitzroy, Collingwood & North Fitzroy

Brunswick St is a key box to tick on your 'eating tour of Melbourne' checklist. The prevailing mood is alternative, fashionable, multicultural and arty all at the same time, and all palates are catered for.

Babka Bakery Café (Map p482; ☎ 9416 0091; 358 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; dishes \$7-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) Famous for its breads, pastries and eternally wholesome-looking waitresses. Also famous for its sensational breakfasts, massive sandwiches, blinis and borscht.

our pick Bebida (Map p482; ☎ 9419 5260; 325 Smith St, Fitzroy; dishes \$7-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) As good as a local gets. This teeny tapas bar extends its diminutive interior by opening up wide bay windows to let happy chatter, live music and the scent of freshly baked chorizo spill out onto the street. A solo effort with the newspapers is greeted just as warmly as a group up for a good night out, the food is first-rate and inexpensive, and the beer selection is good.

Veggie Bar (Map p482; ☎ 9417 6935; www.vegiebar.com.au; 380 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; mains \$10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sat & Sun) You'd be missing out if you skipped the Veggie Bar's tempeh, semolina and other creations just because they lack cow. The burritos require an all day fast beforehand and honest Aussie beer is served by the stubby.

Gluttony it's a Sin (Map p482; ☎ 9416 0336; 278 Smith St, Collingwood; mains \$10-16) It's all about the breakfasts and cakes, and boy does Gluttony live up to its name. Corn, sourdough and cheese breads spill up seared mushrooms and eggs, but the main event is the sweet stuff; if there's a Mod Oz cake it come in all varieties here.

Moroccan Soup Bar (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9482 4240; 183 St Georges Rd, North Fitzroy; mains \$12-15; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This squishy, brightly coloured soup bar is a vegetarian's haven. There's no menu, just the renowned owner who rattles off a list of soups, starters and heavenly North African tagine.

Marios (Map p482; ☎ 9417 3343; 303 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; mains \$12-18) This sceney café is one of Brunswick St's originals, and the whole world knows it. Ignore the full tables, order a coffee and settle in for a short wait; the all-day breakfasts and tasty pastas are well worth it.

Ladro (Map p482; ☎ 9415 7575; 224 Gertrude St, Fitzroy; pizzas \$12-20; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) Getting a table in Ladro requires begging, borrowing and selling your first-born. Expect to be served excellent pizza and to be rushed out the door. Bookings essential.

Afghan Gallery (Map p482; ☎ 9417 2430; 327 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; mains \$13-18; ☎ dinner) What began as a venture to provide work for Afghani refugees some 20 years ago has become a Fitzroy fave. The wine list offers about four options so BYO, but the spicy kebabs, hearty *gorma* (seasoned carnivorous stew), tangy curries and other authentic fare is divine.

Richmond

Victoria St is Melbourne's 'Little Saigon' and the turf between Hoddle and Church Sts is packed with Asian grocers, discount shops, fishmongers and myriad places to clack your chopsticks. Bridge Rd and Swan St offer an abundance of cafés and restaurants with plenty of global flavours.

Groove Train (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9421 4433; 314 Bridge Rd; meals \$8-16) We love a casual spot with old-school space invaders in the corner, newspapers tossed around comfy sofas, and wide open bay windows. We like this one in particular for the eggplant chips and stylish pub-nosh menu. Breakfasts in the sun here can (and have) turned into all-day affairs.

Dan Hung (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9427 9984; 140 Victoria St; mains \$10-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) In a sea of Thai and Vietnamese restaurants Dan Hung delivers on the very simple promise of good food at great prices. The specials board hasn't changed in

about five years, but the chilli salted squid and beef in vine leaves are so special they deserve to be up there for another ten.

Minh Minh (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9427 7981; 94 Victoria St; mains \$12-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) Minh Minh's service varies from warm and cheeky to outright rude. If it's the latter, dish it right back and concentrate on the spicy and fragrant food. The menu here is long and authentic and includes the best *laab nuea* (Lao beef salad) in Melbourne.

Richmond Hill Café & Larder (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9421 2808; 48 Bridge Rd; mains \$13-28; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Carefully prepared bistro fare is served at this popular bar-restaurant and *fromagerie* (cheese shop). It's an open, unfussy space and the food is stylish Mediterranean.

Fenix (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9427 8500; www.fenix.com.au; 680 Victoria St; mains \$35; ☎ lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sat & Sun) Fenix turns dining into an adventure, dishing up experimental textures and flavours to inquisitive gastronomes. The delicate degustation menu does much to please discerning diners, as does the leafy, river location.

South Yarra, Toorak, Prahran & Windsor

Commercial Rd features the Prahran Market and plenty of gay-friendly eateries – its sita strip is the high-profile, style-policed Greville St. South Yarra's and Toorak's affluent eateries are dotted along Toorak Rd and Chapel St. The grungier Windsor end of Chapel St is home to cafés as comfy as your cardigan.

Prahran Market (Map pp476-7; www.prahranmarket.com.au; 163-185 Commercial Rd, Prahran; ☎ dawn-5pm Tue & Sat, dawn-6pm Thu & Fri, 10am-4pm Sun) A top-quality produce market, with several organic-produce stores (including an organic butcher), a fresh-pasta store, bountiful delis, and a food court for grazing on the move.

Globe (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9510 8693; 218 Chapel St, Prahran; meals \$8-17) Get in early to secure a breakfast seat and pack an appetite for Spanish chorizo, tomato and egg bake, a Vietnamese omelette or pesto-drenched poached eggs. The burgers are stacked and by night it turns into a sultry little drinking den.

Borsch, Vodka & Tears (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9530 2694; 173 Chapel St, Prahran; mains \$15-19; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Thu-Sun, dinner Mon-Wed) A fabulous Polish place serving around 100 strains of vodka and modern Polish food. The ambience is shabby-chic with low-lighting and lots of sincere conversation.

Basque (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9533 7044; 159 Chapel St, Prahran; mains \$16-20) This stylish tapas-style bar serves delicious Spanish bites amid dim lighting and chilled chatter. Park yourself at a table or bench seat and settle into a good red.

Orange (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9529 1644; 126 Chapel St, Windsor; mains \$20-30) Orange's Bloody Mary breakfasts are a fine way to start the day (or continue the night before) and the more subtle lunch and dinner fare is inventive and delicious. By the time you've finished dinner and that bottle of plonk the whole place gives way to its alter-ego as a bar.

Jacques Reymond (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9525 2178; 78 Williams Rd, Prahran; 2-course menu \$80, degustation menu from \$140; ☎ lunch Thu & Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Superlative flavours, cuisine, presentation and service comes at a price, but this Melbourne institution delivers all in spades. Specialising in degustation, Jacques introduces diners to steamed mullo-head (fish) and ginger vichyssoise, black lasagne of crab or seared wallaby tenderloin. It's mind-blowingly artful and flavoursome.

For excellent hawker food and yum cha head to **David's** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9529 5199; 4 Cecil Pl, South Yarra; dishes \$10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) or **Koi** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9827 9297; 133 Commercial Rd, Prahran; dishes \$10-17; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon).

St Kilda

Fitzroy and Acland Sts are where you'll find the majority of cafés and restaurants. There are some mainstays by the sea, too.

Lentil as Anything (Map p481; ☎ 9534 5833; 41 Blessington St; prices at customer's discretion; ☎ lunch & dinner) What's the clincher? Is it the organic and vegetarian ingredients? Or the Moroccan, Japanese, Indian, Vietnamese or Sri Lankan flavours? That it's a nonprofit enterprise? Or perhaps the fact that you decide how much your meal is worth, and that it's worth a mint.

Claypots (Map p481; ☎ 9534 1282; 213 Barkly St; mains \$10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This excellent restaurant can't be bothered with décor; all the effort goes into unbearably good spicy seafood claypots with African and Asian flavours. Get busy with your hands – those prawns won't shell themselves – and arrive early to beat the crowds.

Soul Mama (Map p481; ☎ 9525 3338; Shop 10, St Kilda Sea Baths, 10 Jacka Blvd; mains \$15-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Soul Mama's all-vegetarian, guilt-free, soul-warming food is presented cafeteria style – putting the glam in *bain-marie* dining. Service

is fast paced, the queues long, and the sea views unrivalled.

Bedouin Kitchen (Map p481; ☎ 9534 0888; 103 Grey St; mains \$15-25; ☎ dinner) Blood-red walls and Moroccan light fittings set the scene for sharing excellent meze dishes. The menu boasts a few bamboozlers, but the staff are culinary encyclopaedias, so be risqué. Vegetarian options lord it over the meat dishes, but it's all goooooood.

Ciccolina (Map p481; ☎ 9525 3333; 130 Acland St; mains \$20-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) This dark and intimate bustling institution doesn't take reservations, and it's always packed. The mod-Med menu offers prosciutto-wrapped baked figs with blue-vein cheese and earthier pastas. A snug bolt hole of a bar out the back sorts out the queue.

Circa (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1122; www.circa.com.au; 2a Acland St; set lunch per person mains \$30-35) Sexy and sophisticated, this culinary hotspot sits within the chichi hotel, the Prince (p500). The food is fabulous, from the degustation (including vegetarian) right down to the supremely accessible breakfast.

Café di Stasio (Map p481; ☎ 9525 3999; 31 Fitzroy St; mains \$32-38; ☎ lunch & dinner) Café di Stasio thoroughly deserves its reputation as the best Italian restaurant in Melbourne. The sublime cuisine pushes good meat dishes and the two-course lunch (including a glass of wine) is excellent value.

Self-Catering

Supermarkets, often open 24 hours or until midnight, are found in most suburbs – Coles and Safeway are the names to look out for.

Victoria St in Richmond is the place to go for cheap produce and Asian ingredients, and major markets, bursting with fresh produce and gourmet deli items, include Queen Victoria Market (p484) and Prahran Market (p503).

DRINKING

Melbourne has a famously lively drinking scene. You'll find bars hidden down tiny alleys, at the top of darkened staircases and perched atop most luxury hotels.

City Centre

Cookie (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 7660; 1st fl, 252 Swanston St) Stylish and cheeky, this upstairs bar tiles its high walls with kitschy books and vinyl, and pours fine European, Asian and Oz beers.

The wine list is commendable, and the Thai inspired tapas classy. Style cats line up at the bar but jeans and a T-shirt are just as welcome.

Phoenix (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 4976; 82 Flinders St) Three levels of jungle-printed, suede-couched, polished-timbered and plush-carpeted style ensure plenty of atmosphere at this CBD fave. It's unpretentious, and everyone from high-powered suits to empty-pocketed students fits right in.

Order of Melbourne (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 6707; Level 2, 401 Swanston St) Hidden capily above the 'Druids Club', this cavernous bar suspends industrial art from the ceiling and slips a happy, mixed crowd into cushioned corner booths. High-arched windows climb to the lofty ceiling and the bar mixes fine cocktails. A teeny bar-garden up top is open till 10pm.

Prudence (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9329 9267; 368 Victoria St, West Melbourne) More local watering hole than inner-city chic, gorgeous Prudence lays out a snug and delicious spread of tables, bar stools, upstairs drinking rooms, and a downstairs courtyard. Groups ham it up by the open fireplace and bohemian locals concentrate on chess by the window.

Golden Monkey (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9602 2055; Hardware Lane) Decked out like a stylish opium den, Golden Monkey lulls patrons into a happy stupor with decadent cocktails, fine wine and Asian tapas. Tables muddle behind Asian screens or you can perch yourself at the wee bar.

Pony (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 5917; 68 Little Collins St) If too much rock and roll is barely enough, you can party hearty at Pony. It's the kind of place where the distinction between 'riff' and ear-deafening noise is vague, but the crowds are always good fun.

Transport (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9658 8808; Transport Hotel, Federation Sq) This ultramodern, glass-walled pub occupies an enviable position for people and river watching. It's big, brassy and busy. On Friday nights it's shoulder to backbone with yuppies on the prowl. One floor up is **Taxi** (p500) and the third floor is devoted to the decadent **Transit Lounge**, with gorgeous leather couches, intimate corners and a spectacular wine and spirits menu.

Manchuria (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 1996; 1 Waratah Pl) This dark and luscious warren of cosy booths and tables is dedicated to indulgent nightcaps. Hedonistic cocktails are the speciality, and the martini recipes almost require a degree.

St Jerome's (Map pp478-9; 7 Caledonian Lane) Coming here on a weekend is an exercise in frustration, but stumbling upon this back-alley hidey-hole (with a great backyard) on a weeknight or afternoon is sure to thrill. The crowd's friendly, the DJs experimental.

More city drinking:

Carlton Hotel (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 3216; 193 Bourke St) Copacabana meets Las Vegas (Hunter S Thompson style).

Cherry (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9639 8122; AC/DC Lane) Old-school rock, goth gay bikers and so antichic it's crusty.

Double Happiness (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 4488; 21 Liverpool St)...lies in a cocktail at this tiny, socialist-inspired space.

Fitzroy

Fitzroy is hands-down the best pub suburb in Melbourne but there are ample bars as well. In and around Brunswick and Smith Sts is the most obvious hunting ground.

Standard (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4793; 293 Fitzroy St) Boasting one of the best beer gardens in Melbourne, The Standard is anything but its moniker. Down-to-earth bar staff and a truly eclectic crowd enhance an atmosphere defined by live music, footy on the small screen, and loud and enthusiastic chatter.

Napier Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4240; 210 Napier St) A short stroll from Brunswick St, the Napier is the archetypal 'local'. It's dark and laid back, there's a small beer garden, the pub-grub portions are massive, and sharks wage battle around the pool tables.

Builders Arms Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 0818; 211 Gertrude St) Recently reinvented, the Builders Arms is a stylised injection into Fitzroy's drinking scene. The wide-open bar is a subdued mulch of low-lighting and couches, and the restaurant serves fabulous food in deliciously lavish surroundings.

Polly (Map p482; ☎ 9417 0880; 401 Brunswick St) Polly melds a luxe sensibility and slick service with lots of ornate carved wood and plush velvet. Ease yourself into a lounge and peruse the extensive drinks list – you're not going anywhere in a hurry.

Monties (Map p482; ☎ 9419 3344; 347 Smith St) A big round bar, an open space with barn-high ceilings adorned in contemporary art, and comfy booths and window seats make Monties a local's favourite. Even if you live across the city, or the world, you'll feel like a neighbour. It's casual, chatty and charming.

VICTORIAN MICROBREWERIES *Rowan McKinnon*

Victoria has seen a recent explosion of boutique breweries, and a profusion of handmade beers coming into specialist liquor stores and hotels. With more than 20 microbreweries around Victoria, we thought, in the interests of research, we should recommend a few to the good folk who read this guidebook.

We chose **Mrs Parma's** (☎ 9639 2269; www.mrsparmas.com.au; 25 Little Bourke St, Melbourne; ☎ 11am-late Mon-Fri, 3pm-late Sat), the 'all-Victorian beer bar', to get to the bottom (time and again!) of the vexing question of Victoria's best microbrewed beer.

The judges were authors Justine, George, Rowan and Alan, all partial to a tippie; we made our way through quite a few of Victoria's pilsners, porters, ales, lagers, stouts and wheat beers. Most were pretty good, some were rather underwhelming, one tasted like Tiger Balm and another like formaldehyde.

Highly commended, for sheer strength of character, was the Brewers' Beechworth Dark Ale (see p581) – a smoky molasses stew with hints of banana and cloves, and a taste vaguely like cough mixture. Dangerous and deadly, this is like an impetuous sultry flamenco dancer with castanets and a rose in her teeth ('and an ample bosom' said Alan). It has blackness and sparkles at the same time, and, like obsidian, seems forged in the most primeval and elemental processes. She's a temptress and dominatrix, compelling and intimidating. In short, Beechworth Dark Ale is hardcore beer porn.

The Bronze Medal went to Red Hill Golden Ale. Strong on hops, this dry ale has a restrained fruitiness and full body. Its strawberry-red almost pinot quality appealed to Justine, who said that if this ale was a woman she'd be a 'spunky librarian'. 'A coquettish, flaming redhead librarian,' said Rowan, 'with an ample bosom,' said Alan, 'and big lips – botox lips – and equine-like muscles,' said George. Like the difficult second album, this beer is full of talent and potential.

A worthy Silver Medal winner in our scientific beer competition (scrupulously scrutinized by the barman clearing our empties and bringing out chicken parmigianas) was Grand Ridge Brewery's Gippsland Gold (see p598), a classic bitter ale with a complex flavour. There's a nuttiness and a burnt-honey hue to this beer. 'Playful but bewitching,' said George. 'The smell alone would turn decent church-going women' said Justine. 'An ample bosom,' said Alan. 'Zingy, smoky and playful,' said Rowan. Gippsland Gold has won gold medals as Victoria's best beer three times (in some other stupid competition, not ours).

The Gold Medallist was (boom-tish) Holgate Mt Macedon Ale (see p521). This pale ale is excellent with a champagne-like fizz and light citrus finish – more sorbet than pudding. Strong on hops and slightly bitter, the elements of Mt Macedon Ale come together in a wonderful synergy that make it moreish and a little glamorous. Alan said the bosom thing, George might've said something, but after 45 beers we didn't give a rat's arse and nobody was taking notes.

The Beer Lovers' Guide to Victoria's Microbreweries booklet has good information and is available from Information Victoria by phoning ☎ 1300 366 356.

Windsor

Windsor is the southern end of Chapel St and the patch of turf to head in this part of town if you're looking for a drink without the club beats and south-of-the-river glitz.

Back Bar (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9529 7899; 67 Green St) A refreshing retreat from the Chapel St glam, Back Bar is a cosy evening parlour with lavish décor. The music, lighting and attitude are mellifluous and warm.

Lucky Coq (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9525 1288; 197 Chapel St) Injecting just the right amount of indie-retro into this sceney pocket of Melbourne, this

pub is welcome relief for those looking to enjoy a drink, a pizza and a yak with mates without having to think too carefully about their outfit.

St Kilda

On a warm summer evening St Kilda is packed with crowded revellers – many of them English and Irish backpackers (and plenty of locals too).

West St Kilda RSL (Map p481; ☎ 9534 2485; 22 Loh St) Set inside a rambling mansion behind a messy, leafy yard, the West St Kilda RSL

serves cheap beer, larrikin wit and local charm by the jugful. There's sport on the small screen in the bar, a pool table and a wonderful front room fronted by large bay windows.

Vineyard (Map p481; ☎ 9525 4527; 71a Acland St) It hugs the best spot on Acland St and absolutely teems with locals, backpackers and trendy things from outside St Kilda's confines. Settle in early if you want a seat in the courtyard or even the lounge.

George Public Bar (Map p481; ☎ 9534 8822; 127 Fitzroy St) The narrow basement bar of the George (the 'snake pit') is an unpretentious, grungy bar swarming with backpackers and the odd local. There's a pool table and bowls of fat hot chips.

Doulton Bar (Map p481; ☎ 9534 2200; Village Belle Hotel, 202 Barkly St) Keep your eye on the prize: a spot at the curved front window with full-length Acland St views. If you're in too late, keep your eye on the late-20s crowd like everyone else. Fortunately the low-key vibe of this pub-cum-bar keeps the pick-up artists in check.

Mink (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1199; 2 Acland St) Tucked beneath the Prince of Wales, Mink is a plush lounge-cum-bunker with plenty of dark bordello-esque corners for an intimate rendezvous (and lots of vodka).

The **Esplanade Hotel** (p508), **Prince of Wales** (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1177; 2 Acland St) and **Greyhound Hotel** (p508) are also St Kilda drinking institutions.

ENTERTAINMENT

Melbourne has a thriving nightlife and a lively cultural scene. The best source of 'what's on' is the *Entertainment Guide (EG)* in Friday's *Age*. *Beat* and *Inpress* are free music and entertainment publications that can be found in cafés, bars and other venues throughout the city. Also check online at www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/events and **Citysearch** (www.citysearch.com.au/melbourne).

Half-Tix (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 9420; Melbourne Town Hall, cnr Little Collins & Swanston Sts, Melbourne; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon & Sat, 11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-6.30pm Fri) Sells half-price tickets to shows and concerts on day of performance. Cash only.

Ticketek (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1328 49; www.ticketek.com.au; 225 Exhibition St, Melbourne; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Visit the outlet, or make phone or internet bookings for large sporting events and mainstream entertainment. There are Ticketek desks at Rod Laver Arena (p511) and the Princess Theatre (p510).

Ticketmaster7 (Map pp478-9; ☎ 1300 136 166; www.ticketmaster7.com; Theatres Bldg, Victorian Arts Centre, 100 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) Main booking agency for theatre, concerts, sports and other events. Book over the phone or internet, or visit an outlet. There are desks in Myer (p511) and Telstra Dome (p485).

Live Music

Melbourne has long enjoyed a thriving pub-rock scene where bands such as AC/DC, Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds and Jet summured their way into rock's rich tapestry. Legends in the domestic industry such as Paul Kelly, Lisa Miller and Tex Perkins are Melbourne-based and play regularly. So too do Indigenous musicians Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter. City jazz and blues venues are also listed here. Expect to pay between zilch and \$30 for live performances, but much more for international acts.

Apart from the newspapers, tune into independent radio stations **3RRR** (FM102.7; www.rrr.org.au) and **3PBS** (FM106.7) for current gig guides.

Big venues for big names:

Festival Hall (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9329 9699; 288 Rosslyn, West Melbourne)

Forum Theatre (Map pp478-9; www.marinertheatres.com.au; 150-152 Flinders St, Melbourne) The southern-sky rendered, domed ceiling and lavishly-constructed interior is as much a reason to see big name acts here as the music itself.

Metro (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 3359; 20 Bourke St, Melbourne) Top international techno, electronica and rock, from 'IT' DJs to genius such as New Order.

Palais Theatre (Map p481; ☎ 9537 2444; Lower Esplanade, St Kilda) Beautiful, graceful old building.

Rod Laver Arena (p511) Headline acts in a stadium setting.

ROCK**City Centre**

Ding Dong Lounge (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9662 1020; www.dingdonglounge.com.au; 18 Market Lane) This smoky, raucous, grotty bar is one of the finest spots in Melbourne to dance with pure abandon. It's everything a classic rock-and-roll bar should be; local and international bands play here.

Hi-Fi Bar (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 7617; www.thehifi.com.au; 125 Swanston St) Another fine spot to dress down for indie and alternative rock. The Hi-Fi goes for underground international and local acts with a bit of cheek – think Bon Scott tributes and Bronx rap. It's also attracted some big guns looking for an intimate venue.

Northern Suburbs

Tote (Map p482; ☎ 9419 5320; www.thetotehotel.com; 71 Johnston St, Collingwood) A mosh pit and carpet as sticky as the tar lining the lungs of the punters. Live music – metal, punk etc – plays every night except Monday at this stalwart.

Evelyn Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 5500; cnr Brunswick & Kerr Sts, Fitzroy) The Evelyn attracts a mixed bag of local and international acts, and the feel is always warm and welcoming.

Rainbow Hotel (Map p482; ☎ 9419 4193; 27 David St, Fitzroy) This Fitzroy icon has been hosting local talent for over a decade and is a fine option for good blues, folk and jazz of the raucous energetic type. It's a small space and fills easily so start your Sunday session early.

Retreat (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9380 4090; 280 Sydney Rd, Brunswick) This big ole rambling hotel scores on food, drink and music. Blues, roots and acoustic dominate the first half of the week and the DJs move in on the weekends. Regardless of the genre, dancing is almost mandatory and entry is around \$10.

Empress Hotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9489 8605; 714 Nicholson St, North Fitzroy) This quintessential Fitzroy pub pulls a grungy, happy, unpretentious crowd. An eclectic menu of local live music gets a good many nights and half the week entry is free.

Cornish Arms (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9380 8383; www.cornisharms.com.au; 163a Sydney Rd, Brunswick) This big, friendly venue hosts diverse talent and gives new kids on the block from around the country a go. Expect fine bluegrass, soul, funk, jazz and performances from yesterday's local heroes. Sunday sessions are popular with young families.

Further afield but well worth the effort for local acts and local atmosphere:

Northcote Social Club (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9489 3917; 301 High St, Northcote) Intimate bandroom and live music every night.

East Brunswick Club (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9388 9794; 280 Lygon St, East Brunswick) Local acts and dirt-cheap entry.

Richmond

Corner Hotel (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9427 7300; 57 Swan St, Richmond) A scungy pub and classic band venue that's a major player in the Melbourne music scene, hosting international and local acts. New indie talent is well-nurtured here; ditch your attitude and fire up for a raw, loud and live good time.

St Kilda

Esplanade Hotel (Map p481; ☎ 9534 0211; 11 The Esplanade) Several developers dared to convert part

of this Melbourne institution into high-rise condo blocks. The city responded with adamant rage and 'the Espy' continues to host just about every music genre (OK, so not classical) on its four stages nightly.

Prince Bandroom (Map p481; ☎ 9536 1166; 2 Acland St) Check out the massive blackboard out front to see who's taking stage; you'll find the calibre is high. Above the Prince of Wales (p506), the Prince Bandroom has hosted diverse local and international acts for over 20 years.

Greyhound Hotel (Map p481; ☎ 9534 4189; 1 Brighton Rd) On Saturday nights this grotty local boozier with tonnes of rough-round-the-edges charm has drag shows. Other nights you can expect live music and cheap unpretentious drinks.

JAZZ

Jazz cats and blues hounds will be pleased to hear that Melbourne's jazz scene is jumpin'. *EG* has listings.

Bennetts Lane (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 2856; www.bennettslane.com; 25 Bennetts Lane, Melbourne) Hidden down a narrow city lane, this dimly lit jazz joint is the preferred choice for the cream of local and international talent, from old-school horns and drum brushes to contemporary electronica.

Dizzy's (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9428 1233; 90 Swan St, Richmond) Dizzy's offers jazz Wednesday to Sunday nights and attracts some pretty big names. There are 'cry baby' sessions, for those with youngsters, on the first Saturday of the month.

Night Cat (Map p482; ☎ 9417 0090; 141 Johnston St, Fitzroy) The Cat is a large, comfortable space with a great atmosphere and skewwhiff 1950s décor (a Melbourne trademark). Bands here are big and play anything from jazz to salsa.

Manchester Lane (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 0630; 234 Flinders Lane, Melbourne) Doubling as a semiformal restaurant, Manchester Lane is perfect if you're looking for dinner and a classy show. Jazz is the mainstay but other acoustic genres also get a go.

During January, February and March, the Royal Melbourne Zoo (p488) hosts the extremely popular 'Twilights' season of open-air sessions, with jazz or big bands performing on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

Nightclubs

Melbourne's club scene is a mixed bag, and what's here today might be gone tomorrow. Cover charges range from free to between \$5 and \$20. South Yarra, Fitzroy and the CBD hold the greatest concentration.

Croft Institute (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9671 4399; 21-25 Croft Alley, Melbourne) Inspiring both devotion and disgust, depending on who you're talking to, the Croft is a hard-to-find laboratory of boozing and schmoozing. It's a perilous climb to the dance floor upstairs.

Lounge (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 2916; 243 Swanston St, Melbourne; ☎ Wed-Sat) Café by day, club by night. The crowd is an up-for-it mix of young students and the gainfully employed, and the music crosses the genres from electro to hip hop.

Revolver (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9521 5985; 229 Chapel St, Prahran; ☎ nightly) Cavernous Revolver is a weekend-night must for the city's party-hard crowd. A little sleazy, a little seedy and always packed, it keeps the crowd happily in the dark for 54 hours from Friday to Sunday. During the week it's arty and sedate.

Laundry (Map p482; ☎ 9419 7111; 50 Johnston St, Fitzroy) Comfortably shambolic and just a tad sceney, the Laundry attracts all types and does a good job of keeping the entertainment high – DJs, 'extreme karaoke', pool tables, and live music – all nightly.

OneSixOne (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9533 8433; 161 High St, Prahran; ☎ Wed-Sat) The haunt of trendy southerners (of the river that is), this sceney club is a beautiful-people's meat market. It doesn't stay refined all night though, and after the cocktails, mixed drinks and other enhancements have kicked in, the bedlam of good dance music and happy young things takes over.

Boutique (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9525 2322; www.boutique.net; 132a Greville St, Prahran; ☎ Thu-Sat) This opulent little spot on a funky little strip fills its plush booths with lovely, lithe young things who are heavy on the hair product and light on the attire.

First Floor (Map p482; ☎ 9419 6380; Level 1, 393 Brunswick St, Fitzroy; ☎ Tue-Sun) A cavernous space in which to dance, drink and devote yourself to having a good time. It's a smart-looking spot, but not precious about it.

Cinemas

Melbourne has plenty of mainstream cinemas playing the latest releases. The main chains – Village, Hoyts and Greater Union – cluster around the intersection of Bourke and Russell Sts. Tickets cost around \$15. Check the *EG* in Friday's *Age* or other newspapers for screenings and times.

The following cinemas are Melbourne icons, either for their façades or for the content of their films.

MOONLIGHT CINEMA

From December to March the **Moonlight Cinema** (Map pp476-7; www.moonlight.com.au; Royal Botanic Gardens; adult/child \$16/12; ☎ Tue-Sun) screens newish and classic films in the Royal Botanic Gardens (enter via Gate F on Birdwood Ave, South Yarra). Bring along a rug, pillow and moonlight supper, or buy food and drinks there, and set up an outdoor living room in the middle of the gardens. **Open Air Cinema** (Map pp478-9; www.stgeorgeopenair.com.au; ☎ Feb-Mar) screens films in an outdoor amphitheatre with seating at Birrarung Marr. Prices are similar to standard cinemas.

Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 2583; www.acmi.net.au; Federation Sq, Melbourne) The fabulously high-tech cinemas here are where to go to see a mind-blowing range of films, documentaries and animated features.

Astor Theatre (Map p481; ☎ 9510 1414; www.astor-theatre.com; cnr Chapel St & Dandenong Rd, St Kilda) This place holds not-to-be-missed Art Deco nostalgia, with double features every night of old and recent classics.

Cinema Europa (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9827 2440; Level 1, Jam Factory, 500 Chapel St, South Yarra) Good café and bar on the premises, comfy seats and art-house films.

Cinema Nova (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 5331; www.cinema-nova.com.au; 380 Lygon St, Carlton) Nova has great current film releases. Tickets are a measly \$5.50 before 4pm on Monday.

George Cinemas (Map p481; ☎ 9534 6922; 133 Fitzroy St, St Kilda) Small cinema space but a St Kilda local.

Imax (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9663 5454; www.imaxmelbourne.com.au; Carlton Gardens) Within the same complex as the Melbourne Museum, this theatre screens films in superwide 70mm format. Features are listed in *EG* and on the Imax website.

Kino (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 2100; Collins Pl, 45 Collins St, Melbourne) This licensed cinema specialises in quality art-house releases, and is close to great bars too, for after-flick drinks.

Theatre & Dance

Melbourne has a number of well-regarded theatre companies, and it is one of the healthiest scenes in the country, with excellent performers, a responsive public and a supportive atmosphere.

Classical music buffs must listen to the **Melbourne Choral** (www.melbournechorale.com.au), a combination of two choirs that perform a variety of classical and modern works for voice. The **Melbourne Symphony Orchestra** (www.mso.com.au) performs regularly throughout the year; it has both a strong reputation and a keen fan base.

Musica Viva (www.mva.org.au) is one of the country's premier outfits for staging international and local ensemble music. Performances take place about once a month at **Hamer Hall** (Map pp478-9; www.theartscentre.net.au; Victorian Arts Centre, 100 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne). **Opera Australia** (www.opera-australia.org.au) also performs regularly.

The **Australian Ballet** (www.australianballet.com.au) has a good repertoire and some sterling performers, and is based in Melbourne. **Chunky Move** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9645 5188; www.chunkymove.com; 111 Sturt St, Southbank) is Victoria's contemporary dance company, and dishes up a renowned repertoire of work.

The **Victorian Arts Centre** (p486) is Melbourne's major venue for the performing arts and where the **Melbourne Theatre Company** (MTC; Map pp478-9; ☎ 9684 4500; www.mtc.com.au) stages around 15 productions each year, from contemporary to Shakespearean.

Noteworthy venues around town for live theatre:

La Mama (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9347 6948; 205 Faraday St, Carlton) This tiny, intimate forum produces new Australian works and experimental theatre, and has a reputation for developing emerging playwrights.

Malthouse Theatre (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9685 5111; www.playbox.com.au; 113 Sturt St, South Melbourne) An outstanding company that stages predominantly Australian works by established and new playwrights.

Princess Theatre (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9299 9800; 163 Spring St, Melbourne) This beautifully renovated landmark theatre is the venue for superslick musicals.

Regent Theatre (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9299 9500; 191 Collins St, Melbourne) A grand old venue for musicals.

Comedy & Cabaret

Melbourne has an extremely healthy stand-up circuit and is host to April's **International Comedy Festival** (www.comedyfestival.com.au).

The following venues showcase quality comedy and some of Melbourne's most eccentric cabaret:

Butterfly Club (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9690 2000; 204 Bank St, South Melbourne) This adorable terrace house holds a small theatre that hosts regular cabaret performances. Show over, head out the back or upstairs to a uniquely decorated bar, where surfaces are bedecked with the kitsch, the cool and the cute.

Comic's Lounge (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9348 9488; www.thecomicslounge.com.au; 26 Errol St, North Melbourne) The only place in town with daily comedy performances; acts range across the comedy spectrum for around \$10.

Last Laugh Comedy Club (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 1977; www.comedyclub.com.au; Athenaeum Theatre, 188 Collins St, Melbourne) Professional stand-up on Friday and Saturday nights, with dinner-and-a-show packages available.

Sport

FOOTBALL

Australian Rules

The **Australian Football League** (AFL; www.afl.com.au), known as 'the footy', is the city's sporting obsession, with games at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG; p487) regularly pulling crowds of between 50,000 and 80,000. If you're here between April and September try and see a match, as much for the crowd as the game. The sheer energy of the barracking at a big game is exhilarating.

Being the shrine of Aussie rules, the MCG is still widely regarded as the best place to see a match, although the newer but smaller **Telstra Dome** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 8625 7700; www.telstradome.com.au; Docklands) is an option.

Tickets can be bought at the ground for most games, and admission costs between about \$15 and \$20. Booking seats in advance might be necessary at big games.

Rugby

Rugby union has been slow to catch on in AFL-obsessed Melbourne, but the MCG and Telstra Dome attract enormous crowds to international matches.

Rugby league is a NSW-obsessed game, but it is attracting a growing following in Melbourne, owing in part to the success of **Melbourne Storm** (www.melbournestorm.com.au), the only Melbourne side in the national rugby league.

April to September is the season for both codes. Melbourne Storm's home matches are played at **Olympic Park** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9286 1600; www.mopt.com.au; Batman Ave, Jolimont).

Soccer

Soccer (football) has always had a strong fan base in Melbourne, but Australia's qualification for the 2006 World Cup tipped the whole nation into the frenzy of the 'real football' (we're locals, so we're allowed to say it). Moreover, Melbourne Victory won the national competition in 2006; their home ground is Telstra Dome and the season runs from October to May. Contact **Football Federation Victoria** (☎ 9474 1800; www.footballfedvic.com.au) for details on home matches and venues.

CRICKET

For any cricket fan a visit to the MCG (p487) is something of a pilgrimage. During summer, international test matches and one-day internationals are played here. The cricket season in Australia is from October to March. General admission to international matches is adult/child/concession/family \$31/5/25/66, but finals cost more and generally require booking. The cricket event *par excellence* is the traditional Boxing Day test.

HORSE RACING

Horse racing takes place in Melbourne throughout the year at the racecourses at Flemington, Caulfield, Moonee Valley and Sandown.

The **Melbourne Cup** (www.vrc.net.au) brings the entire nation to a standstill. It's so big it gets its own holiday in Victoria and it's watched by some 700 million people in 170 countries. It's always run at **Flemington Racecourse** (Map pp476-7) and always on the first Tuesday in November. Thursday after the Cup, Oaks Day, once a 'ladies' event, is now almost as popular – with both sexes – as the Cup.

MOTOR SPORTS

The **Australian Formula One Grand Prix** (☎ 9258 7100; www.grandprix.com.au) is held in Albert Park in March and the World 500cc **Motorcycle Grand Prix** (<http://bikes.grandprix.com.au>) races at Phillip Island in October. Tickets for the Formula One Grand Prix start at \$39 for a one-day general-admission ticket and \$260 for a three-day ticket.

TENNIS

For two weeks each January **Melbourne Park** (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9286 1244; www.mopt.com.au; Batman Ave, Jolimont) hosts the **Australian Open** (www.ausopen.org). Top tennis players from around the world come to compete in the year's first of the four

Grand Slam tournaments. Tickets range from about \$27 for early rounds to well over \$100 for finals.

The **Rod Laver Arena** (Map pp476-7; www.mopt.com.au; Batman Ave, Jolimont) is an enormous arena that hosts both the Australian Open tennis and big international musos. It features a retractable roof, so weather is not an issue.

SHOPPING

This city looooves to shop. Stores are most dense in the city centre, but South Yarra, Toorak and Fitzroy are also good for unique purchases.

Bourke St Mall is home to the city's two main department stores, **David Jones** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9643 2222; 310 Bourke St, Melbourne) and **Myer** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9661 1111; 314 Bourke St, Melbourne). **Melbourne Central** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9922 1100; cnr Elizabeth & Latrobe Sts, Melbourne) is a shopping centre with lots of mainstream shops, especially clothing. In an imposing modern complex, **QV** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9658 0100; cnr Swanston & Lonsdale Sts, Melbourne) is Melbourne's freshest contender and features populist commercial options and a supermarket. **GPO** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 0066; 350 Bourke St, Melbourne) houses fabulous boutiques including Leona Edmiston and Belinda La Perla, plus the ABC TV shop.

Australian

Counter (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 7775; 31 Flinders Lane, Melbourne; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sat) An excellent outlet for unique souvenirs, Counter sells locally crafted jewellery, ceramics, textiles, wood and glass. Each piece really is a work of art and your purchase will support the local industry.

Crumpler (Map p482; ☎ 9417 5338; cnr Gertrude & Smith Sts, Fitzroy) Crumpler is a local company that makes tough-as-nails bags for bicycle couriers, laptops and photography equipment. They're functional fashion accessories and 'everyone's' got a Crumpler. It's a great local souvenir you won't be ashamed to drag around the world.

RM Williams (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9663 7126; Melbourne Central, Lonsdale St, Melbourne) An Aussie icon, even for city slickers, this brand will kit you up with stylish essentials for working the land, including a pair of those famous boots.

Clothing & Accessories

The city is your best bet for a major wardrobe upgrade. Greville St and Chapel St between High St and Dandenong Rd in Prahran are

good strips for secondhand vintage and retro gear, as well as fresh, Australian designer boutiques. Brunswick St sports designer boutiques, retro threads, street wear and rave wear. Johnston and Gertrude Sts are also home to some cool designer boutiques. The South Yarra end of Chapel St (between High St and Toorak Rd) has long had a reputation as Melbourne's premier style strip; expect to find top labels and top prices. Hit Bridge Rd and Swan St in Richmond and Smith St in Collingwood for factory outlets.

Alice Euphemia (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9650 4300; Shop 6, 37 Swanston St cnr Flinders Lane, Melbourne) The more experimental end of Melbourne fashion gets a showing here, with inventive fabrics, cuts and finishes that aim to make you look more interesting than you might actually be. Great jewellery too.

Hunter & Gatherer (Map p481; ☎ 9593 8168; 82a Acland St, St Kilda) They've done the hunting – you just need to gather. This store filters second-hand and op-shops for the funkier retro gear and packs its 26-odd outlets with it. All profits go towards welfare programmes of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence.

Le Louvre (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 7641; 74 Collins St, Melbourne) You may have to spend the same amount as your entire holiday, but Westwood, Givenchy, Stella McCartney and Galliano don't come cheap. However, they do make you look fabulous and this is where you'll find them all in one opulent little spot.

City Hatters (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9614 3294; 211 Flinders St, Melbourne) Beside the main entrance to Flinders St Station, this is the most convenient place to purchase an iconic Akubra hat. Or better yet, a unique creation that doesn't scream 'I'm a tourist'.

Music & Books

See Bookshops (p475) for stores selling guide books, maps and other useful tourist tomes.

Greville Records (Map pp476-7; ☎ 9510 3012; 152 Greville St, Prahran) One of the last bastions of the 'old' Greville St, this fabulous music shop has such a loyal following that the great Neil Young invited the owners on stage during a Melbourne concert.

Polyester Books (Map p482; ☎ 9510 3012; 330 Brunswick St, Fitzroy) Take kinky and rude and then go several steps beyond. This unapologetic store specialises literature, magazines and audiovisual materials on topics from satanic cult sex to underground comics, and everything

in between. Across the road **Polyester Records** (Map p482; ☎ 9510 3012; 387 Brunswick St, Fitzroy) sells independent music from around the world.

Other

Bernard's Magic Shop (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9670 9270; 211 Elizabeth St, Melbourne) Australia's oldest magic shop sure sells a good fake vomit or whoopee cushion, but there are plenty of items for the serious magician as well.

Anna Schwartz Gallery (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 6131; www.annschwartzgallery.com.au; 185 Flinders Lane, Melbourne) This gallery is leader of the pack when it comes to high-profile modern-art exhibitions in a blindingly white, sometimes chilly space.

Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9654 2944; www.gabriellepizzi.com.au; Level 3, 75-77 Flinders Lane, Melbourne) Ground-breaking local exhibitions, including artists such as Christian Thompson and a host of other indigenous Australian talent.

Kleins (Map p482; ☎ 9416 1221; 313 Brunswick St, Fitzroy) Best described by one divine local as 'the lovely ladies shop', Kleins is stocked floor-to-ceiling with soaps, perfumes, ointments and sundry pampering accessories.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For comprehensive details of travel to/from Melbourne, see p1020.

Air

Most of the major airlines have direct international flights to **Melbourne Airport** (www.melair.com.au) in Tullamarine, 22km northwest of the city centre.

Melbourne is well-connected to all capital cities in the country and many regional centres as well. Carriers include **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au), **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) and **Regional Express** (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au). Jetstar also offers flights from **Avalon Airport** (www.avalonairport.com.au) near Geelong; see p518.

Boat

The **Spirit of Tasmania** (☎ 1800 634 906; www.spiritoftasmania.com.au) sails between Melbourne and Tasmania at 8pm nightly year-round, departing from Port Melbourne's Station Pier and the Esplanade in Devonport – both arrive at around 7am.

Bus

The long-distance bus terminal in the city centre is at the **Southern Cross Railway Station** (Map pp478-9; ☎ 9619 2587; Spencer St, Melbourne). **Skybus** (☎ 9335 2811; www.skybus.com.au) airport buses also operate from here. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) both have daily services to/from Sydney (\$74, 13 hours), stopping at towns along the way. **Firefly** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au) also services Melbourne.

Train

Long-distance trains also operate to/from **Southern Cross**. Victoria's **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs train services between Melbourne and regional Victoria, but also offers an economy service to Adelaide (\$83, 11 hours) and Canberra (\$63, 10 hours).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) runs daily XPT trains between Melbourne and Sydney (\$75, 11 hours).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

If you're driving to/from Melbourne Airport, take the tolled Tullamarine Fwy; a 24-hour Tulla Pass costs \$3.90 – contact **CityLink** (☎ 13 26 29; www.citylink.com.au) for more details. From Avalon Airport take the M1 to Melbourne.

The wheelchair-accessible **Skybus** (☎ 9335 2811; www.skybus.com.au) operates a 24-hour shuttle bus to/from the airport and Southern Cross (one way \$15, every 20 minutes). Buy your ticket online or from ticket booths at the airport and the station. Between 6am and 9pm you can buy it from the driver. You can take your bicycle, but the front wheel must be removed.

Sunbus Avalon Airport Shuttle (☎ 9689 6888; www.sunbusaustralia.com.au) meets all flights at Avalon airport and to/from the city centre (one way \$19, one hour).

A toll-inclusive taxi fare from Melbourne airport to the city centre costs around \$50; from Avalon airport it's around \$100.

Bicycle

Melbourne's a great city for cycling, as it's reasonably flat and there are great routes throughout the metropolitan area. Bicycles can be taken on suburban trains for free during off-peak times. Slippery tram tracks are a major hazard for Melbourne cyclists, though. Cross them on a sufficient angle to prevent your tyre falling into the track.

For more details on cycling in Melbourne, see p490.

Car & Motorcycle

City parking costs from \$2 per hour. Read parking signs for restrictions and times, and if your car is parked in a 'clearway' zone, which operates during peak hours, *move it*, otherwise it will be towed. The visitor information centre (p475) has information about city parking spots.

HIRE

Avis (☎ 13 63 33; www.avis.com.au), **Budget** (☎ 1300 362 848; www.budgetaustralia.com), **Europcar** (☎ 1300 131 390; www.europcar.com.au), **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39; www.hertz.com) and **Thrifty** (☎ 1300 367 227; www.thrifty.com.au) have desks at the airport and in city-centre locations.

For cheap, secondhand rentals in varying conditions, try **Rent-a-Bomb** (☎ 13 15 53; www.rentabomb.com.au), which requires no bond and doesn't have a driver age limit. Rates start as low as \$35 per day, but make sure you read the fine print.

TOLL ROADS

CityLink (☎ 13 26 29; www.transurban.com.au) has two main sections: the western link that runs from the Calder Hwy intersection of the Tullamarine Fwy to join the Westgate Fwy; and the southern link that runs from Kings Way, on the southern edge of the CBD, to the Monash Fwy. Both sections are toll ways.

Tolls are 'collected' electronically by overhead readers from a transponder card (an e-Tag). If you don't have an e-Tag, you can purchase a day pass (\$10.90), which is valid for 24 hours from your first trip on any CityLink section, or a weekend pass (\$10.90), which is valid from noon Friday to midnight Sunday. If you only intend to use the western link to travel to/from Melbourne airport, you can purchase a Tulla Pass (\$3.90). Day and weekend passes can be purchased at any post office, Shell service station, CityLink customer service centre, over the internet or over the phone. Travelling without payment cops a \$100 fine.

Motorcycles can use CityLink for free.

Public Transport

Melbourne's public transport system of buses, trains and trams is privatised. For timetables, maps and fares call the **Met Information Centre** (☎ 13 16 38; www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au). The **Met**

Shop (Map pp478-9; ☎ 13 16 38; Town Hall, cnr Swanston & Little Collins Sts; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) has transport information and sells tickets.

On Friday and Saturday nights after the trams, buses and trains stop running (roughly around midnight), NightRider buses (\$6) depart hourly from City Sq from 12.30am to dawn for many suburban destinations.

TICKETS

Metcards allow you to travel on any and all Melbourne bus, train and tram services, even if you transfer from one to another. Tickets are available from Metcard vending machines and counters at train stations, on board trams (tram vending machines only take coins and only dispense City Saver, two-hour and daily tickets), from retailers displaying the Met flag (usually newsagents and milk bars) and the Met Shop. You can purchase tickets directly from the driver on bus services.

The metropolitan area is divided into two zones. Zone 1 covers the city and inner-suburban area (including St Kilda) and most visitors won't venture beyond that unless they're going right out of town. Adult Zone 1 two-hour tickets cost \$3.20, daily \$6.10 and weekly \$26.70.

City Saver tickets (\$2.30) are fairly useless, only allowing you to travel two sections (check the maps on each tram giving this information) in the CBD without breaking your journey.

See Tours p493 for information on the free City Circle Tram and Melbourne City Tourist Shuttle.

AROUND MELBOURNE

The land around Port Phillip Bay circles Melbourne in its protective embrace with only the break between Points Nepean and Lonsdale offering a way into the Bass Strait. When it comes to weekends, most Melburnians stay within this curve, heading to wineries in the Yarra Valley or to historic Queenscliff. Phillip Island attracts international visitors keen on the fluffy penguins, while others head for the Dandenongs or take a picnic at Hanging Rock.

Whatever day trip or weekend break you make from Melbourne there's usually good public transport links, though if you want to see several spots in a weekend hiring a car makes more sense.

MELBOURNE TO GEELONG

The one-hour drive down the Princes Fwy (M1) to Geelong lets you leave Melbourne via the soaring West Gate Bridge with superlative city and bay views.

Werribee Open Range Zoo (☎ 03-9731 9600; www.zoo.org.au; adult/child/family \$19/10/48, combined zoo & mansion ticket \$31/16/75; ☎ 9am-5pm, last entry 3.30pm) is located about 30 minutes south of Melbourne. Admission includes the safari tour: plenty of emus, bison, Mongolian wild horses, rhinos, zebras and giraffes grazing on the savannah. The African animals on show here are particularly good, especially the lion enclosure.

Next door, **Werribee Park Mansion** (☎ 03-9741 2444; www.werribeepark.com.au; adult/child/family \$13/7/30; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Nov-Apr, 10am-3.45pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4.45pm Sat & Sun May-Oct) is surrounded by beautiful formal gardens, with picnic areas. Audio headphones re-create the 1870s soundscape, when the mansion was built. Dariwill Farm is a gourmet café/produce store at the mansion and the best spot to eat in the park.

Adjacent to the mansion is the **Victoria State Rose Garden** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), with over 5500 bushes arranged in the shape of a giant Tudor rose.

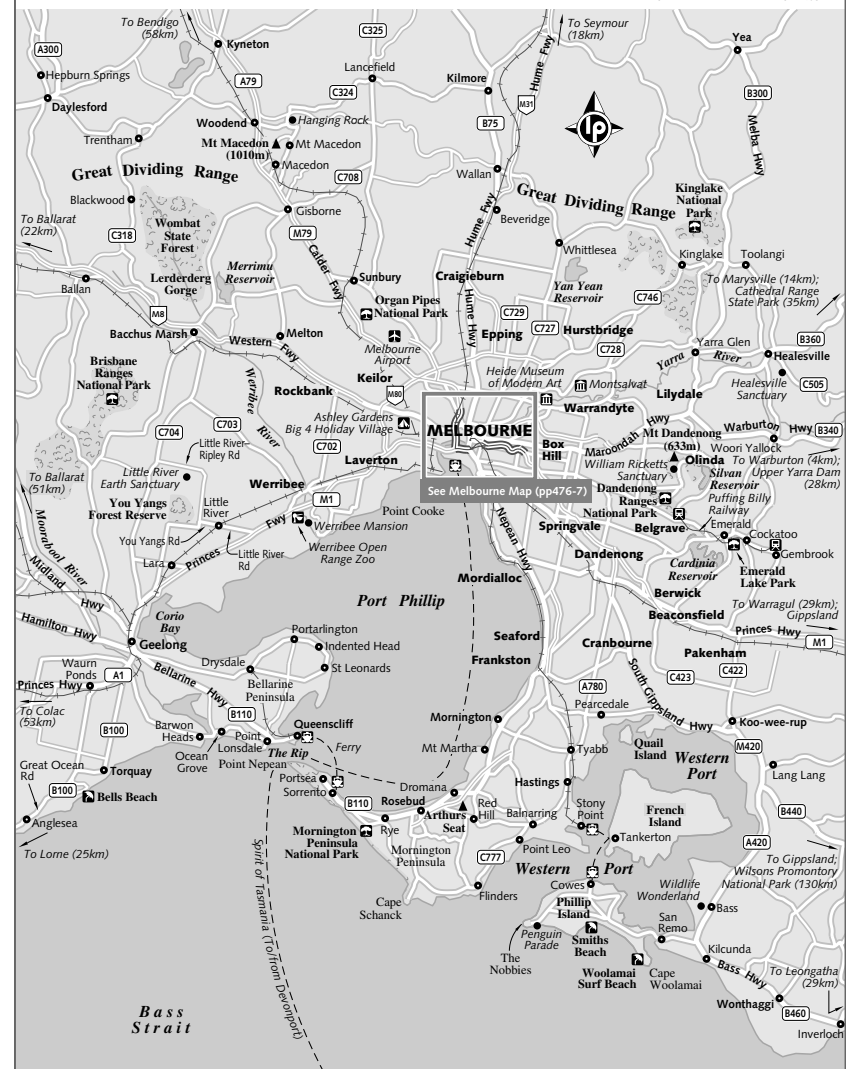
Several Met trains run daily from the city to Werribee station (daily Zone 1 and 2 Metcard \$9.70). From here catch bus 439, which runs the 5km to the zoo and mansion turn-off Monday to Saturday. Otherwise book ahead for the **Werribee Park Shuttle** (☎ 03-9748 5094; adult/child return zoo & mansion \$20/10; ☎ departs 9.30am & 11am, returns 3.30pm), which departs from the Victorian Arts Centre.

GEELONG

☎ 03 / pop 234,000

Much like nearby Melbourne, Geelong boomed during the gold rush as a gateway to the goldfields. In the 20th century, Victoria's second-largest city played industrial catch-up, serving as the state's busiest port and attracting heavy industry. Even with recent beautification along Corio Bay, smokestacks still loom over Geelong's otherwise attractive beaches. Despite a burgeoning café culture and good pubs, many travellers bypass the city that seems to just be the gateway to almost everywhere else: the Great Ocean Rd, Shipwreck Coast, Melbourne and, slightly less impressive, Colac.

AROUND MELBOURNE



Information

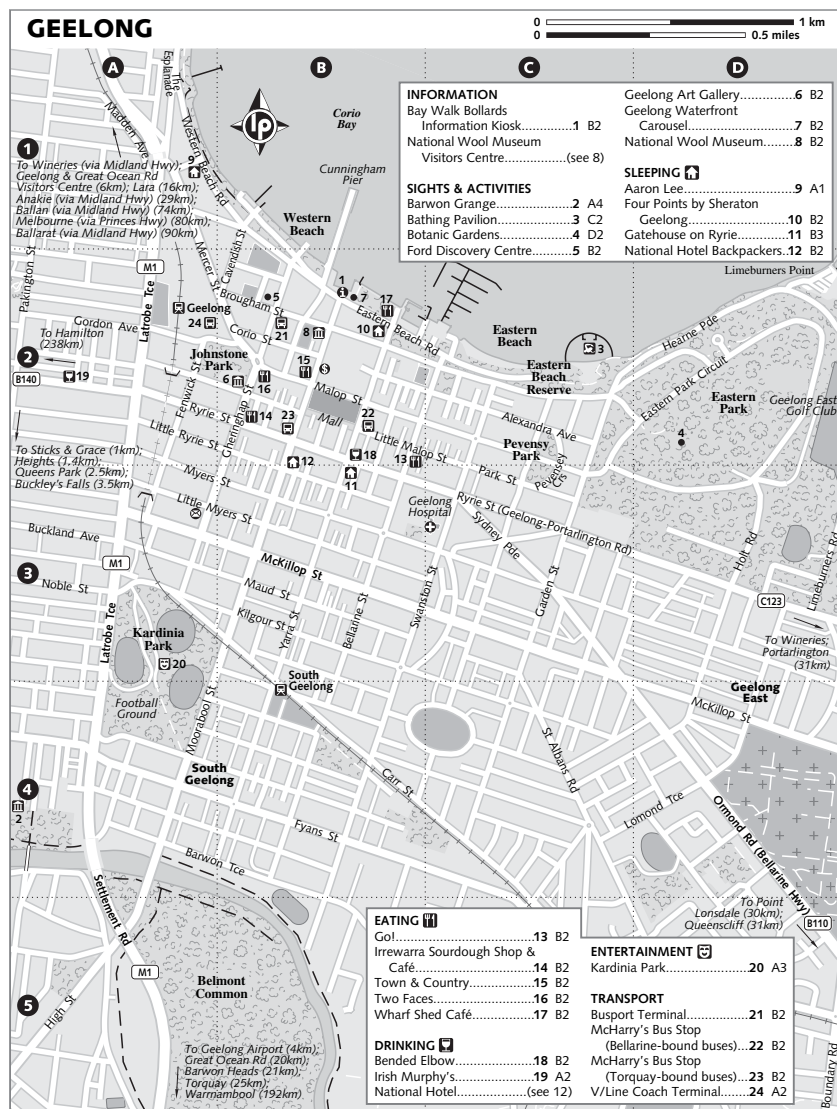
Geelong & Great Ocean Road visitors centre

(☎ 5275 5797; www.greatoceanrd.org.au/geelong; cnr Princes Hwy & St Georges Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) About 7km north of Geelong's centre, this office serves those speeding their way to the Great Ocean Rd.

National Wool Museum visitors centre (☎ 5222 2900; cnr Moorabool & Brougham Sts; ☎ 9.30am-5pm)

Sights & Activities

Geelong's revamped waterfront has plenty to recommend itself: swimming, riding the carousel ride and admiring the grand historic homes. The *Bay Walk Bollards* brochure available from the **information kiosk** (Cunningham Pier) describes Jan Mitchell's 104 famous painted bollards. For a better view of the



INFORMATION	
Bay Walk Bollards	
Information Kiosk	1 B2
National Wool Museum	
Visitors Centre	(see 8)

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Barwon Grange	2 A4
Bathing Pavilion	3 C2
Botanic Gardens	4 D2
Ford Discovery Centre	5 B2

SLEEPING	
Aaron Lee	9 A1
Four Points by Sheraton	
Geelong	10 B2
Gatehouse on Ryrie	11 B3
National Hotel Backpackers	12 B2

EATING	
Go!	13 B2
Irrewarra Sourdough Shop & Café	14 B2
Town & Country	15 B2
Two Faces	16 B2
Wharf Shed Café	17 B2

ENTERTAINMENT	
Kardinia Park	20 A3

TRANSPORT	
Busport Terminal	21 B2
McHarry's Bus Stop (Bellarine-bound buses)	22 B2
McHarry's Bus Stop (Torquay-bound buses)	23 B2
V/Line Coach Terminal	24 A2

DRINKING	
Bended Elbow	18 B2
Irish Murphy's	19 A2
National Hotel	(see 12)

SLEEPING	
Ford Discovery Centre	6 B2
Geelong Waterfront Carousel	7 B2
National Wool Museum	8 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Geelong Art Gallery	6 B2
Geelong Waterfront Carousel	7 B2
National Wool Museum	8 B2

SLEEPING	
Aaron Lee	9 A1
Four Points by Sheraton	
Geelong	10 B2
Gatehouse on Ryrie	11 B3
National Hotel Backpackers	12 B2

EATING	
Go!	13 B2
Irrewarra Sourdough Shop & Café	14 B2
Town & Country	15 B2
Two Faces	16 B2
Wharf Shed Café	17 B2

ENTERTAINMENT	
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V/Line Coach Terminal	24 A2

DRINKING	
Bended Elbow	18 B2
Irish Murphy's	19 A2
National Hotel	(see 12)

town, cruise the bay with **Freedom Bay Cruises** (☎ 0418-522 328; adult/child \$12/6; ☹️ departs hourly from noon to 4pm in summer). Kids love the hand-carved **Geelong Waterfront Carousel** (☎ 5224 1547; Steampacket Pl; adult/child \$3/2.50; ☹️ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-8pm Sat, 10.30am-6pm Sun), a refurbished steam-driven merry-go-round.

Geelong Art Gallery (☎ 5229 3645; www.geelonggallery.org.au; Little Malop St; admission free; ☹️ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) is one of the city's most impressive buildings housing over 4000 works. Naturally, the Australian collection is strong, with Frederick McCubbin's *A Bush Burial* (1890) the gallery's most celebrated

painting, though the Early Geelong collection captures the region's elusive beauty.

The 1851 **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 5227 0387; admission free; ☹️ 7.30am-5pm) are a peaceful place for a stroll or picnic. The '21st century' garden at the entrance features indigenous plants from across Australia.

In a historic bluestone building (1872), the **National Wool Museum** (☎ 5227 0701; www.geelongcity.vic.gov.au; cnr Moorabool & Brougham Sts; adult/child/family \$8/4/20, with Ford Discovery Centre \$12/5/50; ☹️ 9.30am-5pm) focuses on the history, politics and heritage of one of Australia's founding industries.

Ford Discovery Centre (☎ 5227 8700; www.ford.com.au/about/discovery; cnr Gheringhap & Brougham Sts; adult/child/family \$6/3/15; ☹️ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) looks at the Ford motor industry then and now, using interactive displays and exhibits. Rev-heads love the 'cars of the future' display and Bathurst-winning Falcons.

The National Trust recognises over 100 of Geelong's historic buildings. Several are open to the public, including the **Heights** (☎ 5221 3510; 140 Aphrasia St, Newtown; adult/child/family \$6/3/14; ☹️ 11am-4pm Wed & Sun), which was originally imported from Germany, and **Barwon Grange** (☎ 5221 3906; Fernleigh St, Newtown; adult/child/family \$5/3/12; ☹️ 11am-4pm Wed, Sat & Sun).

Sleeping

National Hotel Backpackers (☎ 5229 1211; www.nationalhotel.com.au; 191 Moorabool St; dm/d \$22/50) The Nash is central Geelong's only backpacker accommodation, so if you're in for a night out it makes a good bet. Dorms are tight and showing their age, but you'll only be there long enough to throw your gear into a free locker before taking on Geelong's bars. Live bands play here (see p518).

Gatehouse on Ryrie (☎ 0417-545 196; www.bol.com.au/gatehouse/g.html; 83 Yarra St; s \$80, d incl breakfast \$95-120; ☎ (P)) At this central, rambling guest-house rooms are toasty warm in winter and double-glazed windows keep them quiet. Has a share kitchen and a sitting room.

Aaron Lee (☎ 5222 7733; www.aaronlee.com.au; cnr Western Beach Rd & Ginn Sts; r \$45-125; ☹️) This slick spot has transcended its B&B status and is verging on being a chic boutique hotel. The simply designed studio rooms out the back are aimed at business travellers, while apartments on the beach road take advantage of the views and are perfect for families. All

rooms come with snazzy CD/DVD players and self-contained kitchens.

Four Points by Sheraton (☎ 5223 1377; 10-14 Eastern Beach Rd; \$155-225; ☹️) Holidaying real estate agents mumble 'location, location' in their sleep when they bunk down at Geelong's beachfront luxury hotel that's packed with all mod cons, including televisions as big as the views. Beach-facing balcony rooms come at a premium, but rooms without views are often available as packages.

Eating

Restaurants, cafés and bars line Little Malop St and Corio Bay, while Pakington St is Geelong's brunch epicentre.

Go! (☎ 5229 4752; 37 Bellarine St; breakfast \$4-7, lunch \$4-8, dinner \$7-12; ☹️ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, breakfast & lunch Sat) Go! is a rollercoaster ride of colour with lunchtime sandwiches that push the taste envelope.

Irrewarra Sourdough Shop & Café (☎ 5221 3909; 10 James St; breakfast \$5-10, lunch \$10-18; ☹️ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri) This rustic bakery makes some of the best bread in town and serves it up in wholesome sandwiches or as delicious breakfast toast.

Sticks & Grace (☎ 5224 2900; 4/337 Pakington St; breakfast \$7-17, lunch \$9-18, tapas \$7-14; ☹️ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-late Fri & Sat) One of the newer spots on this hip strip keeps everyone happy with its gooey desserts and grinning pancakes for the kids. Massive coffee bowls will power you through until the Friday-night tapas.

Town & Country (☎ 5222 7180; 53 Malop St; lunch \$8-16, dinner mains \$16-20; ☹️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This restyled bank shows off slinky lines while maintaining original fittings right down to the wall safe. The food won't require a mortgage though, with affordable pizzas and more sophisticated pastas and seafood.

Wharf Shed Café (☎ 5221 6645; 15 Eastern St; mains \$12-22) On the waterfront, this no-fuss diner attracts a large passing crowd (not to mention seagulls) with fare like fish and chips, and the odd surprise like kangaroo or tempura prawns.

Two Faces (☎ 5229 4546; 8 Malop St; mains \$26-35; ☹️ dinner Tue-Sat) A golden oldie on the Geelong scene, Faces balances its innovative flair with local tastes to create dishes like the twice-baked crispy duck or Asian-inspired Western Plains pork. It's all meticulously crafted slow food so you can eat twice as much before it gets to your waistline.

BUT AREN'T YOU A MELBURNIAN?: TOP FIVE CELEBRITIES FROM GEELONG

George Dunford

- Helen Garner: the biographer of 1970s inner-city Melbourne grunge (*Monkey Grip*) was born right here.
- Guy Pearce: the celebrated actor was *Neighbours* with Corio Bay when he moved to the city aged three years old.
- Chrissie Amphlett: the Divinyls lead singer cut her teeth playing gigs with all the boys in town.
- Barry Crocker: his name may be used as rhyming slang for shocker by Melburnians, but the crooner was born beneath Geelong's smokestacks.
- Daryl Somers: Australian TV's best-loved dag wasn't just born here, he also holds the No 1 ticket to the Geelong Cats AFL team.

Entertainment & Drinking

Geelong's large student population demands a lively bar and club scene. Check Friday's *Geelong Advertiser* or the freebie *Forte* magazine for gigs.

Bended Elbow (☎ 5229 4477; www.thebendedelbow.com.au; 69 Yarra St; meals \$8-24) This Brit boozier has English brews on tap and is well positioned to start your night out, though with bands Friday to Sunday and snug booths you might find yourself staying here. Upstairs Level 1 is a club space that plays dance pop.

National Hotel (☎ 5229 1211; 191 Moorabool St) Live bands play regularly at Geelong's rockiest pub that has a young clientele and backpacker accommodation (see p517).

Irish Murphy's (☎ 5221 4335; 30 Aberdeen St) Begorrah! Another Irish bar? Sure, they serve Irish ales and 'the black stuff' with the odd whiff of leprechaun about the décor, but it's also a casual pub that attracts locals and visitors alike, especially for its Smart Arse Trivia Night on Wednesdays.

On winter Saturdays check to see if the mighty Cats are playing a home game at **Skilled Stadium** (Kardinia Park; Moorabool St).

Getting There & Around

For Jetstar services flying from Avalon Airport, see p528.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) trains run frequently from the **Geelong train station** (☎ 5226 6525; Gordon Ave) to Melbourne (\$10.20, one hour).

Four times on weekdays and twice daily on weekends V/Line buses travel to Apollo Bay (adult/child \$23/12, 2½ hours) via Lorne (adult/child \$14/7, 1½ hours).

Mcharry's Bus Lines (☎ 5223 2111; www.mcharrys.com.au) operates the Bellarine Transit service with frequent buses to Torquay and the Bellarine Peninsula (see below). At the time of writing, the company was using temporary bus stops in Geelong due to roadworks: Torquay buses depart from the bus stop at the PNG building on Ryrie St; Bellarine-bound buses leave from Little Malop St.

BELLARINE PENINSULA

Curling around to form the northern side of the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, the Bellarine has surf beaches, wineries and mellow seaside towns that may make you pause on the way to the Great Ocean Rd. The peninsula also has accessible diving and snorkelling sites.

Accommodation prices soar from Christmas to the end of January and many caravan parks have a minimum-stay requirement at this time.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Mcharry's Bus Lines (☎ 03-5223 2111) services travel between Geelong and most peninsula towns, including Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove (\$4.50), Portarlington (\$5.50), Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale (\$7, one hour).

Queenscliff-Sorrento Car & Passenger Ferries (☎ 03-5258 3244; www.searoad.com.au; one way adult/child \$9/7, car from \$49) runs hourly services between Queenscliff, Portsea and Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula.

Queenscliff

☎ 03 / pop 3900

This charming dandy has been a favourite weekender for Melbourne's chic set since the 19th century. The classic hotels, guesthouses and other buildings trimmed with wrought iron along the wide main street are testament to the town's resort boom in the 1880s.

Originally Queenscliff was a base for pilot boats which steered ships through treacherous Port Phillip Heads, one of the world's most dangerous seaways, known as 'the Rip'. The coast is littered with over 200 shipwrecks.

Queenscliff visitor information centre (☎ 5258 4843; www.queenscliff.org; 55 Hesse St; ☎ 9am-5pm; ♿) is in the library in the middle of town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Queenscliff's grandest historic buildings line beachfront Gellibrand St: the ageing **Ozone Hotel** (named for a paddle steamer that once commuted between the town and Melbourne), **Lathamstowe** (44 Gellibrand St), **Queenscliff Hotel** and a row of old **pilots' cottages** (66-68 Gellibrand St) dating back to 1853.

Fort Queenscliff (☎ 5258 1488; cnr Gellibrand & King Sts; tours adult/child \$6/4; ☎ tours 1pm & 3pm Sat & Sun) was built during the 19th century to protect shipping routes between Melbourne and Geelong from a feared Russian invasion. Eighty-minute guided tours (the only way to see the fort) are of the military museum, magazine, cells and Black Lighthouse.

Run by rail enthusiasts, **Bellarine Peninsula Railway** (☎ 5258 2069; www.bpr.org.au; adult/child/family return \$18/10/48; ☎ trips 11.15am & 2.30pm Sun year-round, Tue & Thu school holidays, daily 26 Dec-9 Jan, Sat, Sun, Tue, Wed & Thu 10 Jan-26 Jan) has an immaculate collection of steam trains that ply the 1¼-hour return journey to Drysdale.

Sea-All Dolphin Swims (☎ 5258 3889; www.dolphin-swims.com.au; Larkin Pde; adult/child sightseeing \$60/50, 4hr swim \$115/100; ☎ 8am & 1pm Sep-May) offers swims with seals and dolphins in Port Phillip Bay, and sightseeing tours from a caravan on the pier. **Queenscliff Dive Centre** (☎ 5258 1188; http://divequeenscliff.com.au; 37 Learmonth St; per dive with/without gear \$100/50, 2 dives \$160/100) can get you out exploring the wrecks of the area.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Queenscliff Music Festival (☎ 5258 4816; www.qmf.net.au) is on the last weekend in November with Australian musos of a folksy, bluesy bent.

At other times of the year, the **Blues Train** (www.thebluesrain.com.au) will get your foot tapping with irregular train trips that feature blues and roots music and meals; check the website for dates and artists.

SLEEPING

Queenscliff Inn (☎ 5258 4600; queenscliffinn@bigpond.com; 59 Hesse St; inn d/f incl breakfast without bathroom \$110/170, YHA dm \$28, s \$95, d & f \$110) Luckily for thrifty travellers, this two-storey Edwardian inn is a cross between a hostel and hotel with a choice of period-style rooms and four-bed dorms. No matter what your budget you can

while away evenings in the beautiful common area.

Rubys B&B (☎ 5258 4838; 2 St Andrews St; d \$130) This B&B has three well-appointed rooms with bathrooms, but only two come with spas. Although a little way from the water, it's handy to the main street.

Kia Ora at Queenscliffe B&B (☎ 5258 1122; 38 Gellibrand St; d \$150) Friendly hosts serve up impressive breakfasts (including roasted garden-grown tomatoes and blood orange juice) at this sweet B&B. It's across from a park and near the water, though it feels a million miles from the bustle of town.

Athelstane House (☎ 5258 1024; www.athelstane.com.au; 4 Hobson St; d \$160-220; ♿) Harking back to 1860, this historic building has served as a guesthouse for over a century – so they must be doing something right. Each room has its own distinctive style, including spa, though pricier rooms have sea-view balconies. Breakfast downstairs tops off a brilliant stay as Athelstane doubles as a fine-dining spot.

Queenscliffe Tourist Parks (☎ 5258 1765; 134 Hesse St; unpowered/powered sites \$32/32, cabins \$120) This big place by the water is always busy and may even resemble another suburb of Melbourne in January, but it's a well-resourced spot for caravans, and cabins are a good family option.

EATING

Café Gusto (☎ 5258 3604; 25 Hesse St; breakfast \$7-12, lunch \$14-16; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch Wed-Sun) This is an ideal breakfast spot with a spacious garden out the back and inventive flair, with even basics like the sausage sizzle tricked up as a gourmet snag in sourdough with onion and tomato relish.

Vue Grand Queenscliff (☎ 5258 1544; www.vuegrand.com.au; 46 Hesse St; café mains \$17-25, restaurant mains \$29-34) This historic hotel's restaurant drips with sophistication from its elaborate chandeliers to a menu of roasted barramundi and other seafood dishes. More casual dining can be found at the hotel's Café Lure which does more simple pastas and burgers.

For quicker meals grab newspaper-wrapped seafood from **Queenscliff Fish & Chips** (☎ 5258 1312; 77 Hesse St; fish & chips \$6-8; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) or for a post-swim filler try **Ocean View Kiosk** (☎ 5258 4488; 140 Hesse St; ☎ 9am-6pm Thu-Mon, daily Jan) which does whopping burgers and tasty falafel near the beach.

Point Lonsdale

☎ 03 / pop 1700

Marked by a **lighthouse**, little Lonnie sits on a golden scrape of sand that looks across to Queenscliff. The **Rip View lookout** is a good spot to ponder the township after a challenging walk, but the beach below is legendary amongst skilled surfers. Hidden below the lighthouse is **Buckley's Cave**, where escaped convict William Buckley lived with the Wathaurong Aboriginal people for 32 years, creating a local legend that is remembered in the phrase Buckley's chance (ie very little chance).

Point Lonsdale Guest House (☎ 5258 1142; www.pointlonsdaleguesthouse.com.au; 31 Point Lonsdale Rd; r \$95-230; 🍷) has rooms ranging from basic motel rooms to lavish B&B. Views of the lighthouse will cost a little more.

As well as a selection of main-street take-aways, there's also **Kelp** (☎ 5258 4797; 67 Lonsdale Rd; mains \$21-32; 🍷 8am-10.30pm), a fancier place that is famed for its impressive seafood.

Barwon Heads

☎ 03 / pop 1900

Where the Barwon River meets Bass Strait, Barwon Heads is a beautiful spot with sheltered river beaches; surfers flock 2km west to **Thirteenth Beach**. The town was made famous by *Seachange*, a popular TV series (see the boxed text, below). There are short walks around the headland, the **Bluff** (with sea-view

panoramas), and scuba-diving spots under the rocky ledges below.

On the town's outskirts (follow the signs 2km from the town centre) is **Jirrahinga Koala & Wildlife Sanctuary** (☎ 5254 2484; Taits Rd; adult/child \$10/6), a sweet little animal park that includes pelicans, koalas and a few other Australian natives.

Seahaven Village (☎ 5254 1066; www.seahavenvillage.com.au; 3 Geelong Rd; low-season r Sun-Thu \$110-170, Fri & Sat \$165-200, high-season \$170-265; 🍷 📺 📶) is a cluster of self-contained studios and cottages decked out in individual nautical themes. Each room is spotlessly clean and extras include electric blankets, open fires, full kitchen and entertainment systems.

Most of the best eateries in town are easy to find along Hitchcock Ave, such as chilled **Beachnik Café & Wine Bar** (☎ 5254 3376; 48 Hitchcock Ave; breakfast \$4-13, lunch \$7-14, dinner \$7-22) and **Starfish Bakery** (☎ 5254 2772; 78 Hitchcock Ave; breakfast \$6-9, lunch \$6-9; 🍷 breakfast & lunch), a relaxed, colourful bakery-café. You can grab coffee and light meals or pack a picnic basket at **Annie's Provedore** (☎ 5254 3233; 2/50 Hitchcock Ave; meals \$6-14; 🍷 8am-5pm), which specialises in local gourmet goodies.

CALDER HIGHWAY

Running northwest from Melbourne to Bendigo there are a handful of sites off the Calder Hwy.

Organ Pipes National Park has some impressive vertical basalt columns that form a natural outdoor amphitheatre.

Just north of Gisborne exit the highway for **Mt Macedon**, a 1010m-high extinct volcano that has several **walking tracks**. The scenic route up Mt Macedon Rd takes you past mansions with beautiful gardens and there's a café and picnic grounds near the summit.

Beyond the summit turn-off, the road heads to quaint **Woodend**, or take the signed road on the right to **Hanging Rock**, the sacred site of the Wurundjeri people. The rock was a refuge for bushrangers but attained fame with Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (and the subsequent film by Peter Weir), about the disappearance of a group of schoolgirls. In Woodend, the excellent **Holgate Brewhouse** (☎ 03-5427 3522; www.holgatebrewhouse.com; 79 High St; d from \$125) is a good spot to sample a locally brewed beer or even stay the night in the refitted pub. Prices include breakfast and there are packages for brewery tours and tastings.

Daily trains run to Woodend from Melbourne. From there, **Woodend Taxi** (☎ 03-5427 2641) can take you to Hanging Rock for about \$15.

THE YARRA VALLEY

An hour from Melbourne, the Yarra Valley draws in day-trippers with walking and cycling trails, and its boutique wineries. **Healesville** is the best base to explore from as it's closest to wineries and is the 'capital' of the Lower Yarra Valley; **Warburton** marks the centre of the Upper Yarra Valley.

There's some good walking in national parks in the area, including **Warrandyte State Park**, **Yarra Ranges National Park** and **Kinglake National Park**. Check at the visitors centres for brochures.

Information

Warburton Water Wheel Information Centre

(☎ 03-5966 9600; 3400 Warburton Hwy, Warburton; 🍷 11am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Yarra Valley visitor information centre (☎ 03-5962 2600; www.visitarravalley.com.au; Harker St, Healesville; 🍷 9am-5pm)

Sights & Activities

One of the best places to see Australian native fauna is the **Healesville Sanctuary** (☎ 03-5957 2800; www.zoo.org.au; Badger Creek Rd, Healesville; adult/child/family \$19/10/50; 🍷 9am-5pm), a wildlife park set in native bushland. The Platypus House is a

top spot to see these shy creatures underwater, but the real star is the exciting **Birds of Prey** (🍷 show noon & 2pm) display where predatory birds swoop, dive and attack.

In winter, **Mt Donna Buang** (1249m) has snowy slopes for tobogganing. Below the summit, **Rainforest Gallery** (☎ 03-5966 5996; Acheron Way) is a fantastic rainforest-canopy walk along a 40m observation platform.

Tours

Eco Adventure Tours (☎ 03-5962 5115; www.eco-adventuretours.com.au) Nocturnal spotlighting walks in the Healesville and Marysville area.

Yarra Valley Winery Tours (☎ 03-5962 3870; www.yarrawallevinewerytours.com.au; tours \$80-180) Departs from Lilydale station.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

Strathvea (☎ 5962 4109; www.strathvea.com.au; Myers Creek Rd, Healesville; B&B \$130-170) The 11 rooms at this popular B&B book out well in advance for their gourmet breakfasts and tranquil gardens.

Healesville Hotel (☎ 03-5962 4002; www.healesvillehotel.com.au; 256 Maroondah Hwy, Healesville; d Sun-Thu \$95, Fri \$130, Sat \$295 with dinner) This ever-popular foody pub does fine dining (café mains \$8 to \$16, dinner mains \$24 to \$30) and has an expansive beer garden to while away the afternoon. The accommodation upstairs can be noisy on busy weekends.

Getting There & Away

Suburban trains go as far as Lilydale (use a Zone 1 and 2 Metcard). From Lilydale station, **McKenzie's Bus Lines** (☎ 03-5962 5088; www.mckenzie.com.au) runs to Healesville and Yarra Glen (some services continue to Healesville Sanctuary), and **Martys** (☎ 03-5966 2035; www.martys.com.au) buses run to Yarra Junction and Warburton.

THE DANDENONGS

On a clear day, the Dandenong Ranges and their highest peak, Mt Dandenong (633m), can be seen from Melbourne. The landscape is a patchwork of exotics and natives with a lush understorey of tree ferns – it's the most accessible bushwalking in Melbourne's backyard.

Dandenong Ranges & Knox visitor information centre (☎ 03-9758 7522; 1211 Burwood Hwy, Upper Ferntree Gully; 🍷 9am-5pm) is outside Upper Ferntree Gully train station. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parksweb.vic.gov.au; Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground,

SEACHANGING, TREECHANGING AND SUPERCOMMUTING *George Dunford*

People have been moving out of the city to live in the country for years, but with the advent of the TV series *Seachange* (www.abc.net.au/seachange) in the 1990s it seemed like a viable option for more Melburnians. Filmed on location in Barwon Heads, the series followed a lawyer who adapted to a small town in which she'd settled to avoid the rat race.

Over four million Australians live around the big capitals, citing better transport links, the increase in part-time work and working from home as helping them move. Country movers I spoke to put it down to 'expensive bloody real estate in the city' that forced them to look further a field to meet the Australian dream of owning their own home. Just as seachangers have moved along the coast, treechangers have headed for the bush in areas around Daylesford, the Dandenongs and Woodend.

Of course, the adjustment can be difficult for many city slickers. 'Bad coffee and no vegetarian options in pubs' were the commonest complaints I heard from treechangers out on the road. Perhaps that's why some keep a foot in both camps: buying a place in the country and commuting to the city. Most don't travel more than an hour, thanks to faster trains, and with part-time jobs they can enjoy longer weekends in their country properties. Perhaps the greatest recognition of this new phenomenon came with the creation of a short-lived Australian drama in 2000 called *Going Home*. Unlike other dramas set in homes or workplaces, *Going Home* focused on a group of supercommuters who regularly chatted about the day's events as they took the long journey out of the city.

Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) also has maps and advice on walking routes.

Puffing Billy (☎ 03-9754 6800; www.puffingbilly.com.au; Old Monbulk Rd, Belgrave; adult/child/family return \$40/20/81) is an immensely popular steam train that snakes through lush fern gullies and bush while kids dangle their legs out the window. There are up to six departures between Belgrave and Gembrook during holidays, and three or four on other days. Puffing Billy train station is handy to Belgrave train station, on Melbourne's suburban network.

Dandenong Ranges National Park, a combination of five parks, offers short walks and four-hour trails. **Sherbrooke Forest** has a towering cover of mountain ash trees. Reach the start of its eastern loop walk (10km, three hours), just 1km or so from Belgrave station, by walking to the end of Old Monbulk Rd past Puffing Billy's station. Combining this walk with a ride on *Puffing Billy* makes a great day out. Opposite the Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens is a **picnic ground** where crimson rosellas will peck birdseed from your hand. Walks at **Ferntree Gully National Park**, home to large numbers of lyrebirds, are 10 minutes' walk from Upper Ferntree Gully station.

William Ricketts Sanctuary (☎ 131963; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Mt Dandenong; adult/child/family \$7/3/14; ☎ 10am-4.30pm, closed on total fire ban days) features sculptures blended beautifully with damp fern gardens. Ricketts' work was inspired by nature and the years he spent living with Aboriginal people. Bus 688 runs here from Croydon train station.

Eating

Ripe (☎ 03-9755 2100; 376-378 Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Sassafra; mains \$8-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) An ever-popular café-produce store with a deck out the back that looks down into a bushy glade. Local produce plays a starring role and most people buy a few snacks or stack their gourmet larder on the way out.

Woods Sherbrooke (☎ 03-9755 2131; 21 Sherbrooke Rd, Sherbrooke; mains \$15-28; ☎ 9am-11pm Thu-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Another great little eatery hidden away in the hills with a pleasant garden to enjoy a meal in, whether it's a hefty porterhouse or a light slice with coffee.

Getting There & Away

The Met's suburban trains run on the Belgrave line to the foothills of the Dandenongs (Zone 1 and 2 Metcard). From Upper Ferntree

Gully train station it's a 10-minute walk to the start of the Ferntree Gully section of the national park.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Ever since paddle steamers plied their way here in the 1870s, Melburnians have been making for this seaside destination. These days the beach bums are being outnumbered by wine snobs and foodies, but there's a good weekend to be had here by anyone.

Peninsula visitor information centre (☎ 1800 804 009, 03-5987 3078; www.visitmorningtonpeninsula.org; Nepean Hwy, Dromana; ☎ 9am-5pm) has local information.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Met trains run frequently from Flinders St station to Frankston train station, where the **Portsea Passenger Service** (☎ 03-5986 5666; www.grenada.com.au/pss) runs bus 788 to/from Portsea (one way \$9, 90 minutes). **Peninsula Bus Lines** (☎ 03-9786 7088; www.buslines.com.au/peninsula) runs buses 782 and 783 from Frankston train station to Flinders (one way \$5, 90 minutes).

Car & Passenger Ferries (☎ 03-5258 3244; www.searoad.com.au; one way adult/child \$9/7, car from \$49) runs daily between Sorrento (hourly from 7am to 6pm, reduced sailings in winter) and Queenscliff. **Inter Island Ferries** (☎ 03-9585 5730; www.interislandferries.com.au; return adult/child/bike \$20/10/8) runs the triangle between Stony Point, Cowes (on Phillip Island) and French Island (every 30 minutes from 8.30am to 5pm, until 7pm Friday). There are at least two trips daily year-round.

Sorrento

☎ 03 / pop 1200

Victoria's first official European settlement in 1803, Sorrento is hugely popular in summer for its historic buildings and pleasant beaches. During low tide, the **rock pool** at the back beach is a safe spot for adults and children to swim and snorkel.

TOURS

Most tours offering dolphin swims and sight-seeing depart from Sorrento Pier.

Moonraker Charters (☎ 5984 4211; www.moonrakercharters.com.au; adult/child sightseeing \$44/33, swimming \$99/88; ☎ tours 8am, noon & 4pm Oct-May, 9am & 1pm Jun-Sep)

Polperro Dolphin Swims (☎ 5988 8437; www.polperro.com.au; adult/child observing \$44/28, swimming \$105; ☎ tours 8.30am & 1.30pm Oct-Apr)

VICTORIAN WINE REGIONS & WINERIES *George Dunford*

Victoria is drowning in wine with over 500 wineries, many of them within striking distance of Melbourne. The Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula and Geelong regions produce cool-climate, food-friendly drops like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Cool-climate wines are also found in the Macedon Ranges region, which produces crisp, clear, almost sharp sparkling wines and increasingly impressive Pinot Noir. In the Rutherglen area you'll find big reds and syrupy-sweet Muscat and Tokay, while the undulating and French-influenced Pyrenees offers a considerable variety of wine styles, though flavoursome, glossy Shiraz is the area's best tipple.

Most wineries offer free tastings, although in the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula some charge between \$2 and \$5 for the privilege – usually refundable if you purchase a bottle. Sadly, cellar doors aren't the bargains they once were and you may find your choice in a suburban bottle shop at a cheaper price.

Following are our favourite wineries; tourist offices also stock wine-touring guides for their region, with maps and more off-the-beaten-track wineries.

TarraWarra Estate (☎ 03-5957 3510; www.tarrawarra.com.au; Healesville Rd, Yarra Glen) This striking building combines an art gallery and rowdy bistro for lunch.

Coldstream Hills (☎ 03-5964 9410; www.coldstreamhills.com.au; 31 Maddens Lane, Coldstream) Chardonnay, effusive Pinot Noir and velvety Merlot are the star picks.

Yering Station (☎ 03-9730 0100; www.yering.com; 38 Melba Hwy, Yering) A massive, modern complex with a fine-dining restaurant, produce store and bar; it's home to the heady Shiraz-Viognier blend and a sparkling white wine, as well as Pinot Noir, Rosé and Chardonnay. The Yarra Valley Farmers' Market is held here every third Sunday.

Pettaval Winery (☎ 03-5266 1120; www.pettaval.com; 65 Pettavel Rd, Waurn Ponds) Geelong region's premier winery and fabulous restaurant – head here for a long lunch and award-winning Riesling.

T'Gallant (☎ 03-5989 6565; 1385 Mornington-Flinders Rd, Main Ridge) It pioneered luscious Pinot Gris in Australia and still has the country's best.

Dalwhinnie (☎ 03-5467 2388; 448 Taltarni Rd, Moonambel) The Pyrenees region's wine star. Expensive but beautiful Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet and Shiraz, with top views from the cellar door.

Scotchmans Hill (☎ 5251 3176; www.scotchmanshill.com.au; 190 Scotchmans Rd, Drysdale) Does some good heavier reds that are worth the trip.

Blue Pyrenees Estate (☎ 03-5465 3202; Vinoca Rd, Avoca) Wide range of styles at a wide range of prices. Excellent sparkling wines – cleanse your mouth here after a go at some reds.

SLEEPING

Prices rise with the temperature from mid-December to the end of January, and during Easter and school holidays when places routinely book out.

Sorrento Backpackers Hostel YHA (☎ 5984 4323; www.yha.com.au; 3 Miranda St; dm \$29; ☎) Buried in a bushy setting, this hostel has the comfy feel of a family home even though it's purpose built, and has a great communal BBQ. Take bus 788 to stop 18.

Oceanic Whitehall Guesthouse (☎ 5984 4166; www.oceanicgroup.com.au; 231 Ocean Beach Rd; r \$120-210, apt \$145-160) The limestone, two-storey guesthouse near the back beach has dreamy views from its timber veranda with share bathrooms a minor downside. Across the road, Oceanic Apartments ditch the period charm to be spruce self-contained units.

Sorrento Beach Motel (☎ 5984 1356; www.sorrento-beachmotel.com.au; 780 Melbourne Rd; d \$100-160; ☎) Don't be deceived by the bright changing-

shed colours: this is a modern hotel with wireless broadband for when the waves sound like the office calling. Spa rooms are the best bet, though you'll pay a little more for them.

Carmel of Sorrento (☎ 0408-348 362; www.carmelof-sorrento.com.au; 142 Ocean Beach Rd; s \$150, d \$175-200, self-contained units \$200) This historic cottage, in downtown Sorrento, is elegant with four Edwardian-style B&B guestrooms with bathrooms, and two self-contained units.

Sorrento Foreshore Reserve (☎ 5985 2405; Nepean Hwy) There's good camping here, with amenities and BBQs, though light sleepers will need spots far from the nearby highway.

EATING & DRINKING

Stringer's (☎ 5984 2010; 2 Ocean Beach Rd; sandwiches & snacks \$4-8; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Stringer's is a Sorrento institution with house-made meals and Mornington wines for sale in the attached grocery shop.

Baths (☎ 5984 1500; 3278 Point Nepean Rd; mains \$17-30) Formerly the sea baths, this roomy spot does excellent breakfasts on its waterfront decking, though dinner is fairly damned romantic.

Barbacoa (☎ 5984 1057; 154-164 Ocean Beach Rd; mains: \$26-32; ☎ Wed-Sun 6-10.30pm) With a large and often raucous outdoor bar, this hip spot is perfect for drinking away hot and sweaty nights. The 'sarongs and thongs' casualness of the lounge area makes an ideal place to sample the Mod Oz grub.

Loquat (☎ 5984 4444; www.loquat.homestead.com; 3183 Point Nepean Rd; mains \$19-32; ☎ dinner Thu-Sun, lunch Sun) Just off the road, this swish spot showcases local wines and some great food that runs to duck and wild boar – even the fish and chips comes with zippy gherkin and lime mayo.

Portsea

☎ 03 / pop 800

Portsea is where Melbourne's wealthiest have gotten away from it all by building beachside mansions. On the **back beach** a retired real estate agent may try to sell you scenic **London Bridge**, a natural rock formation. This ocean beach has dangerous surf for swimming, so stick between the flags. You can walk the Farnsworth Track (1.5km, 30 minutes) out to London Bridge and spot middens of the Boonwurrung people who once called this area home. **Front beaches** offer sheltered swimming spots, though as this is Victoria's richest postcode you may need to rescue those drowning under the weight of their own bling.

Dive Victoria (☎ 5984 3155; www.divevictoria.com.au; 3752 Point Nepean Rd; snorkelling incl gear \$65, 1/2hr dives without gear \$50/100) runs diving and snorkelling trips.

Portsea's heart is the sprawling **Portsea Hotel** (☎ 5984 2213; www.portseahotel.com.au; Point Nepean Rd; s \$60-175, tw & d \$95-200), with an excellent Mod Oz restaurant (mains \$17 to \$30) and accommodation that increases in price based on sea views.

Mornington Peninsula National Park

The peninsula's tip is marked by the stunning **Point Nepean** section of the **Mornington Peninsula National Park** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Point Nepean Rd, Portsea; ☎ 9am-5pm, 9am-dusk Jan), originally a quarantine station and army base.

Point Nepean visitor information centre (☎ 03-5984 4276; Point Nepean; adult/child/family walk or bicycle

admission \$8/4/18, one-way transport incl admission \$11/6/26, return transport incl admission \$13/8/34, bike hire per 3hr \$15; ☎ 9am-6pm Jan, 9am-5pm Feb-Apr & Oct-Dec, 10am-5pm May-Sep) will give you the low-down on the park. You can walk or cycle to the point (12km return), or take the Point Explorer, a hop-on, hop-off bus service. There are plenty of **trails** throughout the park and at the tip is **Fort Nepean**, which was important in Australian defence from the 1880s to 1945.

On the southwestern coastline of the peninsula are beautiful rugged **ocean beaches**. It's possible to walk all the way from Portsea to Cape Schanck along them (26km, eight hours). However, swimming is dangerous at these beaches so it's advisable to keep to the lifeguard-patrolled areas at Gunnamatta and Portsea during summer.

Cape Schanck Lightstation (☎ 03-5988 6184; adult/child/family museum only \$11/8/27, museum & lighthouse \$12/10/33, parking \$4; ☎ 10am-4pm), built in 1859, is a photogenic limestone lighthouse, with a kiosk, museum, information centre and regular guided tours.

FRENCH ISLAND

☎ 03 / pop 65

Exposed and windswept, French Island is two-thirds national park and it retains a wonderful sense of tranquillity. Recently pop princess Kylie Minogue bought a 20-hectare property on this remote island, which prides itself on its ecological living. The main attractions are **bushwalks**, which take in wetlands in one of Australia's largest **koala colonies**, as well as a huge variety of birds and over a hundred varieties of orchids.

Notable walks include the **Coast Wetlands Walk** (5½ hours, 14km) and **South Coast Walk** (4½ hours return, 10km), which both start and finish at Tankerton Jetty. If you bring a bike try the **Wetlands Coastal Bike Ride**, a 23km circuit that needs a good mountain bike.

The ferry docks at Tankerton, but it's another 3km to the licensed **French Island General Store** (☎ 5980 1209; Lot 1, Tankerton Rd, Tankerton; bike hire half-day \$30), which also serves as post office, tourist information and bike-hire centre.

TOURS

French Island Eco Tours (☎ 1300 307 054; www.frenchislandecotours.com.au; half-/full-day tour incl ferry & lunch \$65/85; ☎ Thu & Sun) is one of the best ways to see the island without your own transport. Tours around the island explore McLeod Eco

Farm, a former prison. Tours depart from Stony Point and Cowes.

SLEEPING & EATING

McLeod Eco Farm (☎ 5980 1224; www.mcleodecofarm.com; McLeod Rd; bunk room s/d \$35/59, guesthouse s/d \$98/198) Formerly the island's prison, this organic farm offers basic bunkrooms in atmospheric old cells with kitchen facilities and lounge, but if you're after something more upmarket the guesthouse rooms are cosy and include breakfast.

Tortoise Head Lodge (☎ 5980 1234; www.tortoisehead.net; 10 Tankerton Rd, Tankerton; s/d incl breakfast \$80/120) A stroll from the ferry, this spot has knockout water views and represents one of the island's better options. The café is open from 9.30am to 5pm daily, and does Devonshire teas and sandwiches if you're after a snare (\$4 to \$8).

Fairhaven camping ground (☎ 5980 1294; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; unpowered sites free) On the western shore where the wetlands meet the ocean, this camping ground offers a real getaway experience with little more than a compost toilet at the site. Fires aren't allowed and you must carry everything in and out. Bookings essential.

Bayview Camping Ground (☎ 5980 1241; Tankerton Rd, Tankerton; unpowered sites \$10) This privately owned site is at the back of the general store, which is handy if you need any supplies.

French Island General Store (☎ 5980 1209; Lot 1, Tankerton Rd, Tankerton; ☎ 9am-6pm) This one-stop shop will also whip you up a burger or sandwich as well as selling drinks and basic groceries.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Inter Island Ferries (☎ 9585 5730; www.interislandferries.com.au; adult/child/bike \$20/10/8) runs a service between Tankerton and Stony Point (10 minutes, at least two daily).

Unsealed roads make riding tough going, but you can hire bikes (per day \$30) from the kiosk at the jetty in summer and from the general store.

PHILLIP ISLAND

☎ 03 / pop 6700

This small island was originally settled by the Boonwurrung people, who are probably the only people in history not to have attended the island's penguin parade. Instead they came for the diet of seafood and short-tailed

shearwaters, both of which can still be seen on the island.

Today the island revs up for the Motorcycle Grand Prix and is a popular summer getaway, when the population more than quadruples. Excellent beaches, from the wild surf at Woolamai to sheltered bay beaches on the north side, have something for the whole family.

Information

Phillip Island visitor information centre (☎ 1300 366 422, 5956 7447; www.phillipisland.net.au; Phillip Island Rd, Newhaven; ☎ 9am-5pm, 9am-6pm Jan; ☎) Offers information, sells tickets to most individual attractions and has internet access (per hour \$1.50).

Sights & Activities

PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARK

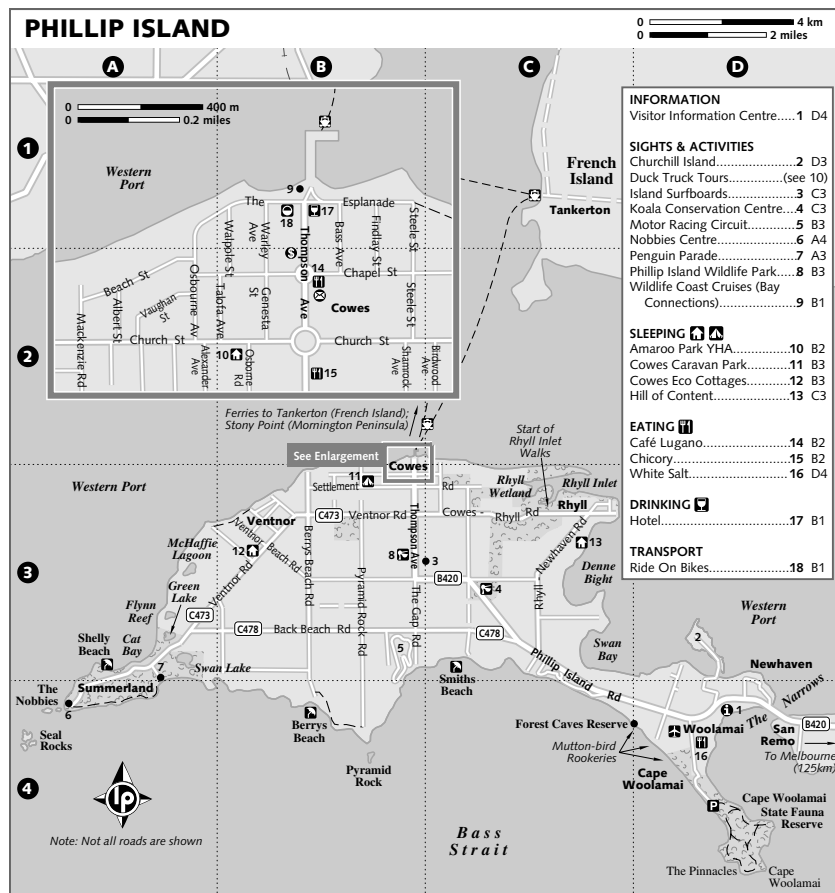
The nature park runs the **Penguin Parade** (☎ 5951 2800; www.penguins.org.au; Summerland Beach; adult/child/family \$18/9/44; ☎ 10am-last penguin show); the **Koala Conservation Centre** (☎ 5952 1307; adult/child/family \$10/5/23; ☎ 10am-5pm, extended hr in summer), off Phillip Island Rd, with elevated boardwalks; and trips to **Churchill Island** (☎ 5956 7214; adult/child/family \$9/5/23; ☎ 10am-4.30pm, extended hr in summer), a working farm also off Phillip Island Rd, where Victoria's first crops were planted and today features historic displays, including butter churning and blacksmithing (call ahead for times).

If you're keen on all three attractions buy the **Three Parks Pass** (adult/child/family \$28/14/72), which is valid for six months and is available at the visitors centre.

Most people come for the **Little Penguins**, the world's smallest and probably cutest of their kind. The penguin complex includes concrete amphitheatres that hold up to 3800 spectators who visit to see the little fellas just after sunset as they waddle from the sea to their land-based nests. Penguin numbers swell in summer, after breeding, but they parade year-round. There are a variety of specialised **tours** (adult \$25-75) so you can be accompanied by rangers or see them from the vantage of a Skybox (an elevated platform). Book well ahead in summer.

SEAL ROCKS & THE NOBBIES

The extreme southwestern tip of Phillip Island leads to the Nobbies and beyond them is **Seal Rocks**, inhabited by Australia's largest colony of fur seals. Perhaps to swipe the spotlight from the penguins, the **Nobbies Centre** (☎ 5951 2816;



admission free; tours adult/child \$10/5; ☀ summer 10am-8pm summer, 10am-5pm autumn, 10am-4pm winter; 10am-6pm spring) opened in 2007 and affords great views of the 6000 Australian fur seals who loll here during the October-to-December breeding season. You can view the seals from boardwalks or use the centre's underwater cameras to zoom in on them.

MOTOR RACING CIRCUIT

Petrolheads love the **Motor Racing Circuit** (☎ 5952 2710; www.phillipislandcircuit.com.au; Back Beach Rd; ☀ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), which was souped-up for the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix in 1989; the island hosted its first Grand Prix way back in 1928. The **visitor centre** (☎ 5952 9400; ☀ 9am-5pm) runs 45-minute **walking tours**

(adult/child/family \$18/9/42, museum & tour \$16/8/38; ☀ tours 11am & 2pm) as well as laps of the track in hotted-up V8s (one/two/three people \$199/299/349).

BEACHES

Ocean beaches on the south side of the island include **Woolamai**, a surf beach with dangerous rips and currents. The surf at **Smiths Beach** is more family-friendly, though it gets busy on summer weekends. Both beaches are patrolled in summer. Head to the quieter, sheltered northern beaches if you're not a strong swimmer or you worry about your kids in the surf.

Island Surfboards (www.islandsurfboards.com.au; surfing lessons \$45, surfboard hire per hr/day \$15/40; Smiths Beach

☎ 5952 3443; 65 Smiths Beach Rd; Cowes ☎ 5952 2578; 147 Thompson Ave) can start your waxhead career with wetsuit hire and lessons for all standards.

BIRDS & WILDLIFE

A good range of wildlife can be spotted at **Phillip Island Wildlife Park** (☎ 5952 2038; Thompson Ave; adult/child/family \$11/6/30; ☀ 10am-5pm, later in summer), about 1km south of Cowes. As well as koalas, wombats, roos and wallabies there are a few harder to find critters like Tasmanian devils, cassowaries and quolls, plus you get a small bag of bread to handfeed along the way.

Mutton birds, also known as short-tailed shearwaters, colonise the dunes around Cape Woolamai from around 24 September to April. Your best chance of seeing them is at the Penguin Parade as they fly in at dusk, or at the shearwater rookeries at Woolamai Beach.

There's a wide variety of other water birds around, including **pelicans** that are fed at Newhaven at 11.30am daily, and in the swamp-land at **Rhyll Inlet** and **Rhyll Wetland**. There's a boardwalk and lookout here, and the **Oswin Roberts Walking Track** (two hours) takes you through the most important bird-watching areas.

Tours

Duck Truck Tours (☎ 5952 2548; www.yha.com.au; 97 Church St; tours from \$70) Based at Amaro Park YHA (see below), does a wide range of tours around the island that can start from Melbourne.

Go West (☎ 1300 736 551; www.gowest.com.au; 1-day tour \$99) Does a one-day tour from Melbourne that includes lunch and iPod commentary in several languages.

Wildlife Coast Cruises (☎ 5952 3501; www.wildlife.coastcruises.com.au; Rotunda Bldg, Jetty, Cowes; 2/5hr tours \$55/62; ☀ Nov-May) Runs a two-hour cruise from Cowes jetty around Seal Rocks and an extension cruise including French Island.

Festivals & Events

Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix (http://bikes.grandprix.com.au) A massive three-day event held annually in October. Phillip Island goes off!

Pyramid Rock Festival (www.thepyramidrockfestival.com) This massive music festival held over New Year's Eve attracts great Aussie bands to a scenic venue.

Sleeping

Phillip Island's prices peak during motor races, Christmas, Easter and school holidays so book as far ahead as possible.

Amaroo Park YHA (☎ 5952 2548; www.yha.com.au; 97 Church St, Cowes; powered sites per 2 people \$30, 10-/4-bed dm \$23/25, 4-bed dm with bathroom \$30, cabins \$135-145;) In a bushy setting, this well-run hostel does 10-bed dorms and a range of cabins suitable for families. It also organises surfing lessons and tours through Duck Truck Tours (left).

Cowes Eco Cottages (☎ 5952 6466; Corner Justice & Ventnor Rds, Cowes; d from \$145;) Staying green doesn't mean you have to sleep in tie-dyed sheets and slum it in kaftans. This establishment uses solar water and religiously recycles so you can holiday guilt-free in self-contained units that are handy to town.

Hill of Content (☎ 5956 0100; www.thehillofcontent.com.au; 33 Rhyll-Newhaven Rd, Rhyll; d \$255-285;) Specialising in couples' accommodation (forget the kids), this elegant place has a minimalist feel but delivers maximum luxury with Egyptian cotton linen, mini BBQs and spas in each room. The pricier lofts are like sumptuous treehouses with balconies and corrugated-iron tanks converted into fountains.

There are plenty of caravan parks, mostly around Cowes; pick up a *Caravan Parks on Phillip Island* brochure from the visitor information centre. Sites range from \$25 to \$38. **Cowes Caravan Park** (☎ 5952 2211; www.cowescaravanpark.com.au; 164 Church St, Cowes; powered & unpowered sites \$25-37, cabins \$70-105) has plenty of facilities and books out in peak periods.

Eating & Drinking

Though most dining options are in Cowes don't be afraid to branch out and explore backstreets and other towns to beat the main-street takeaways.

White Salt (☎ 5956 6336; 7 Vista Pl, Woolamai; ☀ lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) For some the gourmet chip might be an oxymoron, but the thick-cut chips and healthy grilled fish on the menu here might just prove them wrong. The benches out front are packed around lunch and dinner so make it a beach picnic where the only other diners are persistent seagulls.

Café Lugano (☎ 5952 5636; 2/71 Thompson Ave, Cowes; mains \$10-15; ☀ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) This cool joint knows that a good café doesn't stop at an excellent menu (with moreish veggie options like the haloumi stack) but goes the extra mile with peppery service and an interior of lipstick reds and sunny oranges. It's a cosy spot for an intimate drink too.

Chicory (☎ 5952 2665; 115 Thompson Ave; lunch \$15-18, dinner \$25-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) A fine-dining spot that distinguishes itself from the maddening crowd of Thompson St with a first-rate wine list and dishes the likes of NZ blue-eye soused in a passionfruit and peppercorn glaze. Lunch provides a cheaper sampler, but dinner is worth every penny.

Hotel (☎ 5952 2060; cnr Thompson St & the Esplanade; lunch \$14-20, dinner \$15-26; ☺ lunch & dinner) This corner pub has gone uptown with a snazzy refit and outdoor tables that attract a young crowd. Meal-wise it sticks to pub standards (pastas, burgers and schnitzels) though the evening menus venture into kanga fillets and three different kinds of schnitzel.

Getting There & Around

The best service from Melbourne to Cowes is the **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) bus departing at 3.50pm from Southern Cross station, Monday to Friday (one way \$18, three hours and 20 minutes).

Inter Island Ferries (☎ 9585 5730; www.interislandferries.com.au; adult/child/bike return \$20/10/8) runs daily between the triangle of Cowes, Stony Point (on the Mornington Peninsula; every 30 minutes from 8.30am to 5pm plus 7pm Friday) and French Island (every 30 minutes from 9.10am to 5.25pm plus 7.45pm Friday). There are at least two trips daily year-round.

There's no public transport around Phillip Island. You can hire bicycles from **Ride On Bikes** (☎ 5952 2533; info@rideonbikes.com.au; 2-17 the Esplanade, Cowes; per half-/full day \$15/25) and Amaro Park YHA (p527).

GREAT OCEAN ROAD

Wind down the windows if you're driving along this road that curves from Torquay to Warrnambool and you'll cop a unique perfume of bush and beach, gums and salt-water. Some waggish locals call the B100 the Great Bitumen Sea Snake which weaves its way along classic surf beaches before sliding into the Otway Ranges just after Apollo Bay. If you are driving, plan on regular stops to snap the vistas and koalas who don't mind the spectacular scenery themselves.

Beyond Apollo Bay, the thrashing Shipwreck Coast (from Princetown to Port Fairy) inspires spooky stories of ghosts from the bones of wrecked vessels that haunt the area. The lush Otway Ranges, stretching from

Aireys Inlet to Cape Otway, offer revitalising landscapes for bushwalking and camping – most of the coastal section is part of the former Angahook-Lorne State Park, now incorporated into the **Great Otway National Park**.

Taking a surfing lesson is a popular activity for would-be surfers, and there are plenty of relaxed teachers ('Paddle, paddle, keep paddling') who can give you the basics. Lessons cost about \$50 for two hours.

Contact the **Geelong & Great Ocean Road visitors centre** (☎ 5275 5797; www.greatoceanrd.org.au/geelong; cnr Princes Hwy & St Georges Rd, Geelong; ☺ 9am-5pm) for maps and detailed information.

Getting There & Away

Interstate visitors coming from Adelaide, Brisbane or Sydney can fly into Avalon Airport, 22km from Geelong, with **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) and take the door-to-door **Avalon Airport Shuttle** (☎ 03-5278 8788; www.avalonairportshuttle.com.au) along the Great Ocean Rd as far as Lorne. Jetstar flights also depart from Avalon for international destinations in Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) trains from Melbourne's Southern Cross station travel to Geelong and then connect with V/Line buses that cruise along the Great Ocean Rd as far as Apollo Bay (\$34), via Torquay (\$14), Anglesea (\$19) and Lorne (\$28), four times daily Monday to Friday, and twice daily Saturday and Sunday. On Friday (and Monday during Christmas holidays), a V/Line bus continues around the coast from Apollo Bay to Port Campbell and Warrnambool.

McHarry's Bus Lines (☎ 03-5223 2111; www.mcharrys.com.au) has frequent bus services from Geelong to Torquay (\$6), Lorne (\$14) and Anglesea (\$8).

Tours

Several tour companies will take you out on the Great Ocean Rd, many leaving from Melbourne (see p493).

Go West Tours (☎ 1300 736 551; www.gowest.com.au) Takes trips along the Great Ocean Rd and to Phillip Island.

Ride Tours (☎ 1800 605 120; www.ridetours.com.au/site/; ☺ Mon & Wed) Does multiday tours including food and accommodation.

Wayward Bus (☎ 1300 653 510; www.waywardbus.com.au) Follows the southwest coast to South Australia (SA) as part of its Melbourne to Adelaide trip; you can do stopovers too.

TORQUAY

☎ 03 / pop 8000

Even park benches are surfboard shaped in Victoria's surf capital, where many visitors come to stock up on surf gear before taking on waves further along the road. There are a few activities in town, but as more clothing and gear outlets have moved in, the town has become like a mall for wave-lovers.

Torquay visitor information centre (☎ 52 61 4219; www.greatoceanroad.org/surfcoast; Surf City Plaza, Beach Rd) is at the rear of the plaza.

Sights & Activities

Next to the visitor centre is **Surfworld Australia Surfing Museum** (☎ 5261 4606; adult/child/family \$9/6/19; ☺ 9am-5pm), compulsory for would-be waxheads.

Torquay revolves around gorgeous local beaches: **Fisherman's Beach**, protected from ocean swells, and **Front Beach**, ringed by shady pines and sloping lawns, are ideal for families. Surf lifesavers patrol the frothing **Back Beach** during summer. **Bells Beach**, 7km west of Torquay, is legendary amongst surfers the world over for its powerful break which hosts a world-championship surfing contest every Easter.

Go Ride a Wave (☎ 1300 132 441; www.gorideawave.com.au; Bell St; 2hr lessons \$60, 2hr hire from \$20) hires surfing gear, sells secondhand equipment and offers lessons. It's next to the plaza in Baines Cres. Other surf instructors include **Gally's Surf Coaching** (☎ 5261 3542; www.gallysurfcoaching.com.au), **Westcoast Surf School** (☎ 5261 2241) and **Southern Exposure** (☎ 5261 2170).

Tiger Moth World Adventure Park (☎ 5261 5100; www.tigermothworld.com; Blackgate Rd; adult/child under 4 \$10/free; ☺ 10am-5pm), 5km northeast of Torquay, is a giant play park with paddle boats, minigolf, daily air shows and joy flights in vintage aircraft.

Sleeping

Summer and Easter are peak times for Torquay so book well ahead.

Bell Beach Lodge (☎ 5261 7070; 51-53 Surfcoast Hwy; dm/d \$20/50) This super chilled spot is perfect if you want to stow your gear and catch the curl, but if you don't want to haul a board with you it also hires out gear (half-/full day \$15/25). With eight bunk beds, some dorms feel the pinch but there's plenty to keep you out late.

Ironbark Haven B&B (☎ 5263 2224; www.ironbarkhaven.com; 3 Point Addis Rd, Bells Beach/Point Addis; d low/

high season \$120/150) Halfway to Anglesea, this rammed-earth homestead harmonises with the bush setting with several walks starting at your back door.

Bellbrae Harvest Accommodation (☎ 5266 2090; www.bellbraeharvest.com.au; 45 Portreath Rd, Bellbrae; d with/without breakfast \$216/185) If you're a foodie then this well-fitted-out accommodation is ideal with an additional breakfast that includes a freshly baked pastry basket. Rooms have plenty of luxuries (CDs and deep baths), but the mud-brick restaurant (mains \$26 to \$32, open for lunch and dinner) is the real indulgence here. It's located just off the Anglesea-Torquay Rd.

Torquay Holiday Resort (☎ 5261 2493; www.torquayholidayresort.com.au; 55 Surfcoast Hwy; powered sites \$25, cabins low/high season \$55/87; ☺) This modern, kid-friendly park is clean and friendly with a real community returning every summer when bookings are tight.

Other recommendations:

Torquay Public Reserve (☎ 5261 2496; unpowered/powered sites from \$10/25, cabins low/high season \$65/100) Just behind Back Beach.

Sea-Enna Cottage (☎ 5261 4667; signific@pipeline.com.au; 21 Zeally Bay Rd; d low/high season \$90/140) Self-contained and handy to town.

Eating

Growlers (☎ 5264 8455; 23 the Esplanade; mains \$15-26) The ever-popular beach aspect from the shaded veranda means this joint will always pack them in, but the innovative menu is a magnet to weekending Melburnians.

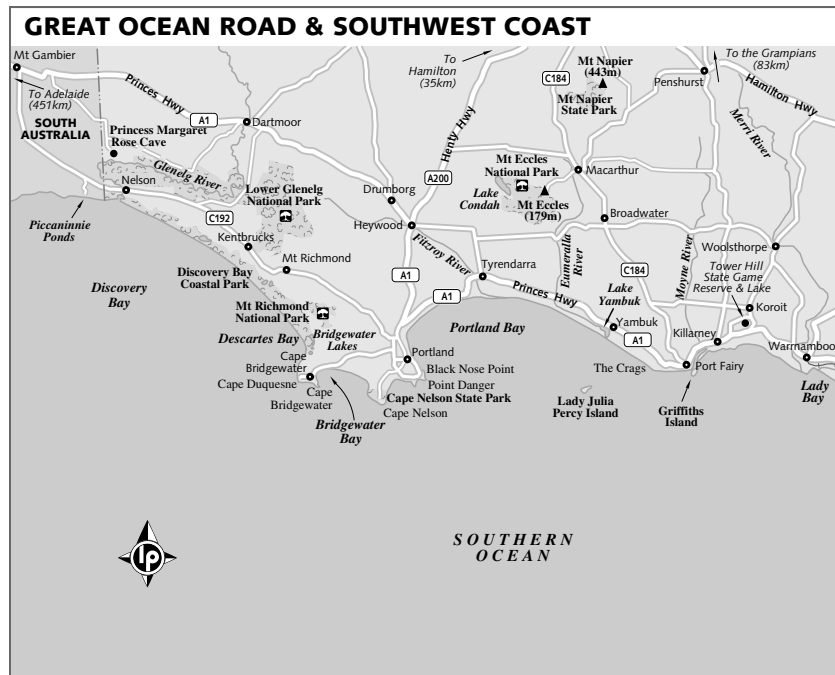
Scorched (☎ 5261 6142; 17 the Esplanade; breakfast \$7-15, mains \$25-30; ☺ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat & Sun) This waterside wonder does top-notch tucker with a brilliant international wine list.

Sandbah (☎ 5261 6414; 21 Gilbert St; mains \$14-21; ☺ lunch & dinner) This simple shopfront belies good grub like daily baked pies and quiches, plus some of the town's best coffee.

ANGLESEA

☎ 03 / pop 2200

This sweet little seaside village is a family favourite for its terrific beaches and camping. The town winds around the gum-green Anglesea River, and accommodation makes the most of tranquil bush settings. There's no visitor centre, just an information booth with brochures across from the main shopping centre.



Activities

You can hire surf or beach-play equipment from the **Anglesea Surf Centre** (☎ 5263 1530; cnr Great Ocean Rd & McMillan St) or **Go Ride a Wave** (☎ 1300 132 441; 143b Great Ocean Rd; 2hr lessons \$60, 2hr hire from \$20), which also gives surfing lessons, as does **Southern Exposure** (☎ 5261 2170).

Eco Logic Education & Environment Services (☎ 5263 1133; www.ecologic.net.au; walks from adult/child/family \$12/9/38) guides kid-pleasing 'marine rock-pool rambles' and night-time 'possum prowls'.

Sleeping & Eating

Anglesea Backpackers (☎ 5263 2664; 40 Noble St) Brightly coloured but basic, this bunkhouse is designed for surfers and offers surfboard hire (from \$20 per half-day). The map of Australia coffee table in the living room is a good indicator of the vibe of this daggy fun spot.

Surf Coast Spa Resort (☎ 5263 3363; www.surfcoastspa.com.au; 105 Great Ocean Rd; d from \$140) This place has gone upmarket and offers all sorts of health-spa add-ons to your stay, from a mud wrap to full facial. The basic motel rooms have been tastefully refitted, though

you might want to opt for a spa unit that is like a small home.

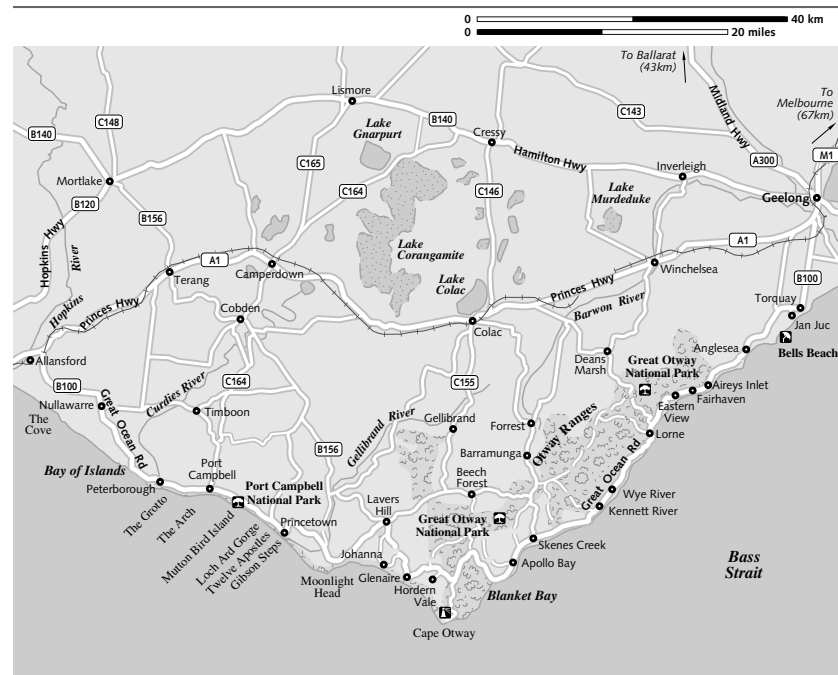
Point Luxury B&B (☎ 5263 3738; www.thepointanglesea.com.au; d low/high season from \$185/200; 🏠) With four snappy suites, this place is a quieter spot that commands ocean views from its balconies and bush at the rear. The king-size beds, gourmet breads at breakfast and complimentary port are welcome extras.

Big 4 Holiday Park (☎ 5263 1640; 45 Murray St; low/high season unpowered sites \$35/60, cabins \$99/139; 🏠) Packed with facilities, including an indoor pool and tennis court, this is an ideal family spot, though some balk at the suburb-like streets of cosy cottages.

LORNE

☎ 03 / pop 1200

Squeezing itself between the waters of Loutit Bay and the bush of the Otway Ranges, Lorne is one of the best spots for exploring the Great Ocean Rd. During peak season, car parks and accommodation are scarce, but out of season you'll be rubbing shoulders with only a few retirees who love the good life out here.



Lorne visitor information centre (☎ 5289 1152; www.visitsurcoast.com; 15 Mountjoy Pde; 🕒 9am-5pm) has recently moved to this larger premises.

Sights & Activities

There are more than 50km of walking tracks through the Otway Ranges around Lorne (see p536). **Eco Logic Education and Environment Services** (☎ 5263 1133; www.ecologic.net.au; walks from adult/child/family \$12/9/38), based in Anglesea, organises guided walks.

Teddy's Lookout makes for a good scenic drive and heading inland, on to picturesque Erskine Falls Rd, yields good walking. At **Erskine Falls** it's an easy walk to the viewing platform or 250 steps down to the base. The visitor centre can also suggest a few different scenic loop drives through the Otway Ranges.

Lorne Surf Shop (☎ 5289 1673; 130 Mountjoy Pde; 🕒 9am-5.30pm) hires boogie boards and wet-suits while outfits like **Go Ride a Wave** (☎ 1300 132 441; www.gorideawave.com.au; 2hr lessons \$60, 2hr hire from \$20) or **Southern Exposure** (☎ 5261 2170; www.southernexposure.com.au; 2hr lessons \$55) offer surfing lessons or hire.

Festivals & Events

Falls Festival (www.fallsfestival.com; tickets \$100)

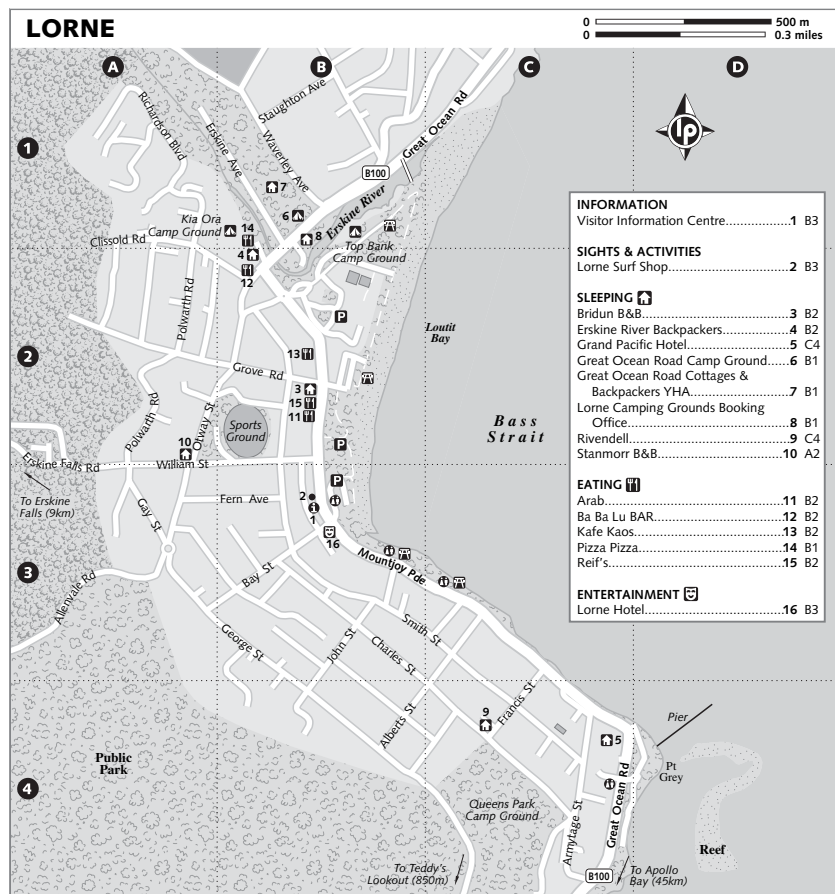
A two-day knees-up over New Year's is on a farm not too far from town. Assembles a top line-up of rock groups and tickets include camping.

Pier to Pub Swim (www.lornesurfclub.com.au) This popular event in January inspires up to 4500 swimmers to splash their way 1.2km across Loutit Bay to the Lorne Hotel.

Sleeping

Lorne locals seem to have thrown a B&B sign up on every backyard loo to create 'boutique' accommodation for the tourist throngs, but some represent poor value. If our suggestions below are booked out, try the straight-talking Lorne visitor information centre (opposite), which offers frank advice on places around town. Prices vary considerably in low and high seasons.

Great Ocean Road Cottages & Backpackers YHA (☎ 5289 1070; www.yha.com.au; 10 Erskine Ave; tents \$15, dn YHA members \$20, nonmembers low/high season \$24/30, d YHA members \$50, nonmembers low/high season \$60/70, cottages low/high season \$150/170) Snuggled away in the bush, this two-storey timber lodge has



spacious dorms, bargain tents already set up and top-value doubles. The institutional feel of some YHAs won't be seen here, with the secluded scrub offering cockatoo and the odd koala sightings. Cottages are huge A-frame retreats that sleep four to six, with basic kitchens and facilities.

Erskine River Backpackers (☎ 5289 1496; 6 Mountjoy Pde; dm/d \$25/60) Beautiful verandas line this classic old building just steps from town and on the river. Owner Robbo runs a laid-back joint with four-bunk dorms and plenty of chill-out space.

Rivendell (☎ 5289 2576; Francis Lane; d \$120) Staying in this fully self-contained flat may give you flashbacks of kindly grandparents you may never have had as the kindly owners offer

plenty of friendly chats and travel advice. Expansive verandas are at treeline so you can spot kookaburras and koalas over a morning cuppa. You probably won't even have time for the DVD or tiny telly in this secluded bush spot.

Bridun B&B (☎ 5289 1666; 1 Grove Rd; d low/high season from \$145/160) One of Lorne's original buildings, this 1920s classic is a weatherboard place set just off the main street. Heritage-style raw wood floors and other furnishings give it an authentic touch, but rooms are embellished with sweets to make a stay a real pleasure. Breakfasts in the morning will strain your belt well after lunch.

Stannmorr B&B (☎ 5289 1530; 64 Otway St; d \$140, ste \$250) Sheltering in the hills, this B&B has

become a Lorne institution for its ever-helpful owners and kookaburra handfeeding. Rooms are decked out in blonde woods, some with views across to the bay. The suite has the best aspect, along with romantic indulgences such as the gas fire, spa and languorous 11am check-out.

Grand Pacific Hotel (☎ 5289 1609; www.grandpacific.com.au; 268 Mountjoy Pde; d low/high season from \$160/180) This refitted relic groans at the floorboards with modish furniture. The best rooms have balconies and stunning sea views, though plainer rooms are still luxurious. Unfortunately, this is a popular weekend wedding venue so there might be late-night revelry.

Great Ocean Road Camp Ground (☎ 5289 1382; 2 Great Ocean Rd; unpowered/powerd sites from \$18/22, cabins low/high season \$80/122) With gum tree-lined spots by the banks of the river, this is a popular camping ground that's handy to town and the beach. Self-contained cottages with bathrooms are basic but good value.

Eating & Drinking

Reif's (☎ 5289 2366; 84 Mountjoy Pde; breakfast \$6-13, lunch \$14-25, dinner \$20-26) The multicoloured tables in the generous forecourt are hard to resist for breakfast or a sultry evening drink. Meals are artful like the breakfast treat of eggs à la mer (salmon and spinach dolloped with hollandaise) or lunch mains such as seafood linguini glowing with saffron and tiger prawns.

Kafe Kaos (☎ 5289 2639; 52 Mountjoy Pde; lunch \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Bright and bubbly, this place quickly exhausts alliteration but fortunately has a solid menu to back up its colourful interior. The Thai tofu burger is a tasty tempter, as is the sumptuous steak sandwich, but every meal should finish with a strong java jolt. Phew!

Pizza Pizza (☎ 5289 1007; 2b Mountjoy Pde; pizzas \$12-14) This tiny spot twirls out flavoursome pizza right before your eyes (courtesy of a large window that spies into the kitchen).

Arab (☎ 5289 1435; 94 Mountjoy Pde; mains \$20-24; ☎) This place has been the spot for coffee and breakfast since it opened in 1956. Suiting diners of this age, there's no fussing with food, just classics like its famous apple crumble.

Ba Ba Lu BAR (☎ 5289 1808; 6a Mountjoy Pde; mains \$18-28; ☎ closed Tue & Wed in low season) Ever-popular with backpackers and billionaires alike, this is a good spot for a pre-dinner tippie. The menu has inspired tapas and some seafood-based mains.

Lorne Hotel (☎ 5289 1409; cnr Mountjoy Pde & Bay St) This refitted pub makes a good spot for a drink, particularly in the ever-busy bottom bar which occasionally has weekend live music.

APOLLO BAY

☎ 03 / pop 1400

Once a fishing town, beautiful Apollo Bay was never going to be a secret for long but despite creeping development it has kept its charm, with rolling hills behind the town. It's a jumping-off point for exploring the surrounding Great Otway National Park.

The **Great Ocean Rd visitor information centre** (☎ 5237 6529; 100 Great Ocean Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) is on the left as you arrive from Lorne and has displays on Aboriginal history, rainforests, shipwrecks and the building of the Great Ocean Rd.

Sights & Activities

It's 1.5km from town to **Marriners Lookout** (signposted) for spectacular views of the town and coast – from the car park it's about 10 minutes' climb to the lookout.

Tandem hang glide or paraglide from **Marriners Lookout** with **Wingsports Flight Academy** (☎ 0419-378 616), or take to the high road with a Cessna 206 flight over the Twelve Apostles with **Apollo Bay Aviation** (☎ 0407-306 065; 3 Telford St; flights per person from \$90).

Wild Dog Trails (☎ 5237 6441; 225 Wild Dog Rd; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) has 1½- to three-hour horse rides (from \$55). Meet the slippery crew banished to the Marengo Reef Seal Colony with **Apollo Bay Sea Kayaking** (☎ 0405-495 909; ☎ tours 10.30am & 2pm most days).

Otway Expeditions (☎ 5237 6341; 3hr bike tours \$55, Argo buggies from \$35) runs mountain-bike tours through the Otways, as well as gentle bush-bashing adventures in cross-terrain-and-water Argo buggies.

A new multiday hike, the **Great Ocean Walk** (www.greatoceanwalk.com.au), starts at Apollo Bay running all the way to the 12 Apostles. You can hop on and off the trail to do shorter walks or take on the whole trek in six days; see the website for suggestions about different legs.

Festivals & Events

Apollo Bay Music Festival (☎ 5237 6761; www.apollobaymusicfestival.com; weekend passes from \$100), in April, spans the genres from classical to rock, folk to blues and back again.

WHERE TO SURF IN AUSTRALIA *Andrew Tudor*

Bells Beach, Cactus, Margaret River, the Superbank – mention any of them in the right company and stories of surfing legend will undoubtedly emerge. The Superbank hosts the first event on the WCT (World Championship Tour) calendar, and Bells Beach the second, with Bells having recently become the longest-serving host of a WCT event. Cactus dangles a lure of remote mystique, while Margaret River is a haunt for surfers chasing the bigger waves.

While the aforementioned might be jewels, they're dot points in the sea of stars that Australia has to offer. Little wonder – the coastline is vast, touching the Indian, Southern or South Pacific Oceans. With that much potential swell, an intricate coastal architecture, and the right conditions, you'll find anything from innocent breaks to gnarly reefs not far from all six Australian state capitals.

For daily surf reports, cams and forecasts, look up **Coastalwatch** (www.coastalwatch.com), or call the **Surf & Snow Line** (☎ 1900 911 525). For more information, news, events and surf schools, look up **Surfing Australia** (www.surfingaustralia.com). **RealSurf** (www.realsurf.com) is useful for surf reports.

New South Wales

It's hard to know where to begin; name practically any coastal town in NSW and there will be good surf nearby.

Popular spots:

- Manly through Avalon, otherwise known as Sydney's northern beaches (p113).
- Byron Bay (p197), Lennox Head (p194) and Angourie Point (p192) on the far north coast.
- Nambucca Heads (p184) and Crescent Head (p183) on the mid-north coast.
- The areas around Jervis Bay and Ulladulla (p233) on the south coast.

Queensland

By now every surfer in the world has heard of the Superbank. Just in case you haven't, it was formed when the Tweed River entrance was dredged and a fixed sand bypass was put in place. A happy accident. The resulting sandbar is 2km long, give or take, and it's said that on the right swell you can ride a wave the entire length. The Superbank stretches from Snapper Rocks to Kirra Point, near Coolangatta, and effectively replaces the breaks of Rainbow Bay, Greenmount Point, Coolangatta Beach and the Kirra groins.

Other areas:

- Along with Superbank, Burleigh Heads (p335; surf cam and report www.burleighcam.com.au) through to Surfers Paradise (p332) on the Gold Coast.
- North Stradbroke Island (p324) in Moreton Bay.
- Caloundra (p340), Alexandra Heads near Maroochy (p342) and Noosa (p344) on the Sunshine Coast.

South Australia

The odd shark attack has made Cactus Beach (p772), west of Ceduna on remote Point Sinclair, something of a bogeyman for surfers, if there is such a thing. Still, it's without doubt SA's best-known surf spot and remains internationally recognised for its quality and consistency. If you're game, it'll be worth it.

Other areas to check:

- Streaky Bay (p771) and Greenly Beach (p770) on the western side of the Eyre Peninsula.
- Pennington Bay, which has the most consistent surf on Kangaroo Island (p705).

- Pondalowie Bay and Stenhouse Bay on the Yorke Peninsula tip in Innes National Park (p765).
- Victor Harbor (p734), Port Elliot (p735) and Middleton Beach at Port Elliot on the southern side of the Fleurieu Peninsula (surf cam and reports www.surfsouthoz.com).

Tasmania

Tasmania has some fine surfing and for years it enjoyed relative anonymity among the global surf community. However, the publicity surrounding the arrival of Shipstern Bluff on the world surfing stage has blown Tassie's cover. This wave is remote and dangerous, and not recommended for the faint-hearted; indeed, it's not recommended at all unless you can magic some expert guidance.

That said, there are plenty of breaks to choose from, but be sure to pack a full-length wetsuit.

Other areas:

- Marawah (p684) on the exposed northwest coast can offer huge waves.
- St Helens (p659) and Bicheno (p657) on the east coast (surf report www.eastsurf.com.au).
- Eaglehawk Neck (p648) on the Tasman Peninsula.
- Closer to Hobart, Cremorne Point and Clifton Beach (surf cam and news www.coastview.com.au/site/surfing).

Victoria

Bells Beach is arguably the spiritual home of Australian surfing; hell, there's even a museum dedicated to Australian surfing history in nearby Torquay (p529). When the wave is on, well, few would argue, but the break is notoriously inconsistent.

Just as well there are many other excellent breaks throughout the state. Phillip Island, the Mornington Peninsula and the Great Ocean Rd are all within a two-hour drive from Melbourne.

Popular spots:

- Smiths Beach on Phillip Island (p526).
- Point Leo, Flinders, Gunnamatta (p524), Rye and Portsea (p524) on the Mornington Peninsula.
- On the southwest coast, Barwon Heads (p520), Point Lonsdale (p520) Torquay (p529), Bells Beach (p529) and numerous spots along the Great Ocean Rd.

Western Australia

The surf on offer in WA is simply awesome. North of Perth there are reefs that produce world-class lefts, while south of Perth the coastal stretch between Capes Naturaliste and Leeuwin offers some of the world's best waves. Margaret River Gracetown and Yallingup (p914) are particular Meccas. For details on the great surf WA has to offer, surf cams and reports, check out www.srosurf.com.

Other areas:

- Trigg Point and Scarborough Beach (p885), just north of Perth.
- Further north at Geraldton (p947) and Kalbarri (p951).
- Down south at Denmark (p921) on the southern ocean.

Andrew Tudor is a Lonely Planet employee and an avid surfer.

Sleeping

YHA Eco Beach (☎ 5237 7899; 5 Pascoe St; dm/s/d \$32/55/82) This architect-designed hostel is so new and shmick that some beds even still had Ikea tags on them when we visited. Best of all it fits into the natural surroundings with

every ecological care taken, which is worth the slightly higher price tag.

Surfside Backpackers (☎ 5237 7263; cnr Great Ocean Rd & Gambier St; dm low/high season \$18/22, d \$45/60) Of the four hostels in town, this rambling weatherboard has the most character, with

a homey feel. From the lounge you can catch great tumbling-surf views or spin the eclectic vinyl collection, or head outside to laze in a hammock. Four-bunk dorms can be a little cosy, but the atmosphere makes for a good stay.

Sandpiper Motel (☎ 5237 6732 Murray St; d low/high season from \$110/145) Simple beach-style rooms in sea blues and sandy tones are the order of the day in this newcomer to the Apollo Bay scene with excellent balcony rooms. There's natural blonde wood throughout, and many

rooms have their own cooking facilities. As it's handy to the main street you can also opt for restaurants.

Nelsons Perch B&B (☎ 5237 7176; www.nelsonsperch.com; 54 Nelson St; d low season \$110-140, d high season \$180-210; ☺ ☺) This four-room B&B keeps it small so you feel like you're staying all by yourself in a pleasant home not far from the beach (but far enough to avoid the crowds). Rooms vary from the top-shelf spa room to the simpler guestroom with its own kitchen.

Haley Reef Views B&B (☎ 5237 7885; www.haleyreefviews.com.au; 31 Noel St; d low/high season \$110/140; ☺) The immaculate English garden gives you an idea of the care taken with guests at this sweet little spot. It's just a short stroll to the beach, but there's an indulgent spa to relax in.

Marengo Holiday Park (☎ 5237 6162; www.marengo-park.com.au; unpowered sites low/high season \$20/36, powered sites \$22/40, d cabins \$80/165) Just 2km west of town by the beach, this meticulously run park has spacious deluxe cabins including a pricey spa cabin. Campers are well taken care of with good facilities.

Eating

La Bimba (☎ 5237 7411; 125 Great Ocean Rd; lunch \$10-15, dinner \$25-32) Head upstairs to escape the main street at this artsy spot for breakfast or an innovative yet unpretentious lunch of cannelloni or a ripper of a steak sandwich. Diner is fancier with rack of lamb on saffron and pistachio risotto, and a solid wine list makes it an ideal spot to sup and swill and ultimately slur.

Café Nautigals (☎ 0402-825 590; 57 Great Ocean Rd; mains \$14-16; ☺) Now with the equally puntastic Lost Buoys bar attached, this local hero has been pleasing punters with its Asian grub for years. Backpackers covet the free internet and good veggie options.

Blue Olive (☎ 5237 7118; Great Ocean Rd; mains \$15-25; ☺) lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Sat & Sun) Just 1km before town, the Olive has the best eating views of rolling surf and a snappy international menu.

CAPE OTWAY

Perhaps Cape Otway's rugged coastline is made less beautiful when you know that it has smashed several ships wide open in its history, but it's hard to believe on a clear day. It forms part of the Great Otway National Park, 21km from Apollo Bay.

About 8km along Lighthouse Rd, a signpost points down an unsealed road to **Parker Hill, Point Franklin** and **Crayfish Beach**, all gorgeous, secluded spots for beach ambling (absolutely no swimming!). You can climb the **Cape Otway Lighthouse** (☎ 03-5237 9240; Lighthouse Rd; adult/child/family \$11/6/26; ☺ 9am-5pm) for amazing views from Australia's oldest lighthouse.

Three of the most popular walks are **Erskine Falls Walk** (7.5km one way), which descends steeply down steps to a lookout and then to the base of the falls; **Kalimna Falls Walk** (9km circuit), running along an old timber tramway; and **Sheoak Falls Walk** (9km return), a moderate to difficult walk that takes you to the 15m drop and deep pool of the falls.

Sleeping

Lighthouse Keeper's Residence (☎ 03-5237 9240; www.lightstation.com; B&B d from \$185, studio from \$185) This sandstone place has scant heritage furnishings and bonuses like DVD players in case it rains. It sleeps up to four; the studio is smaller and good for couples.

Cape Otway Centre for Conservation Ecology (☎ 03-5237 9297; 635 Lighthouse Rd, r from \$250) Just off the Great Ocean Rd, you won't be the only guests at this eco-lodge as it also serves as an animal hospital. The rooms are luxurious with bush-view decks in most of the en suite rooms, but extras like guided walks, afternoon tea and fulsome breakfasts make it even more worthwhile.

Bimbi Park (☎ 03-5237 9246; www.bimbipark.com.au; Manna Gum Dr; unpowered sites low/high season \$17/25, powered sites \$20/30, dm \$20/24, d cabins \$60/85) This horse-riding ranch, just 3km before the lighthouse, has top camping spots and a few cabins in the middle of the bush. Bushwalks lead to remote beaches, and one-hour horse rides cost \$40.

There's plenty of **bush camping** (low/high season \$10/20) throughout the park but book through **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63). You can grab a brochure at visitors centres.

PORT CAMPBELL NATIONAL PARK

The most photographed stretch of the Great Ocean Rd offers sheer limestone cliffs towering over fierce seas. For thousands of years, waves and tides have relentlessly sculpted the soft rock into a fascinating series of rock stacks, gorges, arches and blowholes.

The **Gibson Steps**, hand-carved into the cliffs in the 19th century (and later replaced with

concrete steps), lead down to feral Gibson Beach. This beach, and others along this stretch of coast, are not recommended for swimming – you can walk along the beach, but be wary of high-tide strandings.

The **Twelve Apostles** are the best-known rock formations in Victoria. These lonely rocky stacks have been abandoned to the ocean by the eroding headland. Today their number has been whittled down to six apostles, visible from the viewing platforms. There's an interpretive display at the visitor facility. Timber boardwalks ring the cliff tops, providing viewing platforms and seats.

At **Loch Ard Gorge** (see the boxed text, p542), haunting tales of woe await. It's one of the Shipwreck Coast's most notorious sections. You can find out more at the **Port Campbell visitor information centre** (☎ 03-5598 6089; 26 Morris St, Port Campbell; www.visit12apostles.com; ☺ 9am-5pm).

West of Port Campbell, the next ocean sculpture is the **Arch**, a rocky archway offshore from Point Hesse. Nearby is **London Bridge**, albeit fallen down. It was once a double-arched rock platform linked to the mainland, but in 1990 one of the arches collapsed into the sea.

About 200m up the road from London Bridge, **12 Apostles Helicopters** (☎ 03-5598 6161; www.12ah.com; tours from \$80) offers a range of tours recorded on a 'Skycam' video as a souvenir. If you want to explore under your own steam, **GORATS** (☎ 0409-514 963; www.gorats.com.au; bike tours from \$66, canoe trips from \$29) does mountain bike or canoe tours throughout the Otways.

Sleeping & Eating

Many of the following options are in or near Port Campbell.

Port Campbell Hostel (☎ 03-5598 6305; www.portcampbellhostel.com.au; 18 Tregesa St; dm \$22) This rustic-looking hostel has good dorms though the ones with more bunks can feel squasy. It's in a central spot and has plenty to keep you busy.

Daysy Hill Country Cottages (☎ 03-5598 6226; daysyhill@gatewaybbs.com.au; 2585 Cobden-Port Campbell Rd; d \$130-180; ☺) These hillside cedar and sandstone cottages, just a few minutes from town, are decked out in modern colonial-style country comfort. The newer deluxe cabins have the best views and include spas.

Port Campbell Cabin & Camping Park (☎ 03-5598 6492; campinport@datafast.net.au; Morris St; unpowered/power sites \$20/23, cabins with bathroom low/high season

\$80/105) Neat, small and a two-minute walk to the beach and bottom end of town, these new cabins are a good option, but the camp sites lack shade.

Waves (☎ 03-5598 6111; 29 Lord St; mains \$22-28) With a curved roof, you can't miss the town's best eatery which excels at seafood and meat, but doesn't have much for vegetarians.

SOUTHWEST

The Great Ocean Rd ends 12km east of Warrnambool, where it meets the Princes Hwy which continues into SA. It's a pretty stretch of road which passes through the traditional lands of the Gunditjmarra people. Historic Port Fairy is a nice place for a stopover, but Warrnambool, a large coastal town, is the best place to stock up for onward travel.

WARRNAMBOOL

☎ 03 / pop 30,700

Warrnambool was originally a whaling and sealing station – now it's a major regional commercial centre. Its historic buildings, waterways and tree-lined streets are attractive and there's a large student population who attend the Warrnambool campus of Deakin University.

Information

Warrnambool Library (☎ 5562 2258; 25 Liebig St; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri, 10am-noon Sat; ☺) Free internet access.

Warrnambool visitor information centre (☎ 5559 4620; www.warrnamboolinfo.com.au; Merri St) Sign-posted off the Princes Hwy (A1), it produces the handy *Warrnambool Visitors Guide*.

Sights & Activities

Warrnambool's major tourist attraction is the impressive **Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village** (☎ 1800 556 111; www.flagstaffhill.com; Merri St; adult/child/family \$16/6/36; ☺ 9am-5pm), modelled on an early Australian coastal port. See the cannon and fortifications built in 1887 to withstand the perceived threat of Russian invasion, and **Shipwrecked** (adult/child/family \$25/14/64), a lame evening sound-and-laser show of the *Loch Ard's* plunge.

Warrnambool has excellent beaches such as sheltered **Lady Bay**, the main swimming beach, which has fortifications at the break-water at its western end. **Logan's Beach** has the

TOWER HILL RESERVE

Tower Hill, 15km west of Warrnambool, is a vast caldera born in a volcanic eruption 30,000 years ago. Aboriginal artefacts unearthed in the volcanic ash show that indigenous people lived in the area at the time. It's jointly administered by the Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Cooperative, which operates the **visitor centre** (☎ 03-5561 5315; www.worn Gundidj.org.au) with Parks Victoria. There are excellent day walks, including the steep 30-minute Peak Climb with spectacular 360-degree views. There's a fascinating painting in the Warrnambool Art Gallery (p538) by Eugene von Guérard of Tower Hill painted in 1855. After a century of deforestation and environmental degradation, this incredibly detailed painting was used to identify species used in a replanting programme begun in 1961 when Tower Hill became a state game reserve. Since then over 300,000 trees have been replanted.

PORT FAIRY

☎ 03 / pop 2600

This seaside township was settled in 1835, and the first arrivals were whalers and sealers. Port Fairy still has a large fishing fleet and a relaxed, salty feel with its old bluestone and sandstone buildings, whitewashed cottages, colourful fishing boats and tree-lined streets. The tiny town centre is along and around Sackville St.

Port Fairy Folk Festival (www.portfairyfolkfestival.com), one of Australia's foremost music festivals, is held on the Labour Day long weekend in early March. Accommodation for the festival is routinely booked a year in advance.

Information

Port Fairy Community House (☎ 5568 2681; Railway Pl; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; ☒) Internet access \$4 per hour.

Port Fairy visitor information centre (☎ 5568 2682; www.port-fairy.com/vic; Bank St) Ocean end of Bank St.

Sights

Port Fairy has a rich and sometimes gloomy heritage that enraptures local history buffs. Brochures and maps from the visitor centre show the popular **Shipwreck Walk** and **History Walk** signposted around town. The **Port Fairy History Centre** (Gipps St; adult/child \$3/\$50; ☒ 2-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun, daily during school holidays), housed in the old bluestone courthouse (complete with

dusty mannequins acting out a courtroom scene), has shipping relics, old photos and costumes, and a prisoner's cell. On **Battery Hill** there's a lookout point, and cannons and fortifications positioned here in the 1860s. There's a lovely walk around **Griffiths Island** where the Moyne River empties into the sea. The island is connected by a footbridge and is home to a protected **mutton bird colony** and a modest **lighthouse**. **Mulloka Cruises** (☎ 5568 1790; adult/child \$10/free) runs half-hour cruises of the port, bay and Griffiths Island.

Sleeping

Port Fairy Youth Hostel (☎ 5568 2468; www.portfairyhostel.com.au; 8 Cox St; YHA members/nonmembers dm \$21/25, d \$55/62, f \$80/87; ☒) In the rambling 1844 home of merchant William Rutledge, this friendly and well-run hostel has a large kitchen, pool table, free cable TV and peaceful gardens.

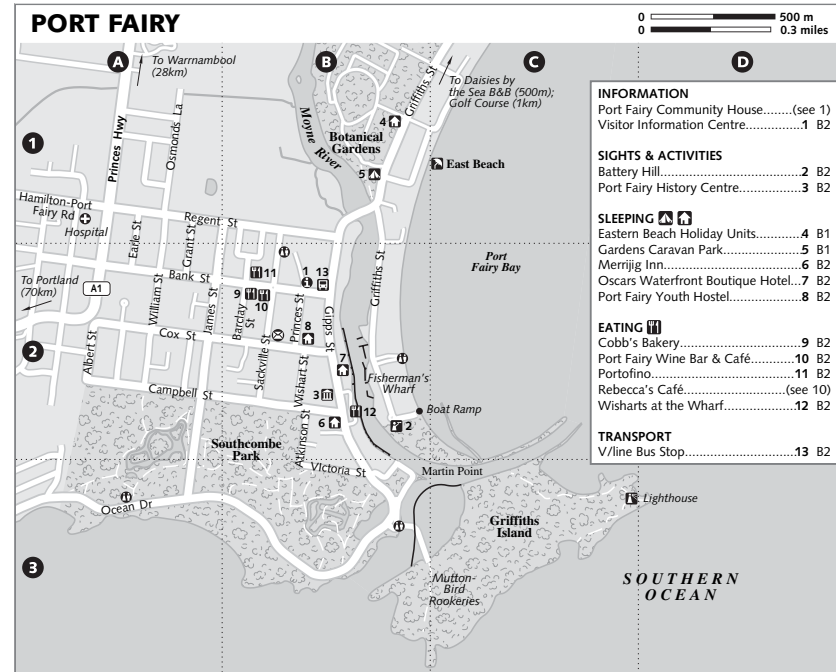
Eastern Beach Holiday Units (☎ 5568 1117; www.port-fairy.com/easternbeach; 121 Griffiths St; d from \$75) What these lack in old-world style they more than make up for in price and amenities – large, comfortable self-contained units with separate bedrooms, lounges and kitchens.

Merrijig Inn (☎ 5568 2324; www.merrijiginn.com; cnr Campbell & Gipps Sts; d incl breakfast from \$130) This is Victoria's oldest inn and the tiny attic doubles are about as authentic as you could get (were people smaller in the old days?) – very quaint, very small! The queen suites are roomier.

our pick Daisies by the Sea B&B (☎ 5568 2355; www.port-fairy.com/daisiesbythesea; 222 Griffiths St; d from \$130) If Port Fairy's old-world charm gives you the creeps, try these two cosy beachfront suites 1.5km from town. Fresh as the sea breeze with waves crashing just 50m from your door, Daisies is a snug, appealing getaway for couples.

Oscars Waterfront Boutique Hotel (☎ 5568 3022; www.oscarswaterfront.com; 41b Gipps St; d \$250, premium ste \$275; ☒) Oscars is spectacular with huge, wrought-iron chandeliers and parquet floors and a broad veranda. Rooms are exquisite and the communal lounge and dining areas are brilliant. Oscars overlooks the wharf (of course), and is popular with the European and American jetset.

Gardens Caravan Park (☎ 5568 1608; www.portfairycaravanparks.com; 111 Griffiths St; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/25, cabins from \$75) One of several caravan parks, this park is next to the botanical gardens, 200m from the beach and a short walk to the town centre.



Eating

Cobb's Bakery (☎ 5568 1713; 25 Bank St) This is where the locals come for fresh-cut sandwiches, pies, pasties, burgers and, naturally, fresh bread.

Rebecca's Café (☎ 5568 2533; 72 Sackville St; mains \$5-12; ☒ breakfast & lunch) Excellent for breakfast and light lunches, Rebecca's serves up cakes, muffins, slices, scones and biscuits as well as homemade ice cream until 6pm.

Wisharts at the Wharf (☎ 5568 1884; 29 Gipps St; mains \$17-23; ☒ lunch & dinner) Wharfside dining doesn't come prettier than this. Plump, fresh fish and chips are always assured here. Adventurous presentation and flavours in very relaxed surroundings.

Port Fairy Wine Bar & Café (☎ 5568 2326; cnr Bank & Sackville Sts; mains \$19-24; ☒ Wed-Sat) This popular corner café moonlights as an upbeat Mod Oz restaurant with a good wine list and excellent linguine with gorgonzola and pancetta, and baked-pumpkin risotto.

Portofino (☎ 5568 2251; 26 Bank St; mains \$28-42; ☒ dinner Mon-Sat) Portofino does high-end Mod Oz-cum-Mediterranean food with style – it's one of the best restaurants in western Victoria. Fancy a little roast duck over couscous with

a dried fig and radish salad, or venison with Moorish spinach and potatoes Catalan style? Portofino offers splendid vegetarian dishes too, and local seafood is a feature.

Getting There & Away

Several buses a day run between Port Fairy and Warrnambool (\$5), connecting with Melbourne trains. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) has daily buses to Portland (\$11) and Mt Gambier (\$27). The thrice-weekly **Viclink** (☎ 13 61 38; www.viclink.com.au) Great Ocean Rd to the Grampians coach service connects Port Fairy to Hamilton (\$13), Halls Gap (\$29) and Ararat (\$35).

PORTLAND

☎ 03 / pop 9600

Portland is the site of Victoria's first European settlement and was a whaling and sealing base from the early 1800s. The first permanent settlers were the Henty family, arriving from Van Diemen's Land in 1834. Blessed Mary MacKillop, Australia's first saint, came here from Melbourne in 1862 and founded Australia's first religious order. Portland is the only deep-water port between Melbourne and

THE SHIPWRECK COAST

The Victorian coastline between Cape Otway and Port Fairy was a notoriously dangerous stretch of water in the days of sailing ships. Navigation was exceptionally difficult due to numerous barely hidden reefs and frequent heavy fog. More than 80 vessels came to grief on this 120km stretch in just 40 years.

The most famous wreck was that of the iron-hulled clipper *Loch Ard*, which foundered off Mutton Bird Island on the final night of its voyage from England in 1878. Of the 55 people on board, only two survived. Eva Carmichael clung to wreckage and was washed into the gorge, where apprentice officer Tom Pearce rescued her. Eva and Tom were both 18 years old. The press tried to create a romantic story but nothing actually happened. Eva soon returned to Ireland and they never saw each other again.

Divers have investigated these wrecks; relics are on display in the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village (p537) in Warrnambool.

Adelaide, and home to the huge Portland Aluminium Smelter (5km from town), exporting 340,000 tonnes per year. The huge industrial wharf is an eyesore on an otherwise attractive colonial-era township.

Information

Portland Municipal Library (☎ 5523 1497; 40 Bentinck St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 10am-1pm Sat; ☎) Internet access.

Portland visitor information centre (☎ 5523 2671; www.greatoceanroad.org/portlandsurrounds; Lee Breakwater Rd) In the impressive-looking Maritime Discovery Centre.

Sights & Activities

The restored 1886 **Portland Cable Tram** (adult/child/family \$11/56/27; ☎ 10am-4pm) does five trips a day plying an 8km circular route linking the vintage-car museum, botanic gardens, Maritime Discovery Centre and WWII memorial water tower. Passengers hop on and off as they please; it's a great way to get acquainted with the town.

The **Powerhouse Motor & Car Museum** (☎ 5523 5795; cnr Glenelg & Percy Sts; adult/child/family \$5/1/10) has 30 vintage Australian and American vehicles and motorbikes dating from 1920.

The grand old **Burswood Homestead** (☎ 5523 4686; 15 Cape Nelson Rd) was built for Edward Henty in 1850 with 5.5 hectares of **gardens** (adult/child \$3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm).

There are some good surfing spots around this coast, especially at sublime **Bridgewater Bay**. The visitor centre has a guide to 15 surf breaks.

Sleeping

Burswood Homestead (☎ 5523 4686; 15 Cape Nelson Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$105/165) Set in beautiful

gardens, this resplendent place is an indulgent, antique-laden mini mansion. Spacious master rooms have bathrooms. Devonshire tea is offered on arrival.

Clifftop Accommodation (☎ 5523 1126; clifftop@dodo.com.au; 13 Clifton Ct; s/d from \$115/135; ☎) On a sunny day, the panoramic ocean views from your balcony are blindingly bright. These two self-contained rooms are huge, with big brass beds, telescopes and a modern maritime feel.

our pick Victoria House (☎ 5521 7577; vichouse@hotmail.net.au; 5 Tyers St; d incl breakfast from \$140) This excellent two-storey Georgian bluestone dwelling right in the town centre was built in 1853 and is National Trust classified. It's been stylishly renovated with nine heritage-style guestrooms with bathrooms, a comfy lounge, open fires and garden.

Henty Bay Van & Cabin Park (☎ 5523 1904; www.hentybay.com.au; 342 Dutton Way; unpowered/powerd sites from \$16/22, cabins from \$60; ☎) This park, 5km from town, has wireless internet and cybercafé, ATM, kitchen and laundry, covered BBQs, boat ramps, TV lounge and disabled access.

Eating

Kopi on the Beach (☎ 5523 1822; 49 Bentinck St; mains \$4-7; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) With hot-pink walls, dangling crystal mobiles, mandalas and bushcraft furniture, Kopi's has 'character'. It's reasonably priced, and the toasted tortilla sandwiches are great.

Sullys Café & Wine Bar (☎ 5523 5355; 55 Bentinck St; mains \$15-18) 'Safe, Sustainable Cuisine' is the ethos at Sullys, a narrow and pleasant nook across from the waterfront.

Sandilands (☎ 5523 3319; Percy St; mains \$16-24; ☎ dinner, closed Tue & Sun) This elegant manor's

imposing façade suggests scary sophistication but reception-centre chairs tone it down a notch. Vegetarians are well catered for here with stir-fry, pasta and risotto dishes.

Getting There & Away

There are daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) buses between Portland and Port Fairy (\$11), Warrnambool (\$16) and Mt Gambier (\$14). Buses depart from Henty St.

PORTLAND TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA

From Portland, you can either go north to Heywood and rejoin the Princes Hwy to SA, or head northwest along the slower, beautiful coastal route known as the Portland-Nelson Rd. This road runs inland from the coast, but along the way there are turn-offs leading to beaches and national parks.

Cape Bridgewater

☎ 03 / pop 100

An essential 21km detour off the Portland-Nelson Rd is Cape Bridgewater. The stunning 4km arc of **Bridgewater Bay** is perhaps one of Australia's finest stretches of white-sand surf beach backed by pristine dunes. The road continues on to **Cape Duquesne** where walking tracks lead to a **Blowhole** and the **Petrified Forest** on the clifftop. A longer two-hour return walk takes you to a **seal colony** where you can see dozens of fur seals sunning themselves on the rocks.

There's plenty of accommodation available at Cape Bridgewater (inquire at the Portland visitor information centre, opposite) but standouts include **Sea View Lodge B&B** (☎ 5526 7276; Bridgewater Rd; s/d from \$100/140, self-contained house sleeping 4 \$165), **Abalone Beach House** (☎ 0408-808 346; www.abalonehouse.com.au; Bridgewater Rd; house sleeping 4 \$170) and, for those with more meagre means, **Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp** (☎ 5526 7267; Bridgewater Rd; dm \$15, cabins \$60).

Nelson

☎ 08 / pop 200

Nelson is the last vestige of civilisation before the SA border – a riverside village with a general store, pub and a handful of accommodation places. It's a popular holiday and fishing spot at the mouth of the **Glenelg River**, which originates in the Grampians and travels more than 400km to the coast at Nelson. A good chunk of the river flows through **Lower Glenelg National Park**, best explored by canoe.

The **Parks Victoria & Nelson visitor information centre** (☎ 8738 4051; ☎) is just before the Glenelg River bridge.

Nelson Boat & Canoe Hire (☎ 8738 4048; www.nelsonboatandcanohire.com.au) can rig you up for serious camping expeditions. Canoe hire costs from \$36 a day. It also does upriver canoe deliveries and pick-ups for an extra fee.

Book a leisurely 3½-hour cruise up the Glenelg River with **Nelson Endeavour River Cruises** (☎ 8738 4191; adult/child \$25/10). The cruise stops at the **Princess Margaret Rose Cave** (adult/child/family \$11/6/26), but tickets for the cave tour cost extra. Cruises depart daily in summer at 1pm, but don't operate Monday and Friday during the rest of the year. If you travel to the cave on your own, it's about 17km from Nelson, towards the border. If you've never had a speleological experience take a 45-minute tour, leaving every hour between 10am and 4pm.

Nelson Cottage (☎ 8738 4161; cnr Kellett & Sturt Sts; d \$80) has old-fashioned rooms with clean shared amenities.

The 1855 **Nelson Hotel** (☎ 8738 4011; Kellett St; d/apr from \$50/120) has a stuffed pelican above the bar next to a giant crab-on-a-slab (of wood) – interesting decorative items. Foodwise there's a range of vegetarian options alongside the crumbed and fried fare (mains \$13 to \$17, open for lunch and dinner). The quarters are plain but adequate with shared facilities, and the apartments are large and self-contained.

GREAT SOUTH WEST WALK

This 250km signposted loop begins and ends at Portland, and takes in some of the southwest's most stunning natural scenery, from the remote, blustery coast, through the river system of the Lower Glenelg National Park and back through the hinterland to Portland. Brilliantly conceived to connect some of the region's best camping grounds, comfortable accommodation and dining options can also be included. The whole loop would take at least 10 days, but it can be done in sections and parts can be done as day walks. Maps are available from the Portland visitor information centre (opposite) and the Parks Victoria and visitor information centre in Nelson (left). All information, FAQs and registration details are available at **Great South West Walk** (www.greatsouthwestwalk.com).

Wrens on Glenelg (☎ 8738 4198; www.wrensonglenelg.com.au; 5 Acacia St; d incl breakfast \$150) is a swish, modern B&B done in designer corrugated iron. Very stylish and comfortable in a bush setting with a private landing on the Glenelg River, Wrens has a queen bed and two-person spa.

The **Kywong Caravan Park** (☎ 8738 4174; www.kywongcp.com; North Nelson Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$14/18, on-site vans \$33, cabins \$49) is on 25 hectares of bushland, next to the national park and Glenelg River.

There are nine **camp sites** (permits \$11) between Nelson and Dartmoor along the Glenelg River that are popular with canoeists but accessible by road, with rain-fed water tanks, toilets and fireplaces, but you need firewood. Camping permits are issued by the Parks Victoria and visitor information centre in Nelson, where you can also get maps. Forest Camp South is among the nicest of these, right on the river, rich in bird life and easily accessible from the Portland-Nelson Rd.

THE WESTERN DISTRICT

This region is the third-largest volcanic plain in the world and has some of the best sheep and cattle country in Australia. The grazing region is traditionally well-heeled and conservative – National Party heartland.

Hamilton

☎ 03 / pop 9250

Hamilton, the ‘Wool Capital of the World’, is the major town of the Western District. There’s no real reason to stay in Hamilton, unless you’re keen on wool-growing. The **Hamilton visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 807 056; 5572 3746; www.sthgrampians.vic.gov.au; Lonsdale St) issues the free *Volcanoes Discovery Trail* booklet.

The **Hamilton Art Gallery** (☎ 5573 0469; Brown St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 2–5pm Sun) has a good collection of colonial art. On Coleraine Rd, 2km west of the centre, the **Big Wool Bales** (☎ 5571 2810; Coleraine Rd; ☎ 9.30am–4pm) has wool samples and shearing demonstrations.

Sir Reginald Ansett (founder of Ansett Airlines) began his empire in Hamilton in 1931. The **Sir Reginald Ansett Transport Museum** (☎ 5571 2767; Ballarat Rd; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am–4pm) has a collection of airline memorabilia, including a 1936 Fokker Universal aircraft, similar to the one Ansett used on his first flight.

SLEEPING & EATING

George Hotel (☎ 5572 1844; george-hotel@bigpond.com.au; 213 Gray St; s/d incl breakfast from \$57/70) Basic small units are in the centre of town, behind the hotel. The restaurant (mains \$8 to \$19, open for lunch and dinner) serves concoctions of local produce, including Merino chicken!

Mourilyan House (☎ 5572 4347; goldsmithmotel@hotkey.net.au; 22 Pope St; d incl breakfast from \$130) This large 1920s-era Art Deco villa glitters with crystal, and has a billiards room, guest lounge and 1870s four-poster beds.

Gilly’s (☎ 5571 9111; gillys@hotkey.net.au; 106 Gray St; mains \$14–19; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue–Sat) Decorated with street signs, registration plates and big lounge chairs, Gilly’s serves stylish dishes and fresh breakfasts.

Mt Eccles National Park

Mt Eccles erupted 19,000 years ago, and the lava flow covered the countryside in all directions, with one massive tongue flowing 30km to the coast and another heading 19km out to sea. Its main features are the scenic lake, lava caves and huge koala population. There’s a **ranger’s station** (☎ 03-5576 1338) and camp sites with toilets and showers.

THE WIMMERA

The Wimmera is an endless expanse of wheat fields and sheep properties bisected by the Western Hwy (A8), the main route between Melbourne and Adelaide.

The major attractions in the region are the Grampians National Park, Mt Arapiles State Park – Australia’s most famous rock-climbing venue (known as Djurite to Koories) – and the Little Desert National Park. The Wimmera was the training ground for Australia’s first international cricket team – an all-Aboriginal team that toured England in 1868.

Getting There & Away

The *Overland*, the Melbourne–Adelaide train, runs through the Wimmera, stopping at Ararat, Horsham and Dimboola (for confirmed bookings only), four times a week. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) has train/bus services between Melbourne and major towns.

From Horsham you can take a bus north to Mildura, west to Naracoorte or south to Hamilton.

STAWELL

☎ 03 / pop 8500

Stawell is famous for the **Stawell Gift**, a 120m foot race that’s Australia’s richest and has been run here every Easter Monday since 1878, attracting up to 20,000 visitors. The **Stawell Gift Hall of Fame** (☎ 5358 1326; Main St; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 9–11am Mon–Fri) is opposite the Gift Hotel and houses race memorabilia. The **Railway Station Gallery** (☎ 5358 1135; Napier St; ☎ Thu–Sun & public holidays 10am–4pm) is worth a look, as much for the beautiful old station building as for the shifting exhibitions.

Bunjil’s Shelter, along a bone-rattling bumpy road 11km south of Stawell and signposted off the road to Pomonal, is one of the most significant Aboriginal rock-art sites in the state. Bunjil is the creator spirit of the Aboriginal people of this region. There’s nothing authentic about **Casper’s World in Miniature** (☎ 5358 1877; London Rd; adult/child/family \$9/4/24; ☎ from 9am). This park displays exhibits devoted to various countries and cultures of the world – a diminutive Eiffel Tower and Egyptian pyramid as well as a replica gold mine, and, of course, a souvenir shop. Kitsch and trashy, but *très populaire* with the tourists!

The town is steeped in colonial-era history and the **Stawell visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 330 080; 50–52 Longfield St) provides interpretive maps for town walking tours. It will also book accommodation.

Sleeping & Eating

Town Hall Hotel (☎ 5358 1059; 62 Main St; s/d without bathroom from \$30/50, penthouse \$160, incl breakfast) A grand old pub that has good, basic rooms with pressed-tin ceilings, guestroom with TV, shared bathrooms and back deck.

Magdala Motor Lodge (☎ 5358 3877; www.magdalamotorlodge.com.au; Western Hwy; d with/without spa \$135/105, f \$160; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just outside town, Magdala has a lovely bush setting with comfortable rooms that look over a small private lake. There’s a heated indoor pool and spa, tennis court and six-hole golf course, an 800m lakeside walking track, free canoe use, on-site fishing and a restaurant (mains \$15 to \$25, open for dinner Monday to Saturday).

Stawell Park Caravan Park (☎ 5358 2709; fax 5358 2199; Western Hwy; sites from \$15, d cabins \$66; ☎) This park, on 48 hectares of attractive bushland, has a pool and recreation room.

Geogie’s Café (☎ 5358 4400; 102 Main St; light meals \$5–9) This little café in the centre of town

churns out fresh, light meals. You’ll find the Grampians Produce Group goodies here too.

Brix Hotel (☎ 5358 1344; 39 Barnes St; mains \$13–19; ☎ lunch Mon–Fri, dinner Fri–Sun) Nothing fussy, just cheap, straightforward pub grub.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) runs five buses daily to Ararat or Ballarat connecting with the V/Line train to Melbourne (\$40). A daily bus service also connects Stawell with Halls Gap (\$10) in the Grampians.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK (GARIWERD)

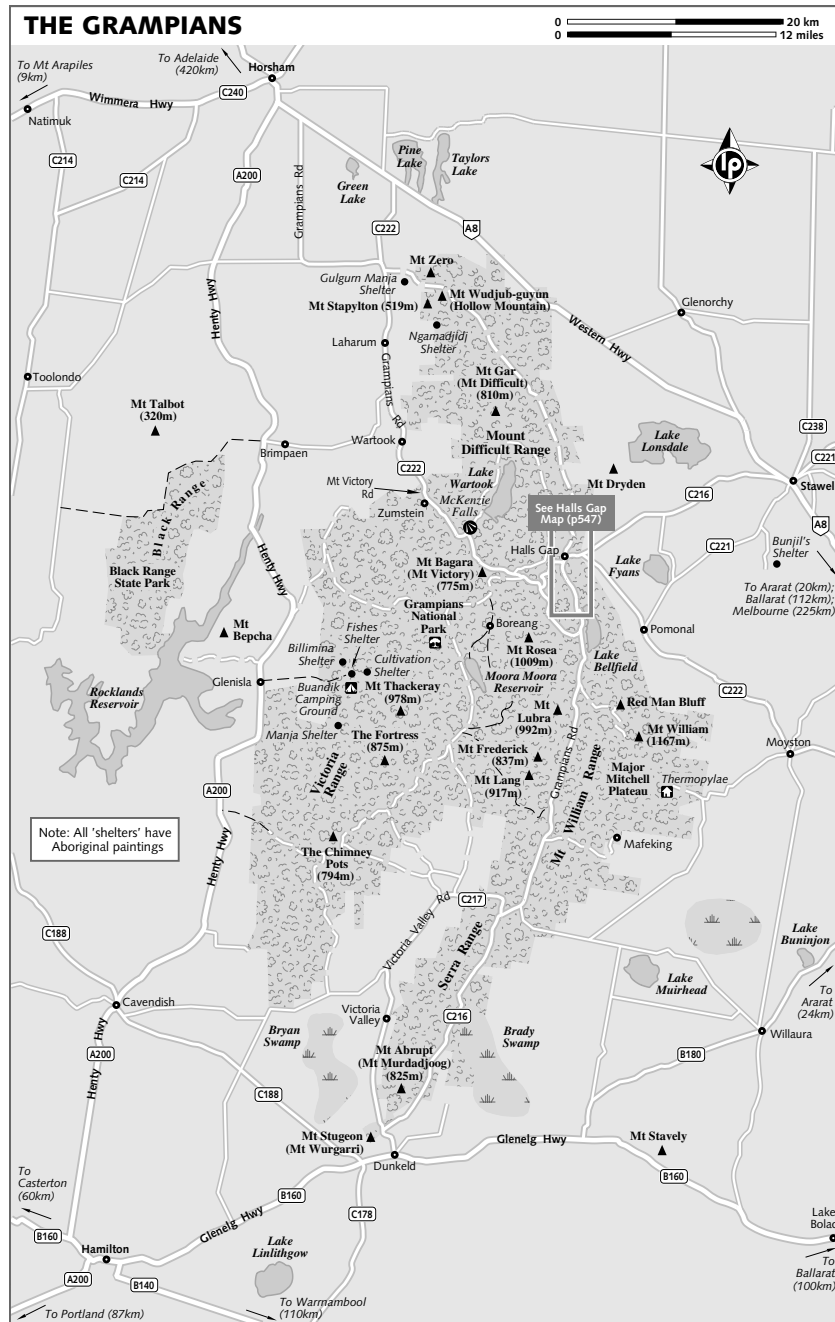
The Grampians (Gariwerd as they’re known to Koories) are one of Victoria’s most outstanding natural features, with a rich diversity of flora and fauna, unique rock formations, Aboriginal rock art, bushwalking and climbing – there’s something for every outdoor enthusiast. The mountains are at their best in spring, when the wildflowers (including 20 species that don’t exist anywhere else in the world) are at their peak. The Grampians lie west of Ararat and Stawell, and stretch 90km from Dunkeld in the south almost to Horsham in the north. In January 2006 devastating bushfires raged through much of the Grampians, nearly engulfing Halls Gap itself. Almost a year on the resulting regrowth was incredible to see – delicate foliage sprouting from the charred frames of trees, grasstrees throwing up huge 2m flowers and flowering orchid species unseen for decades.

Halls Gap

☎ 03 / pop 300

Pretty Halls Gap, in the heart of the Grampians, is a popular base for exploring the region. So popular, in fact, that Halls Gap and its environs host more overnight visitors than any other Victorian destination – only the Great Ocean Rd sees more visitors (day-trippers). Figure this: the Halls Gap region has 300 or so permanent residents, and about 6000 beds! It gets very busy on weekends and holiday periods, but it’s a delightful place, where kangaroos come to graze on the front lawns of the town’s houses and where the air is thick with the songs of kookaburras and parrots.

Halls Gap is tiny, with an overpriced super-market, a bakery, a few restaurants and cafés, and a petrol station.



VICTORIA

VICTORIA

INFORMATION

Grampians Central Booking Office (☎ 5356 4654; 7353 Schmidt Rd) This tour-booking agency is in the Halls Gap general store.

Halls Gap visitor information centre (☎ 1800 065 599, 5356 4616; www.visitgrampians.com.au; Grampians Rd) In Centenary Hall.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, 5356 4381; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) At the Brambuk Cultural Centre on the southern edge of town, with maps and brochures, camping permits and fishing licences.

SIGHTS

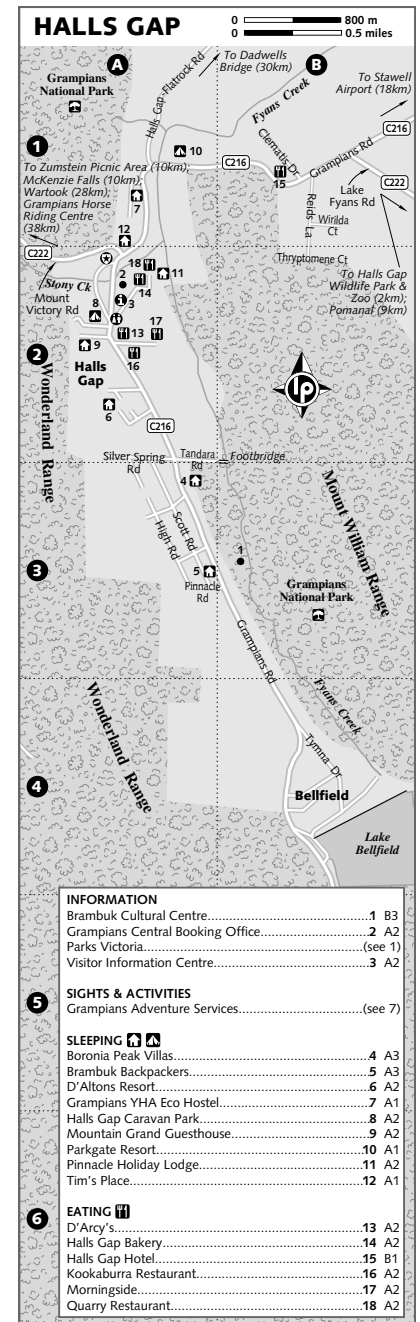
You'll be drawn to the **Brambuk Cultural Centre** (☎ 5356 4452; www.brambuk.com.au; Grampians Rd, admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), representing the open wings of the cockatoo (*brambuk*). It's a striking building that combines timeless Aboriginal motifs with contemporary design and building materials. Five Koorie communities, together with Parks Victoria, run the centre, offering insights into local culture and history through Koorie stories, art, music, dance, weapons and tools. Behind the cultural centre, the **Gariwerd Dreaming Theatre** (adult/child \$5/3) presents both Dreamtime stories and modern informative films about the region. There are demonstrations of Koorie music and dance, organised tours of the rock-art sites, and education and holiday programmes. Outside are native plants used by Aboriginal people for food and medicine.

There is a lot of **Aboriginal rock art** in the park, but not all is publicised or accessible. In the northern Grampians, near Mt Stapylton, the main sites are **Gulgurn Manja Shelter** and **Ngamadidj Shelter**. In the western Grampians, near the Buandik camping ground, the main sites are **Billimina Shelter** and **Manja Shelter**.

Close to Halls Gap, the **Wonderland Range** has some spectacular and accessible scenery. There are scenic drives and walks, from an easy stroll to Venus Bath (30 minutes) to a walk up to the Pinnacles Lookout (five hours). Walking tracks start from Halls Gap, and the Wonderland and Sundial car parks.

The small **Halls Gap Wildlife Park & Zoo** (☎ 5356 4668; www.hallsgapwildlife.com; Pomonal Rd; adult/child/family \$10/6/28; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon), 3km south-east of Halls Gap, houses native and exotic animals.

There are two tracks from the **Zumstein picnic area**, northwest of Halls Gap, to the spectacular **McKenzie Falls**.



VICTORIA

ACTIVITIES

There are more than 150km of **walking tracks** in the Grampians, ranging from half-hour strolls to overnight treks through difficult terrain. Parks Victoria (see p547) provides maps and gives good advice. Take a map and appropriate footwear, a hat and water, and sunscreen in summer. Before you set off, always let someone know where you're going (preferably the rangers).

Tours

Brambuk Cultural Centre (☎ 5356 4452; Grampians Rd; ☹ 9am-5pm) Offers a two-hour tour to Bunjill's Shelter (adult/child \$15/8) and a half-day tour to other rock-art sites (\$27/17). Bookings essential.

Eco Platypus Tours (☎ 1800 819 091; www.ecoplastypus.com) Offers day trips to the Grampians for \$85 per person.

Grampians Adventure Services (☎ 5356 4556; www.g-adventures.com.au; Grampians YHA Eco-Hostel, cnr Grampians Rd & Buckler St, Halls Gap) This group has rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing, bike tours, bushwalking and caving. Activities cost from \$45 for beginners.

Grampians Horse Riding Centre (☎ 5383 9255; www.grampianshorseriding.com.au; Brimpaen, Wartook Valley; 2hr rides \$65; ☹ rides 10am & 2pm) Provides opportunities to explore forests and valleys on horseback, 38km northwest of Halls Gap.

Grampians Mountain Adventure Company (☎ 5383 9218, www.grampiansadventure.com.au; half-day instruction from \$60) Rock-climbing and abseiling adventures tailored to suit those who fancy the vertical world, assisted by accredited instructors.

Grampians Personalised Tours & Adventures (☎ 0429-954 686, 5356 4654; www.grampiantours.com; half-/full-day walks \$79/99) Offers a range of 4WD tours. Tours include stop-offs at picturesque locations, and lots to eat. Two- to four-day walks are available.

Wildlife Tours (☎ 9741 6333; www.wildlifetours.com.au) Two-day tours combining the Great Ocean Rd and the Grampians for \$120 per person.

SLEEPING

There's a **booking service** (☎ 1800 246 880) at the visitor centre.

Budget

Brambuk Backpackers (☎ 5356 4250; www.brambuk.com.au; Grampians Rd; dm/d/fincl breakfast \$22/55/80; ☹) Opposite the Brambuk Cultural Centre, this place is light and airy with a mellow friendly feel and mountain views.

Tim's Place (☎ 5356 4288; www.timsplace.com.au; Grampians Rd; dm/s/d \$23/42/55, 2-bedroom apt from \$110;

☹) Tim's Place is terrific, with great facilities and lots of local knowledge from the friendly owner.

Grampians YHA Eco-Hostel (☎ 5356 4544; www.yha.com.au; cnr Grampians Rd & Buckler St; dm/s/d/f \$28/58/69/95; ☹) This is one of the best youth hostels in Australia – purpose-built, architecturally designed and eco-friendly. There are two- or four-bed dorms and the hosts provide free freshly baked bread, freshly laid eggs and fresh herbs.

Midrange

Pinnacle Holiday Lodge (☎ 5356 4249; www.pinnacleholiday.com.au; d from \$89; ☹ ☹) Right in the centre, this property sits behind the Stony Creek shops. It has everything: indoor pool, tennis courts, spacious modern units and a great range of self-contained spa suites (basic up to deluxe) with gas log fires.

ourpick D'Altons Resort (☎ 5356 4666; www.daltonresort.com.au; 48 Glen St; standard/deluxe cottages from \$100/120; ☹) These delightful timber cottages spread up the hill, away from the main road, between the gums and kangaroos. They have cosy fires, big lounge chairs and little verandas. There's a tennis court and laundry.

Boronia Peak Villas (☎ 5356 4500; www.boroniaparkvillas.com.au; cnr Grampians & Tandara Rds; d from \$125; ☹ ☹) These cottages have a lovely bush setting and offer excellent self-contained accommodation. Cottages range from standard and family units to super-deluxe spa units.

Top End

Mountain Grand Guesthouse (☎ 5356 4232; www.mountaingrand.com; Grampians Rd; s/d incl breakfast & dinner from \$133/176) This gracious timber guesthouse is peaceful and friendly, with welcoming guest lounges. The bedrooms are fresh and colourful with their own spacious bathrooms. Ask about packages.

Camping

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, 5356 4381; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) at the Brambuk Cultural Centre has 13 camp sites with toilets and fireplaces, and most with at least limited drinking water. Permits (\$12) cover one car and up to six people. Bush camping is permitted anywhere except the Wonderland Range area, around Lake Wartook, and in marked parts of the Serra, Mt William and Victoria Ranges. Check with the rangers before heading off.

Parkgate Resort (☎ 5356 4215; www.parkgateresort.com.au; Grampians Rd; sites from \$28, cabins/cottages d from

\$78/93; ☹ ☹) This park has everything for the kids, including a jumping pillow and playground. For adults, there are tennis courts, a camp kitchen, games, lounge rooms and free BBQs.

Halls Gap Caravan Park (☎ 5356 4251; www.hallsgapcaravanpark.com.au; sites/cabins from \$22/79) Features a flood-lit tennis court and gymnasium.

EATING

Halls Gap Bakery (☎ 5356 4439) Has good pies, pastries and fresh-cut sandwiches.

Morningside (☎ 5356 4344; mains \$9-15; ☹ breakfast & dinner) From the deck of this café, behind D'Arcy's, you can watch the browsing kangaroos. Inside there's local artwork and a shifting menu scribed on a blackboard.

Halls Gap Hotel (☎ 5356 4566; 2262 Grampians Rd; mains \$14-23; ☹ lunch & dinner) The hotel serves generous portions of well-prepared pub food. Take a ticket.

Kookaburra Restaurant (☎ 5356 4222; mains \$15-27; ☹ dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) You'll need to book at this place, still popular after many years, if you want to try dishes like the duckling risotto.

Quarry Restaurant (☎ 5356 4858; Stony Creek shops; mains \$16-30; ☹ lunch & dinner) Quarry offers excellent cuisine – start with grilled stuffed mushrooms and then try the kangaroo filets with bush-tomato chutney. Thursday is backpacker night when \$15 buys you a combo bush-tucker platter with portions of croc, roo, emu, barramundi, tiger prawns and damper.

D'Arcy's (☎ 5356 4344; Grampians Rd; mains \$23-28; ☹ dinner) An elegant burgundy-and-white restaurant, D'Arcy's has an interesting menu – roo coated with bush spices – and an excellent range of wines from the Grampians and Pyrenees wineries.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

VLine (☎ 13 61 96) has a daily coach service from Melbourne to Halls Gap (\$48, four hours). Three daily buses run between Halls Gap and Stawell (\$10).

The **Viclink** (☎ 13 16 38; www.viclink.com.au) Great Ocean Rd to the Grampians coach service connects Halls Gap to Dunkeld (\$12), Hamilton (\$17), Port Fairy (\$29), Warrnambool (\$34) and Ararat (\$6).

Wildlife Tours (☎ 9741 6333; www.wildlifetours.com.au) runs three times a week from Melbourne to Halls Gap for \$45 per person.

Mt Zero

Planted in 1953, the olive grove at **Mt Zero Olives** (☎ 03-5383 8280; www.mountzeroolives.com; Mt Zero Rd; ☹ 10am-5pm) produces olives, olive oils (including infused varieties), tapenades and other gourmet products in a picturesque setting. There are tastings and farm-gate sales daily, and an excellent café that opens on weekends and holidays. Well worth a visit.

HORSHAM

☎ 03 / pop 135,000

Mark Twain came here in 1896 and commented that 'Horsham sits in a plain which is as level as a floor'. First settled in 1841, Horsham is the main commercial centre of the Wimmera. There's little of interest here but it's a good base for nearby Little Desert National Park and Mt Arapiles State Park. The **Horsham visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 633 218, 5382 1832; www.visithorsham.com.au; 20 O'Callaghan's Pde) books accommodation.

The **Horsham Art Gallery** (☎ 5382 5575; www.horsham.net.au/gallery; 80 Wilson St; admission by donation; ☹ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun) houses an impressive collection of works by significant Australian artists.

The **Wool Factory** (☎ 5382 0333; 134 Golf Course Rd; adult/child \$5/free; ☹ 8.30am-4.30pm) is a community project providing employment and skills for people with disabilities. It produces ultrafine wool and there's a walk-through sheep shed, café and shop. Tours run at 10.15am, 11am, 1.30pm and 2.30pm.

Sleeping & Eating

Royal Hotel (☎ 5382 1255; 132 Firebrace St; d \$50) This historic hotel is the place to be on Fridays and Saturdays, when people gather from all over the region and hang out till 5am. The popular bistro (mains \$14 to \$22, open for lunch and dinner) serves traditional steaks and pasta dishes.

Horsham House (☎ 5382 5053; www.horshamhouse.com.au; 27 Roberts Ave; s \$105, d \$120-140, incl breakfast; ☹) There's a mix of antiques and modern amenities in this grand balconied house (1905). A detached, self-contained cottage with spa overlooks a rose garden – popular with honeymooners.

Horsham Caravan Park (☎ 5382 3476; horshampark@telstra.com; 190 Firebrace St; sites from \$20, d cabins \$60) This is a great little spot between the botanic gardens and the river, with shady sites and good facilities.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) operates three or four services daily from Melbourne: there's one direct train (en route to Adelaide), while others change to buses at Ballarat or Ararat (\$53, 4½ to 6½ hours).

Weekday buses travel from Horsham's old **police station** (24 Roberts Ave) to Hamilton. On Tuesday, Thursday and Friday they go to Mildura (☎ 5381 1871), and on Thursday and north to Rainbow via Dimboola (☎ 5352 1501).

To get to the Grampians, take the V/Line bus to Stawell and another bus from there to Halls Gap.

MT ARAPILES STATE PARK

Mt Arapiles, 37km west of Horsham and 12km west of Natimuk, is Australia's best venue for rock climbing, with more than 2000 climbs, from basic to advanced. The park is also popular for walks. There are two short and steep walking tracks from Centenary Park to the top of Arapiles – or you can drive up.

Climbing

The **Climbing Company** (☎ 03-5387 1329; www.wimmera.com.au/users/climbco) and **Arapiles Climbing Guides** (☎ 03-5387 1284; http://users.netconnect.com.au/~climbacg/) offer climbing and abseiling instruction. Group instruction and a climb cost from \$50 for a half-day.

Arapiles Mountain Shop (☎ 03-5387 1529; 67 Main St, Natimuk) sells and hires climbing equipment.

Sleeping & Eating

Duffholme Cabins (☎ 03-5387 4246; Natimuk-Goroke Rd; dm/d \$10/48) Self-contained cottage surrounded by wildlife with views of Mt Arapiles. Ring to make arrangements (it's not staffed).

Natimuk Lake Caravan Park (☎ 03-5387 1462; Lake Rd; unpowered/powerd sites from \$15/18) Full facilities, including BBQs and laundry, are available at this park beside Lake Natimuk, about 4km north of Natimuk.

Getting There & Away

The weekday bus service between Horsham and Naracoorte will drop you at Mt Arapiles (\$10).

DIMBOOLA

☎ 03 / pop 1550

This tiny town was made famous by Jack Hibberd's play *Dimboola*, and the subsequent 1979 John Duigan film of the same

name about a country wedding. Dimboola has become a legendary place in Australian culture – the quintessential Aussie back-o'-Bourke, fly-blown, one-horse town. Iconic it may be, but almost nobody comes here, and although grand buildings testify to a rich history, they're faded and crumbling. The huge, historic Dimboola Hotel (where the film was shot), with its spectacular balcony and turret, was gutted by fire in 2003 and has since lain dormant.

When the **Dimboola visitor information centre** (☎ 5389 1588; dimboola@netconnect.com.au; 109 Lloyd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue & Fri, 6-8pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-noon Sat; ☒) is closed, visit Ron and Jill at the caravan park.

The Little Desert National Park starts 4km south of town. **Pink Lake** is a colourful salt lake beside the Western Hwy about 9km northwest of Dimboola. **Ebenezer Aboriginal Mission Station** was established in Antwerp, 18km north of Dimboola, in 1859. It's signposted off the Dimboola-Jeparit road.

Sleeping & Eating

Victoria Hotel (☎ 5389 1630; Lochieal St; s/d incl breakfast from \$30/50) This well-preserved 1920s pub with a fantastic lace-trimmed, vine-covered veranda has basic but clean rooms. Meals here cost \$12 to \$18 for lunch or dinner.

Riverside Host Farm (☎ 5389 1550; Riverside Rd; sites \$18, cabins s/d from \$55/77; ☒) Cabins at this lovely property are on the Wimmera River – you'll be treated to a short boat trip when you arrive. There's a lavender-oil still, camp kitchen, BBQ area, canoes for hire and camping. You can take a boat tour from here into the Little Desert.

Dimboola Caravan Park (☎ 5389 1416; dimboolapark@telstra.com; 2 Wimmera St; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/23, cabins \$70) The grounds of this park beside the Wimmera River are shaded by eucalypt and pine trees.

Dimboola Diner (☎ 5389 1101; 112-114 Lloyd St; mains \$12-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) Next door to the gutted pub is this laid-back eatery.

LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

This national park may not, initially, appear very desert-like, as there's a rich diversity of plants and wildflowers. Two sealed roads between the Western and Wimmera Hwys pass through the park, or you can take the good gravel road from Dimboola. The best-known resident here is the mallee fowl.

TOTAL FIRE BAN

High temperatures and strong winds combine to give Victoria days of extreme fire danger in summer. To prevent bushfires there are stringent laws applying to campfires and other activities involving flames. A campfire can easily spread and wipe out huge tracts of forest and endanger lives.

On days of total fire ban, no campfires of any type are allowed; you can be arrested and jailed for lighting a fire or allowing a fire to continue to burn. Parks Victoria puts up signs in camping areas, towns display warning flags and there are frequent radio messages and fire warnings in newspapers. The penalties for lighting a fire on a day of total fire ban are up to \$10,000 or two years in jail.

There are short walks in the eastern block. Longer walks leave from the camping ground south of Kiata, including a 12km trek south to the Salt Lake; always carry water and notify **Parks Victoria** (☎ 03-5389 1204) before you set out. **Oasis Desert Adventures** (☎ 0419-824 618) offers a fun way to see the desert, and learn about it.

Sleeping & Eating

Little Desert Lodge (☎ 03-5391 5232; www.littledesertlodge.com.au; sites \$18, dm \$18, s/d incl breakfast from \$85/112; ☒) This place is 14km south of Nhill. There are tours of the mallee fowl aviary (\$8) and Little Desert National Park (half-/three-quarter day \$40/65), and evening spotlight walks. The complex includes camping and bunk rooms (supply own linen). There's a dining room (set dinner from \$22), BBQ area and campfire.

Parks Victoria (☎ 03-5389 1204; Nursery Rd, Wail) has **camping grounds** (sites \$11) at Horseshoe Bend and Ackle Bend, both on the Wimmera River south of Dimboola, and another about 10km south of Kiata. Sites have drinking water, toilets and fireplaces.

THE MALLEE

The Mallee takes its name from the mallee scrub that once covered the region. Mallee gums are canny desert survivors – 1000-year-old root systems are not uncommon – and for the Aborigines the region yielded plen-

tiful food. The sky seems vast as you drive through the area, surrounded by horizon, dead-flat semi-arid land and twisted mallee scrub. The Mallee includes the one genuinely empty part of the state (wilderness known as 'Sunset Country') and the sense of isolation and expanse is exhilarating – you don't have to visit central Australia to get a taste of the outback.

The farmers of this district have been doing it hard after years of drought, and consequently many towns are also failing. In just 150 years many small towns in this region have been founded, prospered, peaked and now lie all but abandoned, decaying in the mallee scrub. As you blast up the Sunraysia Hwy, through towns like Speed and Tempy, with their massive grain silos standing idle beside the railway tracks, you can't help but feel there's something sad and broken about this area.

BIG DESERT WILDERNESS PARK

This 113,500-hectare park is a desert wilderness with no roads, tracks, facilities or water. Walking and camping are permitted but only for the experienced and totally self-sufficient. In summer, temperatures are usually way too high for walking. Notify the **ranger's office** (☎ 03-5395 7221) at **Vaapeet** before heading off.

The area is mostly sand dunes, red sandstone ridges and mallee, but there's an abundance of flora and fauna, and some unusual wildlife, such as Mitchell's hopping mouse.

A dry-weather road from Murrayville on the Mallee Hwy (B12) to Nhill separates this park from the Wyperfeld National Park. Parts of the road are very rough and may be impassable after rain.

There are basic free camp sites at Big Billy Bore, the Springs, Moonlight Tank and Broken Bucket Reserve, all on the eastern side.

MURRAY-SUNSET NATIONAL PARK

The 663,000-hectare park is arid and mainly inaccessible. An unsealed road leads from Linga on the Mallee Hwy up to the **Pink Lakes** at the southern edge of the park, where there's a basic camping ground. Beyond this you must have a 4WD. The **Shearer's Quarters** (☎ 03-5028 1218; groups \$55) has basic accommodation on the park's western side.

For more information contact the rangers in **Underbool** (☎ 03-5094 6267; Fasham St) on the Mallee Hwy, or in **Werrimull** (☎ 03-5028 1218) on the northern side of the park.

THE MURRAY RIVER

The Murray River is Australia's most important inland waterway, and forms most of the border between Victoria and NSW. The Murray flows from the Great Dividing Range in northeastern Victoria to Encounter Bay in SA, more than 2700km away, making it the third-longest navigable river in the world.

Some of Australia's earliest explorers travelled along the river, and long before roads and railways crossed the land, the Murray's paddle steamers carried supplies to and from remote sheep stations. The Murray River region is one of the country's most productive agricultural districts, thanks to the endless sunshine and the wonders of irrigation. If you approach the area by car from the south, through the drought-stricken Wimmera/Mallee district, the contrast couldn't be starker – vineyards, avocados, citrus and almond groves cover countless thousands of hectares, all vividly green, overproductive and surreal in this semi-arid emptiness.

Good regional information is available at **Murray River** (www.murrayriver.com.au).

HATTAH-KULKYNE NATIONAL PARK

The Hattah-Kulkyne National Park has dry, sandy mallee-scrub country and fertile riverside areas, lined with red gum, black box, wattles and bottlebrush. The **Hattah Lakes** system fills when the Murray floods, and is great for bird-watching.

The access road is at **Hattah**, 70km south of Mildura on the Calder Hwy. The visitor information centre is 5km into the park. There are two **nature drives**, the Hattah and the Kulkyne, and a network of old camel tracks. Contact **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63, www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) or the Hattah **ranger's office** (☎ 03-5029 3253).

There are camping facilities at Lake Hattah and Lake Mournpoul, but limited water. Camping is also possible anywhere along the Murray River frontage.

MILDURA

☎ 03 / pop 28,000

After driving for hours past unchanging, desolate, dusty, drought-plagued farmlands, you reach this thriving regional centre. The outskirts of Mildura loom up in the windscreens like an apparition – impossibly green, with

huge vineyards and lush golf courses liberally watered by Murray River water. Mildura, meaning 'red soil', is a true oasis town, and as well as being one of the richest agricultural areas in Australia it's a tourist town that's promoted as a place of endless blue skies and sunshine. Once a citrus-growing region, Mildura and neighbouring Gol Gol and Wentworth in NSW are now largely given over to viticulture.

Information

Café de la Rue (☎ 5023 5800; www.cafedelarue.com.au; 51 Deakin Ave; ☑) Coffee, books and internet access at \$4 an hour.

Mildura visitor information centre (☎ 5018 8380; www.visitmildura.com.au; cnr Deakin Ave & Twelfth St) Has an accommodation booking service.

Sights & Activities

The excellent **Mildura Arts Centre & Rio Vista** (☎ 5018 8322; 199 Cureton Ave; adult/child \$3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm) complex combines an art gallery, theatre and historical museum at Rio Vista, a former home of William B Chaffey. This grand homestead has been beautifully preserved. The interior is set up as a series

of displays depicting 19th-century life, with period furnishings, costumes, photos and an interesting collection of memorabilia.

Available from the information centre, *The Chaffey Trail* brochure guides you around some of Mildura's more interesting sights, including the **Mildura Wharf**, the **weir and lock**, **Mildara Winery** and the **Old Psyche Bend Pump Station**.

PADDLE-STEAMER CRUISES

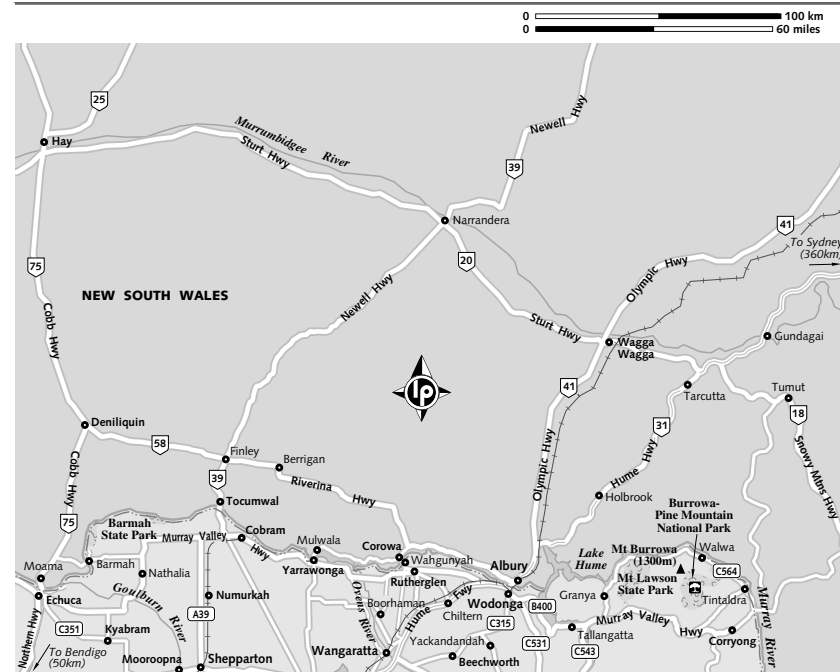
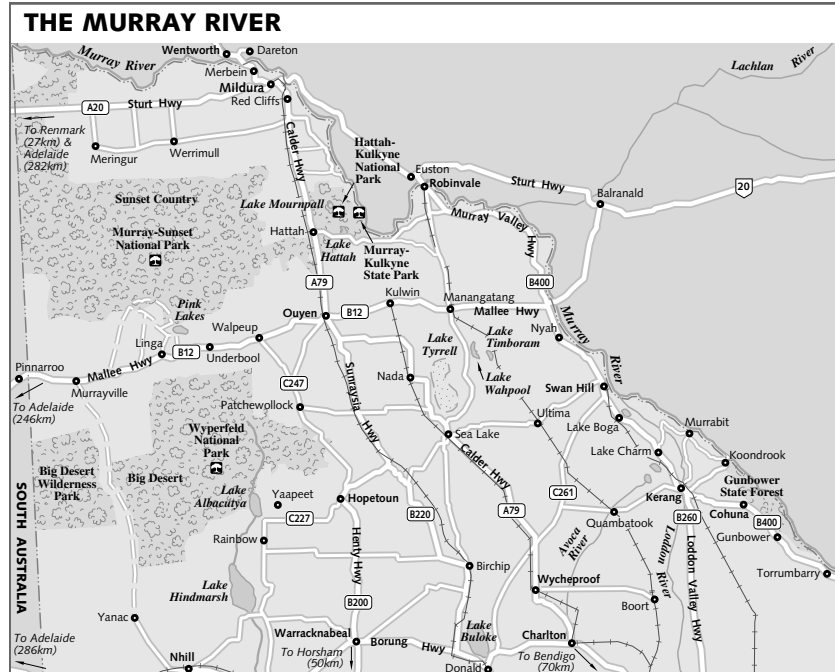
Cruises depart from the Mildura Wharf, and run more often during school holiday periods.

PS Melbourne (☎ 5023 2200; Mildura Wharf; 2hr cruise adult/child \$25/8; ☎ cruises 10.50am & 1.50pm Sun-Thu) The famous *PS Melbourne* is the only paddle steamer still driven by steam power – watch the operator stoke the original boiler with wood.

PV Rothbury (☎ 5023 2200; Mildura Wharf) Offers dinner or winery cruises (\$56) on Thursday, and a lunch cruise on Tuesday (\$25).

Tours

Several Aboriginal operators run tours. The best-known of these is **Harry Nanya** (☎ 5027 2076; www.harrynanyatours.com.au), whose tours



include an excellent day trip to Lake Mungo National Park (adult/child \$130/85).

Junction Tours (☎ 0408-596 438, 5027 4309; day trips adult/child \$120/92; 🗓 Mon, Wed & Fri) Day trips from Mildura to Broken Hill via Wentworth, or outback tours to Menindee from Broken Hill.

Paddleboat Coonawarra (☎ 1800 001 678; www.pbcoonawarra.com.au; 5-day cruise per person tw share with bathroom \$880) Cruises run in May and October.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Mildura International Backpackers (☎ /fax 5021 0133; 5 Cedar Ave; dm per night/week \$20/120; 📺) All the rooms here have two beds (not bunks). Your hosts will help you find work.

Oasis Backpackers (☎ 5022 8255; oasis@bigpond.net.au; 230-232 Deakin Ave; dm per night/week \$20/120; 📺) The better of the two and popular with seasonal workers, Oasis is fresh and modern with excellent communal facilities.

MIDRANGE

Acacia Holiday Apartments (☎ 5023 3855; www.acaciaapartments.com.au; 762 Calder Hwy; d from \$90; 📺) Set back from town on the Calder Hwy, these large self-contained one-, two- and three-bedroom units offer outstanding value for money if you're in a group or family, or staying more than a couple of days. Apartments have kitchens and lounges with free cable TV, and are arrayed around a swimming pool.

Camellia Court Holiday Apartments (☎ 5029 1555; camellia@vic.hotkey.net.au; 169 Cureton Ave; d/tr/f from \$99/109/117; 📺) In a great location opposite the river, Camellia has two two-bedroom apartments and one three-bedroom house, all self-contained next to a playground. The 1970s décor is accidentally retro. Great family accommodation.

Penny's Cottage (☎ 5021 4043; www.pennycottage.com.au; 173a Eighth St; d from \$130) In a delightful original timber house, Penny's Cottage is fully self-contained with a backyard, colonial-era décor and two queen bedrooms.

TOP END

Grand Hotel (☎ 5023 0511; www.milduragrandhotel.com.au; Seventh St; s \$87-450, d \$127-485; 📺) The Grand dominates Mildura, occupying a whole city block overlooking the Murray. It's Mildura's top address and has all the facilities you'd expect. Since 1891 it's played host to prime ministers, governors general and VIPs.

Olive House (☎ 0419-355 748; www.olivehouse.com.au; 170 Ninth St; d incl breakfast from \$165; 📺) Built in 1928, this large Federation house tastefully combines pressed-tin walls and ceilings, and period furnishings with a modern spa bathroom, kitchen and plasma TV. There's complimentary wireless internet access.

our pick Shed & Highlander (☎ 5021 2876; www.cameronsmildura.com.au; 16 Olive Ave; d Mon-Thu/Fri-Sun incl breakfast \$165/180; 📺) These two apartments are spectacular in their design and decoration – an unlikely mix of corrugated iron, stone and recycled timber, with a lilac, mauve and canary-yellow colour scheme in the Shed and a redder-than-red tartan theme in the Highlander. Add some doily art, teddies and floral arrangements, and what ought to be a visual cacophony actually hangs together remarkably well. The appointments are fantastic too, and feature king beds, plasma TVs, modern kitchens, double spa and shower.

Acacia Houseboats (☎ 5022 1510; www.acabiaboats.com.au; 3 nights for 2 people from \$475) Acacia has a number of lovely houseboats accommodating up to eight people, with everything supplied except food and drink.

CAMPING

Apex RiverBeach Holiday Park (☎ 5023 6879; www.apexriverbeach.com.au; Cureton Ave; sites \$17, d cabins/villas from \$55/75; 📺) Thanks to a fantastic location

SEASONAL WORK

Mildura is the centre of the casual fruit-picking industry in northeast Victoria. Harvest season runs from January through March, but casual work on farms and orchards is available year-round. Some farmers allow camping but often you'll need to stay in town, so transport may be necessary.

Madec Harvest Labour Office (☎ 5021 3359; www.madec.edu.au; 97-99 Lime Ave) has comprehensive listings of fruit-picking work.

on sandy Murray River beach just outside town, this park is always popular. There are campfires, a bush kitchen, BBQ area, boat ramp, good swimming, walking and cycling, a café and wireless internet access.

Eating

Mildura is famous for Italian raconteur Stefano de Pieri, who has single-handedly stamped the town on the foodie map. All his ventures are clustered in and around (and under!) the Grand Hotel. More than a mere chef, Stefano's a cult hero, a brand and an aspiring member of parliament.

Souvlaki Inn (☎ 5023 4488; 33 Langtree Ave; 🗓 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Don't leave town without sampling one of these sensational lean-and-tender souvlakis.

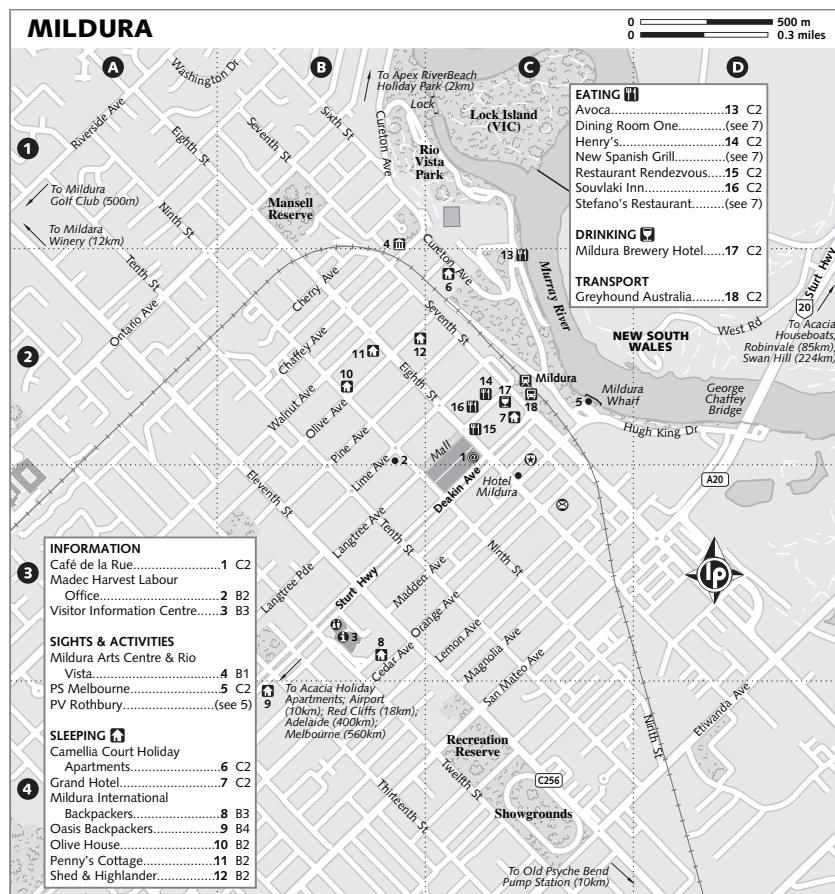
Dining Room One (☎ 5023 0511; Grand Hotel, cnr Deakin Ave & Seventh St; mains \$14-35) Stefano's casual wine bar-café.

New Spanish Grill (☎ 5023 0511; Grand Hotel, cnr Deakin Ave & Seventh St; mains \$15-32; 🗓 dinner Tue-Sun) Simple, quality BBQ food. A carnivore's haven.

Restaurant Rendezvous (☎ 5023 1571; 34 Langtree Ave; mains \$17-27; 🗓 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) The warm, casual atmosphere here complements the perfectly prepared seafood, grills and unusual specials.

Henry's (☎ 5023 0855; 19 Langtree Ave; mains \$18-34; 🗓 dinner Tue-Sat) Cosy and intimate, Henry's offers innovative dishes such as warm tomato and lamb salad, and a game platter that includes kangaroo, duck and goat meat.

Avoca (☎ 5022 1444; Waterfront, Hugh King Dr; mains \$22-35; 🗓 breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) This 1877 paddle boat is moored on the Murray. Inside it's fine dining, local wines and fish-eye river views. Its big red wheel turns every week, when it takes a Murray cruise. One guess who owns it.



our pick **Stefano's Restaurant** (☎ 5023 0511; Grand Hotel, cnr Deakin Ave & Seventh St; set menu Mon-Fri/Sat/long weekend \$84/89/94; 🍴 dinner Mon-Sat) This is the award-winning drawcard of the Grand Hotel. In the underground former wine cellar you'll see Stefano as he cooks up five-course northern Italian meals. Book at least three weeks in advance.

Drinking

Mildura Brewery Hotel (☎ 5022 2988; www.mildura-brewery.com.au; 20 Langtree Ave; 🍷 Tue-Sun) Set in the former Astor cinema, this is Mildura's main nightspot. Shiny stainless-steel vats, pipes and brewing equipment make you thirsty for a drop, and the beers brewed here are superb. Buy a box and be frugal – they're only available at selected stockists outside Mildura.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Mildura airport is about 10km west of the town centre, off the Sturt Hwy (A20). **Regional Express** (REX; ☎ 13 17 13; www.rex.com.au; return from \$250) operates daily services between Melbourne and Mildura, as does **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au; return from \$240).

TRAIN & BUS

Long-distance buses operate from a depot at the train station on Seventh St.

Murraylink is a **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) bus service that runs four times a week, connecting all the towns along the Murray River and with connections at Bendigo, Swan Hill and Echuca. V/Line also has a train/bus service to/from Melbourne to Mildura, via Swan Hill and Bendigo (\$67 one way).

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99) has daily services between Mildura and Adelaide (\$68) or Sydney (\$124).

SWAN HILL

☎ 03 / pop 9700

Swan Hill was named by Major Mitchell in 1836, after he was kept awake by swans in the nearby lagoon. Today it's a major regional centre surrounded by irrigated farmlands. Although the riverside location is pleasant, Swan Hill is rather an underwhelming place. Empty shopfronts indicate that it isn't the thriving regional metropolis that Mildura and Echuca are. Other than the re-created Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement there's not a lot of reason to stop.

The **Swan Hill visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 625 373, 5032 3033; www.swanhillonline.com; cnr McCrae & Curlewis Sts; 🗺) has maps and tourist brochures.

Sights

Swan Hill's major attraction, the **Pioneer Settlement** (☎ 5036 2410; www.pioneersettlement.com.au; Horseshoe Bend; adult/child \$21/11; 🍷 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a re-creation of a paddle-steamer riverside port town. Enter through *PS Gem*, one of the largest river boats to have served on the Murray.

The paddle steamer *PS Pyap* makes short **cruises** (adult/child \$12/7; 🍷 cruises 10.30am & 2.30pm) along the Murray. Every night at dusk a dramatic 45-minute **sound-and-light show** (adult/child \$15/8) is held.

MV Kookaburra (☎ 5032 0003; Moulamein Rd, Murray Downs; adult/child \$28/16; 🍷 cruises 12.30pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun) has 1½-hour luncheon cruises leaving from Captain Paddy Hogg Wharf, 500m over the lift bridge on the NSW riverbank.

Tyntynder Homestead (☎ 0428-500 417; Murray Valley Hwy; adult/child \$8/4), 16km north of town, has a small museum of pioneering and Aboriginal relics, and reminders of the hardships of colonial life. Visits by appointment only.

Sleeping & Eating

Pioneer Settlement Lodge (☎ 5032 1093; fax 5032 1096; Horseshoe Bend; dm/d from \$25/65) Usually booked out to school groups, this is a rambling lodge set in spacious grounds. It's basic, but there are comfortable lounge and dining areas, and a BBQ pit.

Sundowner Swan Hill Resort (☎ 5032 2726; 405 Campbell St; s/d/f \$114/121/217; 🍷 🍷) The Sundowner's central courtyard is a landscaped tropical playground, featuring indoor and outdoor pools and spa. Out past the garden is minigolf, a half tennis-court and more.

Murray Downs Houseboats (☎ 0428-322 160, 5032 2160) The new 12-berth *Exquisite* is the most luxurious way to experience the Murray. Rates are from \$1950 for three nights over the weekend.

Quo Vadis (☎ 5032 4408; 255 Campbell St; mains \$15-29; 🍷 dinner) Quo Vadis serves Italian favourites, while next door its takeaway or eat-outside pizza joint buzzes merrily.

Spoons (☎ 5032 2601; 387 Campbell St; meals \$5-10; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) This deli has an interesting menu offering various risottos, curries and salads.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) trains run several times daily between Melbourne and Swan Hill (\$55, 4½ hours) via Bendigo. There are 17 buses a week between Swan Hill and Mildura, Echuca and Albury-Wodonga.

ECHUCA

☎ 03 / pop 10,100

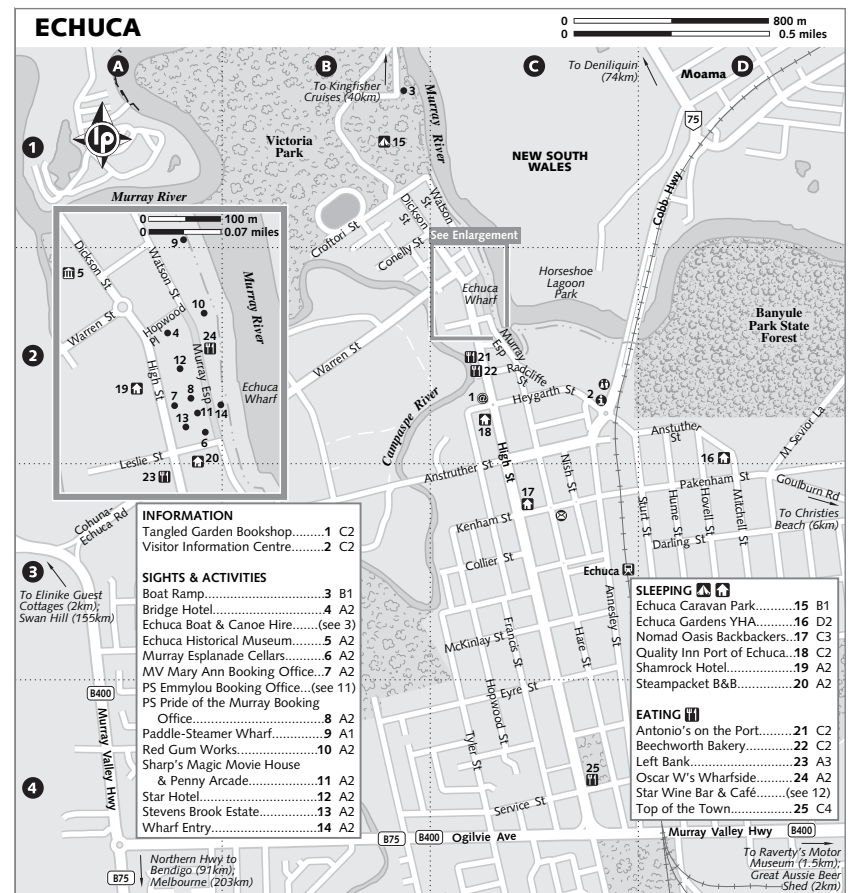
Echuca, which means 'the meeting of the waters', is where the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers join the Murray River. The 'world's paddle-steamer capital', it's also one of the state's major tourism centres, 2½ hours' drive from Melbourne, popular for water skiing, paddle-steamer cruises, swimming and house-boat holidays. Whilst undeniably touristy, the

town has an authentic charm to it as well as several serious restaurants and gourmet delis for the travelling gastronome.

The town was founded in 1853 by convict Harry Hopwood. At the peak of the river-boat era there were more than 100 paddle steamers plying the water between Echuca and outback sheep stations. The Melbourne-Echuca railway line opened in 1864 and within a decade the boom years of the river-boat trade had ended.

Information

Echuca visitor information centre (☎ 1800 804 446, 5480 7555; www.echucamoama.com; 2 Heygarth St) Has an accommodation booking service and sells V/Line tickets.



Tangled Garden Bookshop (☎ 5480 1333; 495-497 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun; 📖) Books, art supplies and internet access (15 minutes \$2).

Sights

HISTORIC PORT OF ECHUCA

The best feature of the **old port area** (☎ 5482 4248; www.portofechuca.org.au; adult/child/family \$12/8/35, with paddle-boat cruise \$25/13/65; ☎ 9am-5pm) is that everything is original. The attractions are spread along the waterfront, and the 'passport' admits you to the three main sections: the wharf, the Star Hotel and the Bridge Hotel.

The booking office is at the entrance to the **Echuca Wharf**. In the wharf's cargo shed, dioramas depict life on the river boats and restored historic **paddle steamers** are moored alongside the wharf. Across the road at the **Star Hotel** (1867) you can escape through the underground tunnel that helped drinkers avoid the police when the pub was a 'sly grog shop'.

At the **Bridge Hotel** (1 Hopwood Pl) your ticket admits you to a historic upstairs gallery. This pub is now a restaurant.

PORT AREA SIGHTS

At **Red Gum Works** (Murray Esplanade; admission free; ☎ 5482 2361; Murray Esplanade; adult/child \$14/8; ☎ 9am-4pm) you can watch wood turners and blacksmiths at work with traditional equipment, and purchase red-gum products.

Sharp's Magic Movie House & Penny Arcade (☎ 5482 2361; Murray Esplanade; adult/child \$14/8; ☎ 9am-5pm) has authentic penny-arcade machines. Don't miss the free fudge tasting! The movie house shows old movies using original equipment. Your ticket is valid all day.

There are free tastings of local wines at **Murray Esplanade Cellars** (☎ 5482 6058; Old Customs House, Murray Esplanade; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) and **Stevens Brook Estate** (☎ 5480 1916; 620 High St).

OTHER SIGHTS

Echuca Historical Museum (☎ 5480 1325; 1 Dickson St; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 11am-3pm) is in the old police station and lock-up, classified by the National Trust. It has a collection of local history items, charts and photos.

The **Great Aussie Beer Shed** (☎ 5480 6904; www.greataussiebeershed.com.au; 377 Mary Ann Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm weekends, public & school holidays) has walk-to-wall beer cans – mostly Australian – in a huge shed; one dates back to Federation.

Raverty's Motor Museum (☎ 5482 2730; Murray Valley Hwy; adult/child \$5/1) has 40 restored classic, vintage

and veteran cars dating from 1900. Call for opening times.

Activities

As you enter the pedestrian-only Murray Esplanade, you can buy tickets for a cruise or to explore the historic buildings along the Esplanade. A paddle-steamer cruise along the Murray is almost obligatory, and at least four steamers offer cruises; head down to the river and check out the sailing times. **PS Emmylou** (☎ 5480 2237; 1hr cruise adult/child \$15/8) is a fully restored paddle steamer driven by an original engine. Overnight cruises are also available.

Hour-long cruises are offered by several paddle steamers whose booking offices are on Murray Esplanade. **PS Alexander Arbuthnot**, **PS Canberra**, **PS Pevensey** and **PS Pride of the Murray** are all in regular service and cruises cost around \$16 for adults and \$6 for kids. **PS Adelaide** is the oldest wooden-hulled paddle steamer still operating anywhere in the world, and occasionally takes passengers on a cruise. **MV Mary Ann** (☎ 5480 2200) is a cruising restaurant offering lunch and dinner cruises.

Echuca Boat & Canoe Hire (☎ 5480 6208; Victoria Park boat ramp) has motor boats, kayaks and canoes for hire.

Sleeping

Hiring a houseboat is a great way to experience river life. Fully equipped boats sleep four to 12. Rates vary according to size and season – a boat with two double bedrooms may cost \$950 per week between May and November, but \$3000 in January. The visitor centre has details and a booking service.

BUDGET

Echuca Gardens YHA (☎ 5480 6522; echucagardens@iinet.net.au; 103 Mitchell St; dm/d \$25/50; 📖) This 135-year-old worker's cottage has tiny bedrooms, clean old bathrooms, a country kitchen and a TV room. The exotic garden boasts ponds, statues, a veggie patch, chooks and fruit trees.

Nomad Oasis Backpackers (☎ 5480 7866; 410-424 High St; dm/d \$25/50) Centrally located with clean shared facilities.

Shamrock Hotel (☎ 5482 2247; 583 High St; d/tr \$65/90) This friendly watering hole has clean rooms with shared bathrooms. There's also a house for up to 12 where you can kip for \$40 per person.

MIDRANGE

Steampacket B&B (☎ 5482 3411; www.steampacketinn.com.au; cnr Murray Esplanade & Leslie St; s/d/f from \$110/135/165) Situated by the old port in a National Trust-classified building, kid-friendly Steampacket's old-world B&B rooms are quaint, with brass bedsteads and views of the wharf. The lounge room is cosy and downstairs in the tearoom meals are served on fine china.

Quality Inn Port of Echuca (☎ 5482 5666; portechu@fc-hotels.com.au; 465 High St; d/f from \$150/200; 📖 📖 📖) This huge luxury motel has swish rooms, a large heated pool and gym, and BBQ areas. In-room comforts include queen beds and wireless internet.

TOP END

Elinike Guest Cottages (☎ 5480 6311; www.elinike.com.au; 209 Latham Rd; d incl breakfast from \$170) These quaint little mud-brick cottages are set in rambling gardens on the Murray River. Inside, the rooms are white and lacy, each with a small sitting room.

CAMPING

Five kilometres east of town is Christies Beach camping area, on the banks of the Murray. It's a lovely spot – one of the best on the Murray – with signposted access from Simmies Rd. There are pit toilets, but bring water and firewood. No permits required or fees due.

Echuca Caravan Park (☎ 5482 2157; fax 5480 1551; 51 Crofton St; sites from \$23, d cabins from \$70; 📖 📖) Beside the river, the facilities here are amazing, with new timber camp kitchens, resort pool, large grassy areas and magnificent shady river red gums.

Eating

Top of the Town (☎ 5482 4600; cnr High & Service Sts) Fish and chips never tasted so good, with unusual selections like redfin and yellowbelly riverfish.

Beechworth Bakery (☎ 5480 6999; 513 High St) The Echuca iteration of this regional Victoria bakery chain is a barn, but the pies, pastries and fresh sandwiches are really good.

Star Wine Bar & Café (☎ 5480 1181; 45 Murray Esplanade; mains \$17-22; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) Part of the Star Hotel (see opposite), offering snacks and light meals and dinner at weekends. The moody bar has some interesting art works, with a patio at the back.

our pick **Left Bank** (☎ 5480 3772; 551 High St; mains \$18-32; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Start with a bloody mary oyster shooter before tucking into the crisp-skin duck with Asian greens and Madeira wine fumet, or the degustation menu. Still got room for the espresso crème brûlée? Absolutely outstanding and worth the splurge!

Antonio's on the Port (☎ 5482 6117; 527 High St; mains \$19-29; ☎ dinner) This authentic Italian place is popular and backs onto the lovely Campaspe River. Gourmet pizzas are a speciality.

Oscar W's Wharfside (☎ 5482 5133; 101 Murray Esplanade; dinner mains \$29-38; ☎ lunch & dinner) Offering a whiff of charm and elegance, Oscar W's claims to be the only Australian restaurant overlooking the Murray. It seems unlikely but who cares – the food is good and the views are delightful.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) has daily train services to/from Melbourne (\$34, 3½ hours). V/Line's Murraylink buses run daily from the train station, connecting Echuca with Wodonga (\$39), Swan Hill (\$22) and Mildura (\$42). A daily service is available to destinations in southern NSW.

BARMAH STATE PARK

Barmah is a significant wetland area of Murray River flood plains. It's the largest remaining red gum forest in Australia, and the swampy understorey usually floods in winter, creating a breeding area for many fish and birds.

Dharnya Centre (☎ 03-5869 3302; admission by donation; ☎ 10.30am-4pm) is the visitor information centre and small museum with displays on Aboriginal heritage and the park, run by members of the Yorta Yorta people with Parks Victoria. Evidence of more than 40,000 years of occupation has been found nearby; however, the Yorta Yorta people's Native Title claim for the area was controversially rejected in 1998.

The park is popular for bird-watching, fishing and walking, although in the wet season a canoe is the best way to get around. **Gondwana Canoe Hire** (☎ 03-5869 3347), 4km past Barmah, hires canoes (per day \$60).

The cruise boat **Kingfisher** (☎ 03-5869 3399; www.kingfishercruises.com.au; adult/child/family \$23/18/82; ☎ cruises 11am Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun) runs two-hour cruises.

You can camp for free anywhere in the park or at the Barmah Lakes' camping area, which has tables, BBQ areas and pit toilets.

YARROWONGA

☎ 03 / pop 4800

Yarrowwonga has more sunshine hours than almost anywhere else in Australia. The **Yarrowwonga visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 062 260, 5744 1989; www.yarrowwongamulwala.com.au; 1 Irvine Pde) is on the shores of Lake Mulwala, just beside the bridge.

The **Lady Murray** (☎ 0412-573 460) and **Paradise Queen** (☎ 0418-508 616) operate daily cruises along the lake and the Murray River.

Yarrowwonga Outdoors (☎ 57443522; www.yarrowwongaoutdoors.com.au; 7 Witt St) hires kayaks, bikes and kites. **Mulwala Waterski School** (☎ 5744 2777; www.mulwalawaterski.com.au; Melbourne St, Mulwala) offers water-skiing instruction and parasailing, and equipment for sale and hire.

RUTHERGLEN

☎ 02 / pop 2500

Dating from gold-rush days, Rutherglen is a quaint town and the centre of one of Victoria's major wine-growing districts.

The **Rutherglen visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 622 871, 6033 6300; www.rutherglencvic.com; 57 Main St) offers an accommodation referral service and hires bikes. It can also provide information about Rutherglen's busy calendar of wine and food events.

Sleeping

Victoria Hotel (☎ 6032 8610; fax 6032 8128; 90 Main St; s/d from \$40/50) Front rooms at this beautiful old National Trust-classified place have bathrooms and views over Main St. Lunch and dinner mains here cost \$9 to \$16.

Motel Woongarra (☎ 6032 9588; www.motelwoongarra.com.au; cnr Main & Drummond Sts; s/d from \$58/66) Near-est to the centre of town, Woongarra's rooms

are spacious and the grounds and pool are lovely.

Brimin Floating Lodge (☎ 6035 7245; www.briminlodge.com.au; Brimin Rd; lodges \$90; ☎) Walk along the levee, across a ramp and you're in your own little houseboat on a billabong. Lounge on the rooftop while your lunch sizzles on the electric BBQ.

Tuileries (☎ 6032 9033; www.tuileriesrutherglen.com.au; 13 Drummond St; d incl breakfast from \$165; ☎) Enjoy bright, uncluttered luxury in gloriously coloured modern rooms. Tuileries has a guest lounge, tennis court and an excellent restaurant (mains \$28 to \$35, café meals \$12 to \$16; open for dinner daily, café open for breakfast and lunch Wednesday to Sunday).

Rutherglen Caravan & Tourist Park (☎ 6032 8577; www.rutherglencaravanandtouristpark.com; 72 Murray St; unpaved/powerd sites \$17/20, d cabins from \$67) This park with good facilities is on the banks of Lake King, close to the golf course, bowling club, playground and swimming pool.

Eating

There's a great café scene all along Main St, and takeaway places or spots to fill a picnic hamper. Many of the wineries have restaurants overlooking vineyards, lakes and rivers serving lunch and/or dinner, although the atmosphere can suddenly change when a wine-tour bus pulls up.

ourpick Forks & Corks (☎ 6032 7662; 82 Main St; mains \$16-23; ☎) lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) This is a bright, airy place that serves simple, well-prepared favourites – fish and chips, curries and pastas. The service is relaxed and cheerful, and the wine list offers some interesting local selections.

Rendezvous Courtyard (☎ 6032 9114; 68 Main St; mains \$17-24; ☎) dinner Thu-Tue) The menu here is Ital-

ian influenced with an emphasis on beef and seafood dishes. Lighter bites are available like a pastries plate, including samosas and spring rolls, and good-looking imaginative salads.

Beaumont's Café (☎ 6032 7428; 84 Main St; mains \$23-32; ☎) lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Beaumont's offers fine Mod Oz dining in a pleasant room and courtyard. Mediterranean and Asian influences produce an interesting menu that features Moroccan chicken and coconut curry fish.

Getting There & Away

The **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) bus to Wangaratta (\$7) connects with the train to Melbourne on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

The Murraylink bus connecting Wodonga with Mildura stops at Rutherglen. The bus stop is at the western end of Main St.

CHILTERN

☎ 03 / pop 1200

Tiny Chiltern is one of Victoria's most historic and charming colonial townships. In fact, it's so quaint and authentic that the town is often used as a film set for period pieces.

Chiltern visitor information centre (☎ 5726 1611; 30 Main St) has information about the region and bird-watching opportunities in the nearby Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park.

Atheum Library & Museum (☎ 5726 1467; Conness St; admission \$3; ☎) 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is housed in the former town hall (1866).

Star Hotel/Theatre (☎ 5726 1395; cnr Main & Conness Sts; adult/child \$5/2; ☎) by appointment) was once the centrepiece of Chiltern's social and cultural life. The grapevine in the courtyard is in the *Guinness World Records* as the largest in the southern hemisphere.

WODONGA

☎ 02 / pop 31,000

Separated from its twin town, Albury, by the Murray River, Wodonga looks out on the lovely Sumsion Gardens and a lake formed off Wodonga Creek.

The **Gateway visitor information centre** (☎ 1300 796 222, 6051 3750; www.destinationburrywodonga.com.au) has info about Victoria and NSW, and a 24-hour touch screen.

There are signed trails for the **Gateway Island Bicycle & Walking Tracks** (www.tourisminternet.com.au/wdbike1.htm) and **Wiradjuri Walkabout Aboriginal River Walk**, with camp sites, tree carvings and bird sanctuary.

You'll see the main cluster of motels as you drive into town and along the main street. There

are also several caravan parks. **Sanctuary Park Motel** (☎ 6024 1122; www.sanctuaryparkmotel.com.au; 11 High St; s/d/f \$72/85/99; ☎) has lake views.

Getting There & Away

There are daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) trains to/ from Melbourne (\$50, 3½ hours). V/Line buses connect Wodonga with Yarrowwonga (\$12, 1½ hours) and Mildura (\$70).

WODONGA TO CORRYONG

The Murray Valley Hwy continues east of Wodonga through tiny **Tallangatta**. In the 1950s the rising waters of the Mitta Mitta River, a tributary of Lake Hume, flooded following construction of the Hume Weir at Tallangatta. Most of the township had already been relocated to New Tallangatta. There's a lookout point 7km east of the town, from which you can see the streetscape of Old Tallangatta, especially if the waters are low.

There's a turn-off 15km west of Tallangatta to the town of **Granya**. The road to the north rejoins the Murray River and follows it to **Towong** and **Corryong**, via **Tintaldra**, which is worth a detour if you have a day or two to spare. Rupert Bunny (1864–1947), the famous Australian artist, spent time here in the 1920s, and painted *The Murray at Tintaldra*. The **Tintaldra Hotel** (☎ 02-6077 9261; Main St; d \$30-65) is only 100m from the banks of the Murray. It has a beer garden, meals, basic rooms and a motel room. Camping is also an option.

GOLDFIELDS

The goldfields are one of the state's most interesting areas, with ever-present reminders of the gold-rush days. It's a blend of quaint townships, impressive regional centres and rolling countryside. Dramatic landscapes contrast from the green forests of the Wombat Ranges to red earth, bush scrub and granite country up around Inglewood.

The **Goldfields Tourist Route** takes in all the major gold-rush centres, and is great for bike touring and horse riding. Or you could hire a gypsy caravan. **Colonial Way** (☎ 03-5438 8249; www.colonialway.com.au; 35 Taylors Rd, Rheola; caravans per week \$770-990) rents caravans that are pulled by Clydesdale horses.

The old diggers dug up most of the gold, but there's still gold around, and metal detectors

RUTHERGLEN REDS

Wineries are the main attraction around Rutherglen. They produce superb fortifieds and some potent Durifs and Shirazs – some of the biggest, baddest and strongest reds. Our favourites include the following selection:

Morris (☎ 6026 7303; Mia Mia Rd; ☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

RL Buller & Son (☎ 6032 9660; www.buller.com.au; Three Chain Rd; ☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Stanton & Killeen Wines (☎ 6032 9457; www.stantonandkilleenwines.com.au; Jacks Rd; ☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Campbells (☎ 6032 9458; www.campbellswines.com.au; Murray Valley Hwy; ☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Rutherglen Estates (☎ 6032 8516; www.rutherglenestates.com.au; Tuileries Complex, Drummond St; ☎) 10am-6pm)

Warrabilla Wines (☎ 6035 7242; www.warrabillawines.com.au; Murray Valley Hwy; ☎) 10am-5pm)

THE EUREKA REBELLION

Life on the goldfields was a great leveller, erasing social distinctions as doctors, merchants, ex-convicts and labourers toiled side by side in the mud. But as the easily won gold began to run out, the diggers recognised the inequalities between themselves, and the privileged few who held land and the government.

The limited size of claims and the inconvenience of licence hunts (see the boxed text, p565), coupled with police brutality and taxation without political representation, fired the unrest that led to the Eureka Rebellion.

In September 1854 Governor Hotham ordered the hated licence hunts to be carried out twice weekly. In the following October a miner was murdered near a Ballarat hotel after an argument with the owner, James Bentley. Bentley was found not guilty by a magistrate (and business associate), and a group of miners rioted and burned his hotel. Bentley was retried and found guilty, but the rioting miners were also jailed, which fuelled their distrust of authority.

Creating the Ballarat Reform League, the diggers called for the abolition of licence fees, a miner's right to vote and increased opportunities to purchase land.

On 29 November 1854 about 800 miners, led by Irishman Peter Lalor, burnt their licences at a mass meeting and built a stockade at Eureka, where they prepared to fight for their rights.

On 3 December the government ordered troopers to attack the stockade. There were only 150 diggers within the barricades at the time and the fight lasted only 20 minutes, leaving 30 miners and five troopers dead.

The short-lived rebellion was ultimately successful. The miners won the sympathy of Victorians and the government chose to acquit the leaders of the charge of high treason.

The licence fee was abolished. A miner's right, costing one pound a year, gave the right to search for gold and to fence in, cultivate and build a dwelling on a moderate-sized piece of land – and to vote. The rebel leader Peter Lalor became a member of parliament some years later.

and prospecting gear can be bought or hired in many towns.

Central Victoria is also a major wine-producing area. The main regions are the Pyrenees Ranges near Avoca, the Heathcote region and around Bendigo.

BALLARAT

☎ 03 / pop 88,000

The area around Ballarat was known to the local Koories as 'Ballaarat', meaning 'resting place'. Around 25 pre-European clans identify themselves collectively as Wathaurong people. European pastoralists arrived in 1837 and the discovery of gold at nearby Buninyong in 1851 saw thousands of diggers flock to the area. After alluvial goldfields were played out, deep shaft reefs that were worked until the end of WWI.

Ballarat's former prosperity is reflected in the wealth of impressive Victorian-era buildings. Ballarat's 100-year-old **Begonia Festival**, in early March, attracts thousands of visitors.

Information

Ballarat visitor information centre (☎ 1800 446 633, 5320 5741; www.visitballarat.com.au; Eureka Centre,

cnr Eureka & Rodier Sts; 🏠) Has an accommodation booking service and an internet kiosk (15 minutes \$2).

Municipal library (cnr Sturt & Camp Sts; 📖) Check your emails here.

Parks Victoria (☎ 5333 6782; cnr Doveton & Mair Sts)

Sights & Activities

One of Australia's finest streetscapes of Victorian architecture is Ballarat's **Lydiard St**. Impressive buildings include Her Majesty's Theatre, the art gallery and Craig's Royal Hotel.

Hopeful prospectors can pick up miners' rights and rent metal detectors at the **Gold Shop** (☎ 5333 4242; 8a Lydiard St North), in the old Mining Exchange building.

At the Ballarat Showgrounds there's a fine **Trash & Trivia market** (Creswick Rd; 🕒 8am-2.30pm Sun).

Timeless Tours (☎ 5342 0652) offers half-day guided tours (\$30) around Ballarat's heritage sites and trips further a field.

SOVEREIGN HILL

A re-created gold-mining town of the 1860s, **Sovereign Hill** (☎ 5331 1944; www.sovereignhill.com.au; Magpie St; adult/child/family \$34/16/86; 🕒 10am-5pm) is an entertaining living history museum, with actors dressed in period costumes. You



can pan for gold and may find a speck or two. There are also two underground tours of re-created mines plus a gold pour, which transforms \$50,000 of liquid gold into a 3kg bullion bar.

The nightly sound-and-light show **Blood on the Southern Cross** (☎ 5333 5777; adult/child/family \$41/22/110) is an impressive simulation of the Eureka Stockade battle. Show times depend on when the sun sets: 9.15pm and 10.30pm in summer; 6.45pm and 8pm in winter. Bookings are essential. Note that combined Sovereign Hill entry and show tickets are available (adult/child/family \$70/35/187).

GOLD MUSEUM

Sitting on an old mine, the **Gold Museum** (☎ 5331 1944; Bradshaw St; adult/child/family \$9/4/22, or Sovereign Hill ticket; ☎ 9.30am-5.20pm) has displays including nuggets, coins and a display on the Eureka Rebellion.

BALLARAT FINE ART GALLERY

The **Ballarat Fine Art Gallery** (☎ 5320 5858; www.balgal.com; 40 Lydiard St North; adult/child \$5/free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm) is the oldest and one of the best provincial galleries in the country. It houses a wonderful collection of Australian art, including Tom Roberts, Norman Lindsay et al, and an 1895 work by Koorie William Barak. The gallery also has remnants of the original Eureka flag.

LAKE WENDOUREE

Formerly the Black Swamp, this large artificial lake is bone-dry thanks to the current drought – a vast shallow concave of dried-out silt. Several firearms have been found in the dry lake bed. Lake Wendouree was created for the 1956 Olympics rowing events.

Wendouree Pde, which circles the lake, is where many of the city's palatial houses are found. There are old timber boat sheds along the lake's shores.

BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ballarat's botanical gardens are beside Lake Wendouree. The cottage of the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon is here. Come face to face with John Howard in the Prime Ministers' Avenue, a collection of bronze portraits.

A tourist **tramway** runs on weekend afternoons and school holidays, departing from the **tram museum** (☎ 5334 1580; www.btm.org.au; South Gardens Reserve, Lake Wendouree).

EUREKA CENTRE

Standing on the site of the Eureka Rebellion, the **Eureka Centre** (☎ 5333 1854; www.eurekaballarat.com; Eureka St; adult/child/family \$8/4/22; ☎ 9am-5pm) has multimedia galleries simulating the battle. The main visitor information centre is now housed here (see p562).

BALLARAT WILDLIFE PARK

This most attractive **zoo** (☎ 5333 5933; www.wildlifepark.com.au; cnr York & Fussell Sts; adult/child/family \$20/13/60) has native animals, reptiles and a few exotics.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Robin Hood Hotel (☎ 5331 3348; 33 Peel St North; dm/s/d \$20/30/40) Right in the centre, this downmarket old local pub has spacious, high-ceilinged rooms upstairs, with good beds and crooked, clean bathrooms. Beware karaoke on Friday and Saturday.

Sovereign Hill YHA & B&B Lodge (☎ 5333 3409; www.sovereignhill.com.au; Maggie St; dm/s/d \$25/38/55, B&B lodge s/d/ff from \$110/130/160; ☎) With heritage rooms and a guest lounge with fireplace and bar, this is just a stroll from Sovereign Hill. The separate YHA cottage is great.

Reid's Guesthouse (☎ 5332 3461; 128 Lydiard St North; dm/s/d \$26/40/68) Next to the railway station, this 1886 guesthouse retains many of its original features – the foyer has splendid Art Nouveau ceiling murals and leadlight windows.

MIDRANGE

George Hotel (☎ 5333 4866; www.georgehotelballarat.com.au; 27 Lydiard St North; s with/without bathroom \$75/55, d with/without bathroom \$95/70; ☎) In historic Lydiard St North, this magnificent hotel was rebuilt in 1902 with towering ceilings and sweeping walnut staircases. The rooms are more modern and include breakfast.

Nieder Weisel (☎ 5331 8829; www.ballarat.com/niederweisel; 109 Webster St; d self-contained apt incl breakfast from \$140, B&B d from \$200) This palatial Victorian mansion has magnificent ornate rooms with enormous beds and decadent bathrooms. Breakfast commands silver service and Royal Albert china, and warm hospitality tops it all off.

Oscar's (☎ 5331 1451; www.oscarshotel.com.au; 18 Doveton St; d from \$150; ☎) The 13 rooms of this attractive Art Deco hotel have been tastefully refurbished to include double showers and spas, and broadband internet connections.

GOLD FEVER

In May 1851 EH Hargraves discovered gold near Bathurst in New South Wales (NSW), and sensational accounts of the find caused thousands of people to drop everything to try their luck. Sydney was virtually denuded of workers, and when news of the discovery reached Melbourne the same exodus threatened there.

A reward was offered to anyone who could find gold within 300km of Melbourne. Within a week, gold was discovered in the Yarra River but the find was soon eclipsed by a more significant discovery at Clunes. Prospectors headed to central Victoria as fresh gold finds became an almost weekly occurrence.

Gold was found in the Pyrenees, Warrandyte, Buninyong, and the Loddon and Avoca Rivers. Ballarat, in September 1851, produced the biggest discovery, followed by other significant finds at Bendigo, Mt Alexander, Beechworth, Walhalla, Omeo and in the hills and creeks of the Great Dividing Range.

By the end of 1851 about 250,000 ounces of gold had been claimed. Farms and businesses lost their workforces and were often abandoned. Hopeful miners came from England, Ireland, Europe, China and the failing goldfields of California; during 1852 about 1800 people arrived in Melbourne each week.

The government imposed a licence fee of 30 shillings a month for all prospectors. This entitled the miners to an 8-sq-foot claim in which to dig for gold and it provided the means to enforce improvised law. Any miner without a licence could be fined or imprisoned. Although this later caused serious unrest, it was successful in averting the lawlessness that had characterised the California rush.

Gold fever meant backbreaking work, unwholesome food, hard drinking and primitive dwellings, and while amazing wealth came to some, it remained the elusive dream for others – for every success story, there were hundreds more of hardship, despair and death.

The gold rush had its share of rogues, including the notorious bushrangers, but it also had its heroes: the martyrs of the Eureka Stockade, a miners' rebellion that eventually forced political change in the colony (see the boxed text, p562).

The gold rush ushered in a fantastic era of growth and material prosperity for Victoria, opening up vast areas of country previously unexplored by colonists.

In the first 12 years of the rush, Victoria's population rose from 77,000 to 540,000. To cope with the moving population and the tonnes of gold and supplies, the development of roads and railways was accelerated.

The mining companies that followed the independent diggers invested heavily in the region over the next couple of decades. The huge shantytowns of tents, bark huts, raucous bars and police camps were eventually replaced by timber and stone buildings, which became the foundation of many of Victoria's provincial cities.

The gold towns reached the height of splendour in the 1880s. Gold gradually lost its importance but, by then, the gold towns had stable populations plus agriculture and other activities to maintain economic prosperity.

Gold also made Melbourne Australia's largest city and financial centre, a position it held for nearly half a century.

TOP END

Craig's Royal Hotel (☎ 5331 1377; www.craigroyal.com; 10 Lydiard St South; d from \$180) The best of the grand old pubs was so named after it hosted visits by the Prince of Wales and Duke of Edinburgh. It's a wonderful Victorian building with old-fashioned opulence and some creaky floorboards.

Ansonia (☎ 5332 4678; www.ballarat.com/ansoniam.htm; 32 Lydiard St South; d from \$189) An upmarket retreat,

this place exudes calm with its minimalist design, polished cement floors and light-filled atrium. The café serves all-day breakfasts. Rooms range from studio apartments to family suites.

CAMPING

Ballarat Goldfields Holiday Park (☎ 1800 632 237, 5332 7888; www.ballaratgoldfields.com.au; 108 Clayton St; sites/cabins from \$22/60; ☎) Close to Sovereign Hill,

minimum two-night stay) are made through agencies in Daylesford.

Daylesford Accommodation Booking Service (DABS; ☎ 5348 1448; www.dabs.com.au; 94 Vincent St)

Daylesford Cottage Directory (☎ 5348 1255; www.thespacountryholidayshop.com.au; 86 Vincent St)

Daylesford Getaways (☎ 5348 4422; www.dayget.com.au; 123 Vincent St)

DAYLESFORD

Daylesford Hotel (☎ 5348 2335; fax 5348 1083; cnr Albert & Howe Sts; d incl breakfast \$55) The old pub has small neat rooms upstairs. Bathrooms are clean but tiny, and there's a cosy TV room and balcony.

Double Nut Chalets (☎ 5348 3981; www.doublenut.com; 5 Howe St; d incl breakfast from \$130) The four chalets are spacious and tasteful suites that have gable ceilings and kitchenette, in a lovely garden right in town.

Possum Cottage (☎ 5348 3173; www.lakedaylesfordcottage.com.au; Leggatt St, d incl breakfast from \$150) In a fabulous lakeside location, this self-contained cottage has a comfortable lounge with wood heater and great balcony.

Lulu's (☎ 5348 1255; 7 Albert St; minimum 2 nights \$320) Lulu's, a tastefully renovated 1880s miner's cottage, sleeps five in one queen room, one twin and a single. There's DVD and stereo, spa and separate shower, excellent kitchen with microwave and dishwasher, and a great outdoors area with large deck and BBQ.

Lake House (☎ 5348 3329; www.lakehouse.com.au; King St; d incl breakfast from \$320; ♿) Set in rambling gardens with bridges, waterfalls and cockatoos, these welcoming units around the lake make you feel like just staying put. There's a guest lounge, tennis court and the ultimate pampering of Salus healing spring waters; see the boxed text, below.

HEPBURN SPRINGS

Daylesford Wildwood Youth Hostel (☎ 5348 4435; www.mooltan.com.au/www/wildwood.htm; 42 Main Rd; dm/s/d from \$25/40/75; ♿) In a charming cottage with a homey lounge room, you'd never know it was a youth hostel. The dorm rooms are average, but other rooms have bathtubs and garden views.

Continental House (☎ 5348 2005; www.continentalhouse.com.au; 9 Lone Pine Ave; dm/s/d \$30/40/70) This 'vegan life sanctuary' is a rambling, timber guesthouse with a laid-back alternative vibe, a café serving excellent buffets, Saturday-night banquets (\$25), a superb open-veranda sitting room and a music room. BYO linen and yoga pants.

Mooltan Guesthouse (☎ 5348 3555; www.mooltan.com.au; 129 Main Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$90/110) An inviting Edwardian country home, Mooltan has large lounge rooms, a billiard table and tennis court. Bedrooms open onto a broad veranda overlooking the Mineral Springs Reserve. There are special weekend packages

and spa rooms, plus cheaper rooms that share facilities.

Hepburn & Amberley Cottages (☎ 9557 1035; www.hepburnamberleycottages.com.au; 17 Church Ave; minimum 2 nights from \$180) A refreshing antidote to the manicured pretensions of some of the region's guesthouses, these two cottages are unrenovated, authentic and largely original. Hepburn, which sleeps four, was a miner's cottage and Amberley, sleeping six, was a school house. Rough and rustic; BYO linen.

Shizuka Ryokan (☎ 5348 2030; www.shizuka.com.au; Lakeside Dr; midweek package s/d \$204/275) Inspired by traditional places of renewal and rejuvenation in Japan, this minimalist getaway has rooms with private Japanese gardens, tatami matting and plenty of green tea. Packages can include a superb Japanese dinner and breakfast with various massage treatments (see the boxed text, opposite).

Springs Retreat (☎ 5348 2202; www.thesprings.com.au; 124 Main Rd; d incl breakfast from \$232) This charming 1930s mansion has been brought into the 21st century in great style. Many rooms have spas and private balconies, garden rooms have courtyards and pampering packages are available.

Eating

DAYLESFORD

Vincent St and its side streets have some great cafés.

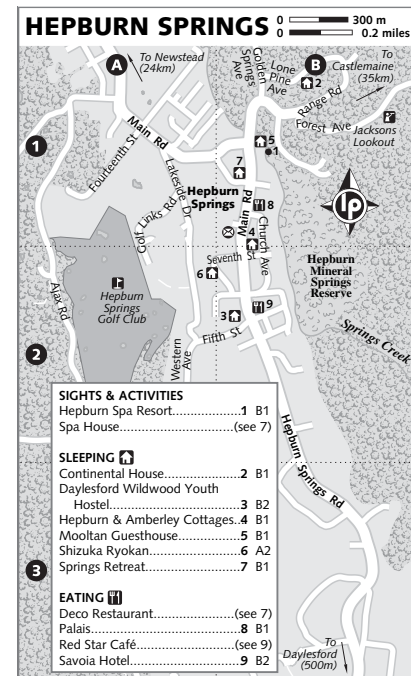
Electric Sitar (☎ 5348 1676; 4/27 Albert Arcade; mains \$13; ♿ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) This aromatic takeaway/eatery offers well-prepared Indian favourites.

Boat House Café (☎ 5348 1387; mains \$15-19; ♿ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sun, dinner Sat & Sun) This perennial favourite is in an old boat shed. The setting is lovely – you can nibble nachos out on the deck and watch the swans on the lake.

Harvest Café (☎ 5348 3994; 29 Albert St; mains \$15-22; ♿ Thu-Mon) This retro café has fantastic music, timber floors, blackboards and excellent food, with good vegetarian options.

Frangos & Frangos (☎ 5348 2363; 82 Vincent St; mains \$16-32; ♿ breakfast & lunch Fri & Sat, lunch Sun) Ensnconed in a corner building that's had a groovy refit, Frangos² has a licensed café serving light meals next door to its main dining room that serves fine European-inspired cuisine.

Lake House (☎ 5348 3329; King St; mains \$34-38) Daylesford's much-lauded Lake House restaurant is among the best in Victoria. The beautiful dining room overlooks Lake Daylesford or



you can take luncheon on the deck. Reservations are essential.

HEPBURN SPRINGS

Savoia Hotel (☎ 5348 2314; 69 Main Rd; mains \$14-25; ♿ lunch & dinner) If you like your steak big and your chicken roasted, this is the place.

our pick Red Star Café (☎ 5348 2297; 115 Main Rd; mains \$10-28; ♿ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) This old weatherboard shopfront filled with light, great music and lots of Hepburn locals is *the* place for all-day breakfasts and lunches. The eclectic menu offers piquant curries and laksas next to frittata and gnocchi.

Palais (☎ 5348 4849; www.thepalais.com.au; 111 Main Rd; mains \$15-25; ♿ dinner Thu-Sun) This dazzlingly atmospheric 1920s theatre building is a restaurant, café and cocktail bar. Enjoy the osso bucco or moussaka then relax in lush lounge chairs, play pool or even dance. Locals pack out the place on the kid-friendly Thursday nights when meals cost \$12 and feature trevally filets and Moroccan chicken tagine. The Palais is a country stable on the live music circuit and hosts some of Australia's best acts.

PAMPERING SOAKS

Salus (☎ 5348 3329; www.lakehouse.com.au; Lake House, King St, Daylesford) The pampering starts as you walk through a small rainforest to your exotic jasmine-flower bath in a cedar-lined tree house overlooking the lake. Then you might choose a lime-and-ginger salt polish before a steam and waterfall, a rejuvenating facial and a full-body drizzle of warm Japanese camellia oil.

Daylesford Day Spa (☎ 5348 2331; www.daylesforddayspa.com.au; 25 Albert St, Daylesford) Start with a vitamin-rich mud body mask and steam in a body-care cocoon, before a scalp massage and Vichy shower.

Spa House (☎ 5348 2202; www.thesprings.com.au; Springs Retreat, 124 Main Rd, Hepburn Springs) Have an algae gel wrap, based on an ancient Chinese treatment, then move into the lavender steam room, or take a soft pack float.

Hepburn Spa Resort (☎ 5348 2034; www.hepburnspa.com.au; Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve) Where it all began in 1896, Hepburn Spa Resort is currently undergoing a major refit of its bath house and will reopen in 2008. It has relocated its reception, facilities and treatments to the big yellow Liberty House across the road, and still performing all its spa-and-massage magic without the use of its springwater pools. Drop by for a milk-and-honey wrap.

Shizuka Ryokan (☎ 5348 2030; www.shizuka.com.au; 7 Lakeside Dr, Hepburn Springs) How about a 'body polish' with natural sea salts and seaweed extracts, ginseng and green tea at this authentic Japanese country spa retreat?

Massage Healing Centre (☎ 5348 1099; www.massagehealingcentre.com.au; 5/11 Howe St, Daylesford) For a modest, down-to-earth alternative to the glitz-and-glam spa resorts listed above, try this place. We did and left feeling blissed out.

Deco Restaurant (☎ 5348 2202; 124 Main Rd; mains \$24-30) In a fabulous retro setting, elegant Deco at Peppers Springs Retreat serves fabulous food like spiced fillet of wild barramundi on *brandade* with sauce *vierge*.

Getting There & Around

Daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) train/coach services connect Melbourne to Daylesford (\$16, 1½ hours) by train to Woodend and then bus to Daylesford. Weekday V/Line buses run from Daylesford to Ballarat (\$11), Castlemaine (\$6) and Bendigo (\$11). The buses run from the newsagency at 55 Vincent St.

It's a pleasant 45-minute walk between Daylesford and Hepburn Springs. A **shuttle bus** runs between the Daylesford visitor information centre and Hepburn Springs spa complex four times each weekday. Local **taxis** (☎ 5348 1111) include a six-seater in the fleet.

CASTLEMAINE

☎ 03 / pop 8700

Castlemaine is a relaxed country town that's home to artists, long-time locals, hippies and 'tree-changers'. It also has some splendid colonial architecture and gardens. The discovery of gold at Specimen Gully in 1851 radically altered the pastoral landscape of the Castlemaine region, as 30,000 diggers worked goldfields known collectively as the Mt Alexander Diggings. The town grew up around the government camp and soon became the market place for all the goldfields of central Victoria. Whilst not as commercialised as Daylesford, Castlemaine (the 'Hot Rod Capital of Australia') is rapidly catching up, keen to get its share of day-trippers and weekend-escapes from Melbourne.

Castlemaine hosts the **State Festival** (www.castlemainefestival.com.au) in March/April in odd-numbered years, one of Victoria's leading arts events.

Information

Castlemaine visitor information centre (☎ 1800 171 888, 5470 6200; www.maldoncastlemaine.com; Mostyn St) In the stunning Castlemaine market building.

GCom Internet (☎ 5470 6690; 167 Barker St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat; ☎) High-speed internet at \$5 per hour.

Sights & Activities

Dating from 1861, **Buda** (☎ 5472 1032; www.buda.castlemaine.org; cnr Hunter & Urquhart Sts; adult/child/

family \$9/7/20; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun, 10am-5pm Sun) was home to a Hungarian silversmith and his descendants for 120 years. The family's art and craft collections and personal belongings are on display.

The impressive **Castlemaine Art Gallery & Historical Museum** (☎ 5472 2292; www.castlemainegallery.com; 14 Lyttleton St; adult/student/family \$4/2/8; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun), in a superb Art Deco building, has a collection of colonial and contemporary Australian art; downstairs is a local history museum.

The imposing **Old Castlemaine Gaol** (☎ 5472 5311; www.oldcastlemainegaol.com.au; cnr Bowden & Charles Sts) was closed for renovations when we visited.

The famous **Restorers Barn** (☎ 5470 5667; 129-133 Mostyn St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) is chock-full of interesting bric-a-brac and collectables.

In the evening, catch a live band or film at the historic **Theatre Royal** (☎ 5472 1196); see also opposite.

The **Victorian Goldfields Railway** (☎ 5475 2966; www.vgr.com.au; adult/child/family \$24/11/54; ☎ Wed & Sun, Sat during school holidays) does return steam-train rides between Castlemaine and Maldon through the Muckleford Forest. There are several runs a day, with an hour's stopover at each end for sightseeing. Steam-train tragedies from all over the world come to ride this baby.

Sleeping

The region has a free **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1800 171 888, 5470 5866; www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au).

Northern Hotel (☎ 5472 1102; 359 Barker St; d \$50) One kilometre north of town centre, the Northern has the cheapest rooms in town – basic, clean with shared bathrooms.

Castle Motel (☎ 5472 2433; www.castlemotel.com.au; Duke St; s/d/f \$89/99/139; ☎ ☎) This is a classic 1960s-era roadside motel with spacious self-contained rooms with fridges and free satellite TV. There's a pool and spa too. It's close to the centre but the rooms backing onto the main Melbourne–Castlemaine road are noisy.

Midland Private Hotel (☎ 5472 1085; www.themidland.com.au; 2 Templeton St; s/d incl breakfast from \$90/140, apt d from \$220) This lace-decked hotel, which has been sheltering travellers since 1879, features a magnificent Art Deco entrance foyer and dining room, and a lounge with open fireplaces. Breakfast comes with homemade produce.

Book Heaven's 1857 Coach House (☎ 5470 6948; www.castlemaine.biz/bookheaven; 61 Main Rd, Campbell's Creek; s/d \$110/120) Five minutes' drive on the

road to Daylesford, this fantastic restored coach house offers comfort and atmosphere. Split over two levels, the coach house is furnished with period pieces, including a tiny potbellied stove.

our pick Theatre Royal Back Stage (☎ 5472 1196; www.castlemainetheatre.com; Hargraves St; d incl breakfast \$195). It's a unique experience staying in the backstage area of the 1854 theatre building. The two suites are tiny but beautifully decorated with period furniture and cinema memorabilia. The rate includes admission to all movies screened during your stay, and you can make arrangements for a private screening of your favourite film.

Castlemaine Gardens Caravan Park (☎ 5472 1125; www.castlemainegardenscaravanpark.com; Doran Ave; sites from \$22, d cabins from \$69) Ideally situated next to the Botanic Gardens and public swimming pool, this leafy park has a camp kitchen, BBQs and recreation hut.

Eating

Capones (☎ 5470 5705; 50 Hargraves St; mains \$11-17; ☎ dinner) Pizzas and pastas done gangster-style.

Fuel (☎ 5470 5000; 113 Moyston St; mains \$12-20; ☎ dinner) Fuel is a wannabe American-style diner, replete with car-part décor.

Tog's Café (☎ 5470 5090; 58 Lyttleton St; mains \$16-25; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat) Fashionable Tog's has open fireplaces and a menu boasting Kashmiri lamb curry, great soups and salads.

Saff's Café (☎ 5470 6722; 64 Mostyn St; mains \$17-23) Saff's Café serves excellent homemade bread, cakes and savouries, the best coffee in town and interesting meals such as the roti bake topped with a tomato-and-hummus crust.

Papas Fish & Chips (☎ 5472 2974; 99 Moyston St) and **Blue Sea Fish Shop** (☎ 5472 1194; 91 Moyston St) are almost next door to each other, both serving good fish and chips, and hamburgers.

Getting There & Away

Daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) trains run between Melbourne and Castlemaine (\$20, 1½ hours) and continue on to Bendigo (\$6) and Swan Hill (\$34). Daily coaches run to Daylesford (\$6), Maldon (\$6), Ballarat (\$14) and Geelong (\$31).

MALDON

☎ 03 / pop 1250

Charming Maldon is a well-preserved relic of the gold-mining era. Its population is a

fraction of the 20,000 who once worked here. The tourist town is virtually closed on Monday and Tuesday since traders work all weekend.

The **Maldon visitor information centre** (☎ 5475 2569; www.maldoncastlemaine.com; High St; ☎) stocks lots of useful free literature. A small **historical museum** (☎ 5474 1633; ☎ 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun), behind the visitor centre, displays local artefacts.

On the edge of town is the excellent **Penny School Gallery & Café** (☎ 5475 1911; www.pennyschoolgallery.com.au; 11 Church St; ☎ 10am-5pm), exhibiting well-known artists' work.

You can take a candle-lit tour of 1880s-era **Carmen's Tunnel Goldmine** (☎ 5475 2667; adult/child \$5/2; ☎ 1.30-4pm Sat & Sun), which is off Parkin's Reef Rd, 2.7km south of town. Railway buffs will enjoy the **Victorian Goldfields Railway** (☎ office 5470 6658, station 5475 2966; Hornsby St), which has old-time **steam trains** running to Castlemaine (see opposite). Historic **Porcupine Township** (☎ 5475 1000; www.porcupinetownship.com.au; Bendigo Rd; adult/child/family \$9/6/25; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a quaint re-creation of a gold-mining village.

Folk-music fans will enjoy the annual **Maldon Folk Festival** (www.maldonfolkfestival.com) held in early November.

Sleeping

Heritage Cottages of Maldon (☎ 5475 1094) manages many of the area's self-contained cottages and B&Bs.

Central Service Centre (☎ 5475 2216; Main St; s/d \$40/70; ☎) This excellent option is in the unlikely setting of a former garage (the pumps are still out the front). The MG room is the funkiest.

Maldon's Eaglehawk (☎ 5475 2750; www.maldon.eaglehawk.com; 35 Reef St; s/d from \$90/100; ☎ ☎) Even motels in this town have loads of appeal. Beautiful heritage units are set in delightful grounds with little alcoves overlooking the pool, BBQ nooks and vine-trimmed verandas.

Calder House (☎ 5475 2912; www.calderhouse.com.au; 44 High St; s/d from \$90/110) Step back in time at this formal and grand, yet very inviting place, right in the centre of town. It has superb features and guestrooms with four-poster beds and claw-foot baths.

Maldon Caravan Park (☎ /fax 5475 2344; Hospital St; unpowered/power sites from \$18/21, d cabins from \$62; ☎) This old park straggles up through the bush. It's friendly and homey, with a bush kitchen, BBQs and swimming pool next door.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, Bendigo 5430 444; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) manages the Butts Reserve camp site in the Maldon Historic Reserve with toilets and picnic tables. No permits are required. From Maldon, travel west along Franklin St and follow the signs to Mt Tarngower to the camp site.

Eating

Berryman's Café & Tearooms (☎ 5475 2904; 30 Main St; meals \$4-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Enjoy a light meal, snack or full-on lunch in an old tearoom environment or outside in the sun. Try the yabby pie.

Café Maldon (☎ 5475 2022; 52 Main St; mains \$9; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This trendy little place is where the locals read their papers and watch the visitors' antics. Tables are set between couches and unusual giftware that is for sale, and with luck you'll catch some live music. The gourmet pastries are highly regarded.

Ruby's at Calder House (☎ 5475 2912; 44 High St; mains \$20-27; ☎ dinner) This is one of the area's best restaurants. Set in an elegant Victorian dining room, it serves 'creative country cuisine' using only fine local produce. Book ahead.

Getting There & Away

Castlemaine Bus Lines (☎ 5472 1455; www.castlemainebuslines.com.au) runs two buses each weekday between Maldon and Castlemaine (\$6), connecting with trains to and from Melbourne.

Castlemaine taxis (☎ 13 10 08) service Maldon.

MARYBOROUGH

☎ 03 / pop 7500

In 1854 gold was discovered around here at White Hills and Four Mile Flat. A police camp at the diggings was named Maryborough, and at the height of the gold rush the population was over 40,000. Today the town has some fine buildings and a few sights.

The **Maryborough visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 356 511, 5460 4511; www.centralgoldfields.com.au; cnr Alma & Nolan Sts; ☎) has loads of helpful maps and friendly staff.

The magnificent 1892 **Maryborough Railway Station** (Burns St; ☎ Wed-Mon) was described by Mark Twain as 'a train station with a town attached'. It now houses an antiques emporium, gallery and café. **Worsley Cottage** (☎ 5461 2800; 3 Palmerston St; ☎ 10am-noon Tue & Thu, 2-5pm Sun) is the historical society museum.

Sleeping & Eating

Bull & Mouth Hotel (☎ 5461 1002; cnr High & Nolan Sts; s/d \$35/45) The staircase is magnificent, the rooms are simple and small, and the restaurant (mains \$10 to \$18, open for lunch and dinner) serves the best steaks in town and other quirky dishes. The weekend DJ plays dance, country and R & B.

Bella's Country House B&B (☎ 5460 5574; www.cgold.com.au/bellas; 39 Burns St; d from \$120) This handsome red-brick Victorian homestead has a magnificently restored interior, complete with comfy lounges and open fires.

Maryborough Caravan Park (☎ 5460 4848; www.maryboroughcaravanpark.com.au; 7 Holyrood St; unpowered/powered sites \$15/22, cabins from \$55; ☎) Right in town, by Lake Victoria, this family park is walking distance to the swimming pool.

Old Vault (☎ 5460 5164; 106 High St; mains \$10-19) Enjoy a coffee or an Old Vault beef burger in this Art Deco bank building.

Getting There & Away

The trip from Melbourne takes about 2½ hours and involves taking a train from Southern Cross Station to Castlemaine, and then getting a bus to Maryborough. The one-way fare is \$23.

BENDIGO

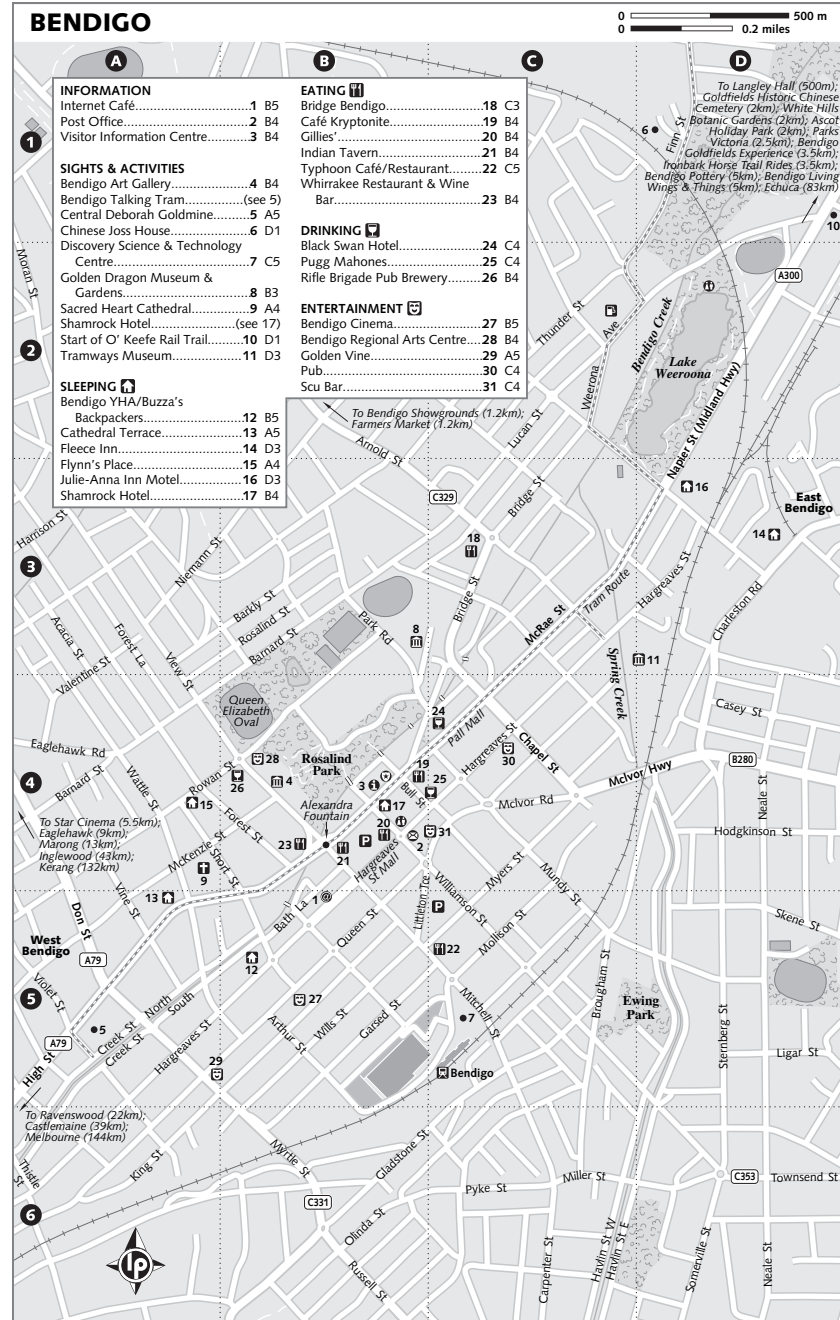
☎ 03 / pop 94,000

When gold was discovered at Ravenswood in 1851, thousands converged on the fantastically rich Bendigo Diggings. The arrival of Chinese miners in 1854 had a lasting effect on Bendigo, which maintains a rich Chinese heritage.

During the boom years between the 1860s and 1880s, mining companies poured money into the town, resulting in the Victorian architecture that graces Bendigo's streets today. By the 1860s, diggers were no longer tripping over surface nuggets and deep mining began. Local legend has it that you can walk underground from one side of the town to the other. These days the town is a prosperous provincial centre with fine public gardens, statues and buildings, a bohemian café and restaurant scene, and one of the best regional art galleries. Bendigo is a likeable city, with arcades and alleyways, and plenty for you to explore for a few days.

Information

Bendigo visitor information centre (☎ 1800 813 153, 5444 4445; www.bendigotourism.com; 51 Pall Mall) In the historic former post office.



Internet café (☎ 5442 6411; 374 Hargreaves St) Internet for \$9 per hour.

Parks Victoria (☎ 5444 6620; cnr Taylor St & Midland Hwy, Epsom) It's 3.5km out of town.

Sights

Even if you're not religious, a visit to the magnificent **Sacred Heart Cathedral** (www.sand.catholic.org.au/cathedral; cnr Wattle & High Sts) is essential. It's a superb piece of architecture and a walk down its central aisle below the high vaulted ceiling and superb stained-glass windows is a highlight.

The **Chinese Joss House** (☎ 5442 1685; Finn St; adult/child \$3/1; ☹ 11am-4pm), in North Bendigo at the end of the tramline, is one of the few practising joss houses (Chinese temples) in Victoria. It opens to visitors only on Sundays.

The **Goldfields Historic Chinese Cemetery** (White Hills Cemetery, Holdsworth Rd) is the oldest and most significant of its kind in Australia, with a prayer oven where paper money for the spirits of the dead was burnt.

The 500m-deep **Central Deborah Goldmine** (☎ 5443 8322; 76 Violet St; adult/child/family \$19/16/49; ☹ 9.30am-5pm), worked on 17 levels, became operational in the 1940s and was connected with two Deborah shafts that date back to the 1860s. About one tonne of gold was removed before it closed in 1954. The mine is one of Bendigo's major tourist attractions, with exhibits and photographs from the mid-1800s onwards. After donning hard hats and lights, you're taken 61m down the shaft to inspect the ongoing operations, complete with drilling demonstrations. There's a combined ticket (adult/child \$29/16) for the mine tour plus a ride on the Talking Tram.

Bendigo's tram system was closed down in 1972, but Bendigo residents took direct action and resuscitated the trams, which now run as a tourist feature. The **Bendigo Talking Tram** (☎ 5443 8322; 76 Violet St; adult/child/family \$13/8/37; ☹ 9.30am-3.30pm) runs with a commentary from the Central Deborah Goldmine, through the centre of the city, out to the **Tramways Museum** (admission free) and on to the Chinese Joss House. It leaves the mine every hour, or five minutes later from Alexandra Fountain in Charing Cross.

One of Victoria's largest regional galleries, the **Bendigo Art Gallery** (☎ 5443 4991; www.bendigoartgallery.com.au; 42 View St; admission by donation) has an outstanding collection of 19th-century European, colonial and contemporary Australian art, and regular touring exhibitions from overseas. Guided tours run at 2pm daily. Works by

Sidney Nolan, John Brack, Lloyd Rees through to Brett Whiteley and Aboriginal artists Rusty Peters and Ningura Napurrula are on permanent display.

The magnificent **Shamrock Hotel** (cnr Pall Mall & Williamson St), built in 1897, is a fine example of elaborate Italianate late-Victorian architecture (see opposite). The story goes that floors were regularly washed down to collect gold dust brought in on miners' boots.

There are two enormous processional dragons, Old Loong (the world's oldest) and Sun Loong (the world's longest), at the excellent **Golden Dragon Museum** (☎ 5441 5044; www.goldendragonmuseum.org; Bridge St; adult/child/family \$8/4/20). Old Loong arrived in 1892 for the annual Bendigo Easter Festival, and Sun Loong took over in 1970 when Old Loong retired. The museum traces the involvement of the Chinese community in the development of Bendigo. There are also **Chinese gardens** nearby and a tearoom serving light meals.

The oldest pottery works in Australia (1858), **Bendigo Pottery** (☎ 5448 4404; www.bendigopottery.com.au; Midland Hwy, Epsom; ☹ 9am-5pm) is 6km north of Bendigo. There's a café, sales gallery and historic kilns, and you can watch potters at work. Also on site is **Bendigo Living Wings & Things** (☎ 5448 3051; adult/child/family \$7/5/18), which has lizards, pythons, wallabies, dingoes, butterflies and walk-through parrot enclosures.

The huge **Discovery Science & Technology Centre** (☎ 5444 4400; www.discovery.asn.au; Railway Pl; adult/child/family \$10/7/30; ☹ 10am-5pm) has a wide range of interesting and educational exhibits.

Bendigo Showgrounds is the venue for the **Sunday Market** (☹ 8.30am-3pm) and, on the second Saturday each month, the **Farmers Market** (☹ 8am-1pm).

Activities

Ironbark Horse Trail Rides (☎ 5448 3344; Watson St; rides per 1/2hr \$30/55) organises various horse rides including the Great Australian Pub Ride to Allies Hotel in Myers Flat (with lunch \$75). In the Ironbark complex, **Bendigo Goldfields Experience** (☎ 5448 4140; www.bendigogold.com.au; Watson St) has fossicking and detecting tours (per half-day \$130) into the bush, or gold panning (per hour \$12) at the mobile gold-panning centre.

You can hike or bike the **O'Keefe Rail Trail** (19km one way) from the corner of the Midland Hwy and Baden St through bushland to Axedale.

Balloon Flights of Bendigo (☎ 544 1127; www.balloonflightsvic.com.au; sunrise flight, breakfast & champagne \$250) offers birds'-eye views of the Bendigo environs.

Festivals

Bendigo's busy schedule of festivals includes the **Bendigo Agricultural Show** (www.bendigoshow.org.au) held in October, and the **Bendigo Cup** (www.racingvictoria.net.au/vrc/bendigo), part of the Spring Racing Carnival held in November. The **Easter Festival** attracts thousands of visitors with its carnival atmosphere and procession of Chinese dragons.

Sleeping

There's an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1800 813 153, 5444 4445) at the visitor information centre (p572).

BUDGET

Bendigo YHA/Buzza's Backpackers (☎/fax 5443 7680; 33 Creek St S; dm/s/d/f \$25/42/65/70; ☹) This small, homey hostel is in a weatherboard cottage that's been opened up inside to make bright cheery rooms with all the usual amenities. It's in a great location.

Fleece Inn (☎ 5443 3086; 139 Charleston Rd; dm/s/d incl breakfast \$35/50/75; ☹) This 140-year-old ex-pub has dorm rooms with partitioned-off beds, spacious bathrooms and a huge back courtyard with lounge area, TV and BBQs. Smart rooms are up the grand original timber staircase.

MIDRANGE

Shamrock Hotel (☎ 5443 0333; www.shamrockbendigo.com.au; cnr Pall Mall & Williamson St; d from \$110, ste from \$195) The Shamrock is a stunning Victorian building with stained glass, original paintings, fancy columns and a *Gone with the Wind*-style staircase. The cheaper rooms are small.

Cathedral Terrace (☎ 5441 3242; www.cathedralterrace.com.au; 81 Wattle St; s/d incl breakfast from \$120/155; ☹) For an intimate experience in classic old-world Victoria you must stay here, among the antiques and lush furnishings. A full breakfast is served in the lounge, with a view of Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Julie-Anna Inn Motel (☎ 5442 5855; fax 5441 6032; 268 Napier St; s/d/f from \$124/135/180; ☹) This upmarket motel is just across from Lake Weeroona. The spacious units open onto an attractive central courtyard, with a grand dining room at the end.

TOP END

Langley Hall (☎ 5443 3693; www.langleyhall.com.au; 484 Napier St; s/d incl breakfast from \$120/175; ☹) Built in 1904, Langley Hall offers unfussy opulence. Sweep up the grand staircase to magnificent suites, opening out to expansive verandas. Downstairs, enjoy the elegant and comfortable parlour, drawing room and billiard room.

Flynn's Place (☎ 5444 001; www.flynnsplace.com.au; 104 Short St; d from \$165; ☹) If all that old-world lace gives you the creeps, these two modern self-contained apartments might be more your taste. Flynn's is sleekly fitted out and furnished in a historic building, with queen beds, widescreen TVs, DVDs, sound systems and free broadband internet.

Eating

Bendigo has an excellent range of cafés, pubs and restaurants. Bull St (off Pall Mall) has a great café scene.

Gillies' (Hargreaves St Mall) The pies at this Bendigo institution are among the best in Australia.

Indian Tavern (☎ 5442 3399; 14-16 Pall Mall; mains \$11-18; ☹ dinner) This cheerful and authentic Tandoori-style curry house serves Indian favourites. Eat in or takeaway.

Typhoon Café/Restaurant (☎ 5443 3111; 95 Mitchell St; mains \$15-24; ☹ dinner) Typhoon is a contemporary place, modern yet relaxed and informal. Traditional noodle soups sit aside funky lime-and-coriander Thai beef salads.

Café Kryptonite (☎ 5443 9777; Pall Mall; mains \$15-28; ☹ lunch & dinner) Kryptonite is popular, with a good atmosphere. The Tuscan pork sausages with apple are great.

Whirakee Restaurant & Wine Bar (☎ 5441 5557; 17 View Point; mains \$13-28; ☹ dinner Tue-Sat) The owner/head chef serves excellent Mod Oz cuisine such as kangaroo sirloin with creamed parsnip. Downstairs there's a small wine bar with cosy sofas.

Bridge Bendigo (☎ 5443 7811; 49 Bridge St; mains \$22-35; ☹ lunch & dinner) Perhaps the best restaurant in Bendigo. The imaginative modern-European menu includes veal *involtini*, crispy wild barramundi and spit-roast lamb. The select wine list is strong on local wines.

Drinking

Pugg Mahones (☎ 5443 4916; 224 Hargreaves St) Pugg's has Guinness (and many other beers) on tap, a great atmosphere, a beer garden and live music Thursday to Saturday.

Rifle Brigade Pub Brewery (☎ 5443 4092; 137 View St; mains \$16-20) A popular old pub brewing Ironbark Dark, Old-fashioned Bitter and Rifle Lager. Enjoy top pub food in the courtyard.

Black Swan Hotel (☎ 5444 0944; 6 Howard Pl) This is a trendy place for a drink.

Entertainment

Pub (☎ 5443 4079; 173 Hargreaves St) Bendigo's premier live-rock venue, showcasing touring acts from all over Australia.

Scu Bar (☎ 5441 6888; 238 Hargreaves St) Mainstream dance music on Friday and Saturday nights.

Golden Vine (☎ 5443 6063; 135 King St) Popular jam sessions are the go on Tuesday nights, and bands play on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

Bendigo Regional Arts Centre (☎ 5441 5344; www.bendigo.vic.gov.au; 50 View St) Bendigo's main venue for the performing arts.

Bendigo Cinema (☎ 5442 1666; www.cinema.bendigo.net.au; 107 Queen St) Shows the usual diet of mainstream films.

Star Cinema (☎ 0408-337 277; www.starcinema.org; Eaglehawk Town Hall, Peg Leg Rd, Eaglehawk; adult/child \$12/7) Classic and art-house flicks.

Getting There & Around

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs 11 trains daily from Melbourne (\$27, two hours). One train continues on to Swan Hill (\$30). Other stops include Castlemaine (\$6) and Kyneton (\$10). V/line buses depart from Bendigo train station, with daily services to Castlemaine (\$6) and Mildura (\$60) via Swan Hill (\$30); weekday services to Ballarat (\$21) and Geelong (\$37); and Monday to Saturday services to Echuca (\$8).

Walkers Buslines (☎ 5443 9333) and **Christian's Buslines** (☎ 5447 2222) service the area (two-hour tickets \$2). Timetables are available at the visitor centre.

For a taxi call **Bendigo Associated Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08).

THE HIGH COUNTRY

Grab your bike, throw the skis on the roof, and get set for an action-packed trip to Victoria's High Country, where the air is clear and the mountain scenery invigorating and spectacular. The High Country isn't particularly high – the highest point, Mt Bogong, only reaches 1986m.

Although there are plenty of activities to do in the High Country, it's the ski resorts that have really put this area on the map. Skiers and snowboarders flock here from Melbourne and the outlying areas during the winter months.

The ski season officially launches, with or without snow, on the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June and runs until mid-September. The best deals are to be found in June and September (low season), with late July to August (high season) the busiest and most expensive time.

Others may prefer the year-round slothful delights of wine tasting, and during the summer (October onwards) there are outdoor activities such as horse riding, canoeing, abseiling and mountain-bike riding.

Eildon and the gateway towns (Mansfield, Myrtleford, Harrietville and Bright) are in the northwestern foothills. Omeo is the High Country's southeastern gateway town.

Declared a national park in December 1989, the 646,000-hectare **Alpine National Park** joins the high country areas of Victoria, NSW and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Recreation and ecotourism opportunities in the area are outstanding, particularly snow sports in the winter. Dispersed bush camping is available in areas running off 4WD and walking tracks, while on principal roads the use of designated camping areas is encouraged. The area's many walking tracks include the **Australian Alps Walking Track**, which extends 655km through the park from Walhalla to the outskirts of Canberra.

The park is a spectacular and fragile environment, and the vegetation throughout is quite diverse. In spring and summer the slopes are carpeted with beautiful wildflowers. More than 1100 plant species have been recorded in the park, including 12 that are unique to Australia.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) operates services to major alpine towns, and there are also connecting services from Benalla and Wangaratta. Services vary seasonally.

During winter the roads can become impassable. Check road conditions with the **Official Victorian Snow Report** (www.vicsnowreport.com.au/report.html) before heading out. Snow chains, widely available for hire, must be carried during winter even if there's no snow – heavy penalties apply if you don't.

EILDON

☎ 03 / pop 700

The small, one-pub town of Eildon was built in the 1950s to house Eildon Dam project workers. It's a popular recreation and holiday base for Lake Eildon, one of Victoria's favourite water-sports playgrounds, with a shoreline of over 500km. The surrounding **Lake Eildon National Park** protects 27,750 hectares of bushland adjoining the lake.

On Main St there's the small **Eildon visitor information centre** (☎ 5774 2909; www.lakeeildon.com).

Activities

Kids love the touch-and-feel tanks at the **Fresh-water Discovery Centre** (☎ 5774 2950; Goulburn Valley

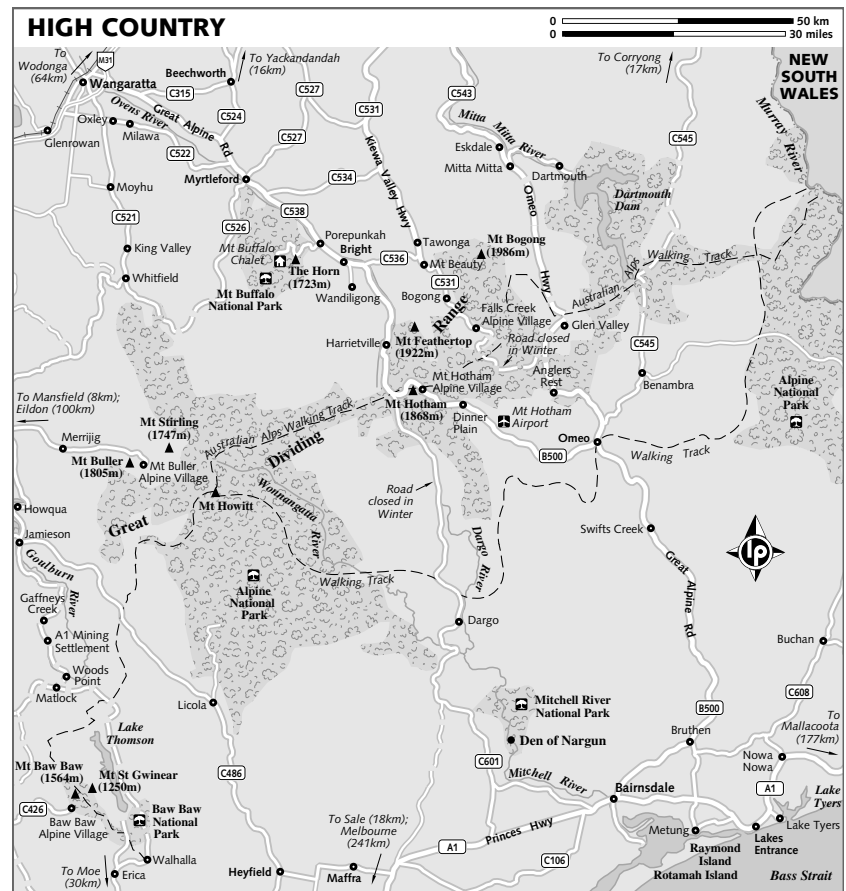
Hwy; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 11am-4pm Fri-Mon, 11am-4pm daily during school holidays).

Horse trails are run by **Rubicon Valley Horse-riding** (☎ 5773 2292; www.rubiconhorsriding.com.au; Rubicon Rd, Thornton; 2hr/half-full day \$55/75/135).

If you want to practise your angling, try the **Goulburn Valley Fly Fishing Centre** (☎ 5773 2513; www.goulburnvalleyflyfishing.com.au). **Eildon Lake Charters** (☎ 5774 2871; 55 Joe Taylor Rise) rents boats, and runs water-skiing and sightseeing trips.

Sleeping & Eating

Robyn's Nest (☎ 5774 2525; www.robyns-nest.com.au; 13 High St; cottage for up to 4 incl breakfast \$160) This plush 'adults only' B&B swears it has the most comfortable beds in Eildon. If you decide to get



BUSHFIRE

Beginning in early December 2006 fires ravaged Victoria's northeast region for more than 50 consecutive days. In the High Country and Gippsland, fires burnt out more than 1,100,000 hectares of bushland – about the size of Jamaica or Lebanon. In the weeks before Christmas the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) called up thousands of volunteers, and enlisted the services of fire-fighters from New Zealand, Canada and the USA. Thirty-three houses were lost, along with 153 sheds and outhouses, 1700km of fencing and 2000 head of livestock. There was one death. The Cresta Valley ski lodge at Mt Buffalo was destroyed, as was a bridge on the popular Walhalla Goldfields Railway. Authorities closed roads, fearing the ski villages at Falls Creek, Mt Buller and Mt Hotham would burn. In Melbourne the air was shrouded in smoke haze as ash and soot fell from the sky, airports were closed and people with respiratory conditions were warned to stay indoors.

up, the private balconies have superb views of the Eildon Valley and Mt Trobrek.

Golden Trout Hotel (☎ 5774 2508; 1 Riverside Dr; s/d from \$60/70) Try to secure a room with a Goulburn River view here. The pub has a decent bistro (meals \$8 to \$30) with a nice sun deck.

Lake Eildon Marina & Houseboat Hire (☎ 5774 2107; www.houseboatholidays.com.au; 190 Sugarloaf Rd) and **High Country Houseboats** (☎ 5777 3899; www.ahc.com.au) both rent out 10- to 12-berth houseboats from around \$2100 to \$4500 per week during high season.

Toss in a line from the grounds of **Eildon Caravan Park** (☎ 1800 651 691, 5774 2105; www.eildonpc.com; sites \$22, cabins from \$75) and cook up dinner on the BBQ.

Parks Victoria manages **Fraser Camping Area** (☎ 0437-351 909; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; sites \$16), a terrific camping ground in the national park with good facilities including BBQs and picnic shelters. A small store has basic provisions and issues camping permits.

Coco's Restaurant & Bar (☎ 5774 2866; lunch mains \$9-13, dinner mains \$17-23; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) overlooks the boat harbour, while **Taste of Eildon** (☎ 5774 2642; 7 High St; mains \$8-16; ☎ 9am-5pm Thu-Mon, dinner summer) is a café, gallery, and gourmet food and wine shop in the old general store.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) runs daily services from Melbourne to Eildon (one way \$22, 3¼ hours), Marysville and Alexandra (three hours).

MANSFIELD

☎ 03 / pop 2800

Mansfield is an all-seasons destination where you can go skiing at Mt Buller and late-spring

horse riding through the mountains. It makes a great base for a weekend or a longer stay.

The graves of the three Mansfield police officers killed by Ned Kelly and his gang in 1878 at Stringybark Creek rest in **Mansfield cemetery**, at the end of Highett St.

The visitor information centre, **Mansfield-Mt Buller High Country Reservations** (☎ 1800 039 049, 5775 2518; www.mansfield-mtbuller.com.au; Old Railway Station, Maroondah Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm, 8am-9pm ski season), books accommodation.

Activities

Enjoy spectacular sunrise views of Mt Buller from a hot-air balloon with **Global Ballooning** (☎ 9428 5703; www.globalballooning.com.au; flights incl champagne breakfast adult/child \$295/195).

Seven kilometres south of town, **High Country Camel Treks** (☎ 5775 1591; Rifle Butts Rd; adult/child per hr \$24/15) offers hourly and overnight treks.

High Country Horses (☎ 5777 5590; www.highcountryhorses.com.au; 10 McCormacks Rd, Merrijig; 2hr rides \$55, half-day \$80, full-day \$150-200, overnight \$415-440) offers rides around Merrijig and overnight trips across Mt Stirling, camping in a cattleman's hut at Razorback.

High Country Scenic Tours (☎ 5777 5101; www.highcountryscenic.com.au; ☎ Nov-May) operates a range of specialised off-road vehicles taking groups on exciting day and overnight tours of Victoria's high country, priced from \$135 to \$200 per person.

Mansfield Mountain Bike Tours (☎ 1800 815 810, 5775 2380; 2hr rides \$40, half-day \$85; ☎ Oct-Apr) runs adventure bike tours.

Make like *The Man from Snowy River* and take a trail ride on the Great Dividing Range, 22km from Mansfield, with **Watson's Mountain Country Trail Rides** (☎ 5777 3552; www.watsonstrailrides.com.au; 3 Chains Rd, Boorolite; 1/2hr \$30/55). One of the

highlights is the downhill area that is featured in the 1982 film.

Sleeping

Wappan Station (☎ 5778 7786; www.wappanstation.com.au; Royal Town Rd, Mairdample; cottage d from \$90, shearer's quarters adult/child \$30/15; ☎) Experience life on a 40.5-sq-km sheep and cattle farm at Wappan Station, on the banks of Lake Eildon. It has newly renovated self-contained cottages and more basic twin-share rooms.

Mansfield Backpackers' Inn & Travellers Lodge (☎ 5775 1800; www.mansfieldtravelodge.com; 112 High St; d \$95-98, f \$155; ☎) This restored heritage building has modern motel rooms (prices drop midweek).

Tavistock House (☎ 5775 1024; www.tavistockhouse.com.au; cnr High & Highett Sts; d midweek/weekend \$120/135) In the centre of town, this lovely conversion of the historic former Westpac building has three spacious rooms decked out in Victorian-era style (no TV, phone or radio here).

Highton Manor (☎ 5775 2700; www.hightonmanor.com.au; 140 Highton Lane; stable/manor d incl breakfast \$120/235; ☎) Built in 1896, this stately two-storey manor has motel-style rooms in the former stables and lavish period rooms in the main house. The impressive gardens are great for a stroll.

Eating

Mansfield Regional Produce Store (☎ 5889 1404; 68 High St; mains \$7-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri) This rustic store, with its array of delicious homemade produce and artisan breads, is a great place to shop if you're self-catering. Take a seat by the fire or get to know the locals over a coffee and baguette at the communal tables.

Sweet Potato (☎ 5775 1955; 50 High St; mains \$10-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) There's a relaxed vibe at this cosy licensed café, which serves Mod Oz cuisine with some spicier Asian-fusion dishes.

Mansfield Hotel (☎ 5775 2101; 86 High St; mains \$15-26; ☎ lunch & dinner) The local pub has had a modern refit and serves great food, including wood-fired pizzas.

Magnolia Gourmet Country House (☎ 5779 1444; 190 Mt Buller Rd; mains \$24-26; ☎ dinner Thu-Sat) The locals' pick for fine dining in Mansfield – try the robust high-country beef with mash and mushrooms or the kangaroo fillet with cranberry jus. Magnolia House is also a B&B, which

might be useful after a three-course meal and a tippale from the regional wine list.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) buses run twice daily (once Sunday) from Melbourne (one way \$35). **Mansfield-Mt Buller Bus Lines** (☎ 5775 2606; www.mmb.com.au) runs twice-daily buses for skiers from Mansfield to Mt Buller (\$40 return).

MT BULLER

☎ 03 / elev 1805m

Three hours' drive from Melbourne, Mt Buller is Victoria's largest ski resort. There's an extensive lift network, including a chairlift that takes you from the day car park directly to the slopes. **Cross-country trails** link Mt Buller and Mt Stirling.

The downhill skiing area is 180 hectares (snow making covers 44 hectares), and runs are divided into 25% beginner, 45% intermediate and 30% advanced, with a vertical drop of 400m. There are several cool terrain parks for snowboarders. The quad chairlift operates daily in summer from 26 December until 26 January, and then weekends until Easter for mountain-bikers and walkers.

Information

Mt Buller Resort Management Board (☎ 5777 6077; www.mtbuller.com.au; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri in ski season, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun in summer) Shares premises with the village post office on Summit Rd. In winter the information office is at the Clock Tower. There's internet access in the Abom complex. Gate admission fees during the ski season are \$33 per car for the day car park, more for longer stays. Lift tickets for a full day cost adult/child \$92/50. Combined lift-and-lesson packages start at \$130. Discounts apply for university students. Sightseeing tickets cost \$18/10.

Sleeping

There are over 7000 beds on the mountain. **Mt Buller Central Reservations** (☎ 1800 039 049) books lodge accommodation that starts at around \$75 per person.

Mt Buller YHA Lodge (☎ /fax 5777 6181; The Ave; dm midweek/weekend \$65/70) Open only during winter, this is one of the least expensive places on the mountain. Although the dorms are small, there's quality bedding, good facilities and friendly staff.

Duck Inn (☎ 5777 6236; www.duckinnmtbuller.com; 18 Goal Post Rd; dm/tw/d incl breakfast from \$70/95/100) An intimate guesthouse with a range of accommodation

from dorm rooms to doubles. There's a good restaurant here and a ski-hire shop.

Andre's at Buller (☎ 5777 6966; www.andresatbuller.com; Cobbler Lane; d incl breakfast summer/ski season from \$180/280) The luxurious architecturally designed Andre's is open year-round and boasts an excellent ski-in, ski-out position during winter and glorious summer sunsets.

Mercure Grand Chalet Hotel (☎ 5777 6566; www.mtbullerchalet.com.au; Summit Rd; d summer from \$250, ski season \$685; 🏠) This plush resort offers self-contained suites, library, billiard table, several well-regarded eateries and an impressive sports centre.

Eating

Breathmaker Signature Restaurant (☎ 5777 6377; Breathmaker All Suite Hotel, 8 Breathmaker Rd; mains \$17-33; 🍷 dinner daily winter, Wed-Sun summer) The food at this year-round fine-dining restaurant (the only one in the region) lives up to the magnificent views, with its delicious fusion of Asian, European and Mod Oz cuisine.

Pension Grimus (☎ 5777 6396; Breathmaker Rd; mains \$25-30; 🍷 dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun winter) Traditional Austrian fare includes Wiener schnitzel and Salzburger *nockerl* (hazelnut and choc-chip soufflé). Pension Grimus also has very comfortable boutique apartments.

There's a licensed supermarket in the Moloney's building in the village centre (closed in summer), and various fast-food eateries on the slopes and in the village, including **Cattleman's Café** (☎ 5777 7800; Bourke St).

Getting There & Around

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) has buses twice daily from Melbourne to Mansfield (\$34). **Mansfield-Mt Buller Buses** (☎ 5775 2606, winter 5775 6070; www.mmbul.com.au) runs a winter Melbourne-Mt Buller service (adult/child return \$140/105) and year-round daily buses from Mansfield to Mt Buller (adult/child return \$40/27).

Ski-season car parking is below the village; a 4WD taxi service transports people to their village accommodation (adult/child one way \$12/8).

Day-trippers park in the Horse Hill day car park and can take the quad chairlift into the skiing area, or the free day-tripper shuttle-bus service between the day car park and the village. Ski hire and lift tickets are available at the base of the chairlift.

For the ultimate rock-star arrival, chopper into Mt Buller from Melbourne with **Helicop-**

ters Victoria (☎ 9416 9999; www.helivic.com.au; 4-person/6-person share \$2200/3000).

MILAWA/OXLEY GOURMET REGION

Milawa, a one-pub town, has had a renaissance as a regional gourmet centre, boasting notable wineries, fine restaurants and several local food producers.

Brown Brothers Vineyard (☎ 03-5720 5547; www.brownbrothers.com.au; Bobinawarra Rd, Milawa; 🍷 9am-5pm) produced its first vintage in 1889 and is still run by the same family. The swanky complex features a tasting room, an excellent restaurant, and picnic and BBQ facilities.

Milawa Mustard (☎ 03-5727 3202; Old Emu Inn, The Cross Roads, Milawa; 🍷 10am-5pm) offers tastings of 18 seeded mustards. The **Olive Shop** (☎ 03-5727 3887; oliveshop@ozemail.com.au; Snow Rd, Milawa; 🍷 10am-5pm Thu-Mon) has locally produced olive oil for sale as well as delicious tapenades.

Oxley wineries include **John Gehrig Wines** (☎ 03-5727 3395; 🍷 cellar door 9am-5pm). If you blink you'll miss **King River Café** (☎ 5727 3461; Snow Rd, Oxley; mains \$15-22; 🍷 lunch Mon, lunch & dinner Wed-Sun), this old general store that is the place to stop for coffee or a meal en route to the snow.

The **Milawa Cheese Company** (☎ 03-5727 3588; milawacheese@netc.net.au; Factory Rd, Milawa; 🍷 9am-5pm), 2km north of Milawa, offers tastings and a café. It excels at soft and washed-rind cheeses. The restaurant (☎ 03-5727 3589; mains \$20 to \$25; open for lunch daily, dinner Friday and Saturday) here is fabulous – a must-stop on the 'Gourmet Road'.

Lindenwarrah Country House (☎ 03-5720 5777; www.lindenwarrah.com.au; Bobinawarra Rd, Milawa; d incl breakfast \$280-360; 🏠) Surrounded by vineyards, this Moroccan-inspired boutique hotel has simple but impeccably stylish rooms. The **Restaurant Merlot** (mains \$26-32; 🍷 breakfast daily, lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) here is also recommended.

BEECHWORTH

☎ 03 / pop 2800

Beechworth is a living legacy of the 1860s gold-rush era. Many of the distinctive honey-coloured public buildings remain, including the courthouse and jail where Ned Kelly was charged and remanded for the murder of three Mansfield policemen.

Information

Beechworth visitor information centre (☎ 1300 366 321, 5728 8065; www.beechworth.com; 103 Ford St)

In the Old Shire Hall, books accommodation and activities, and has information on scenic walks and wineries in the area.

Green Gekko Café (☎ 5728 2470; 78 McFarlane St; 🏠) Internet access at \$10 for a half-hour.

Sights & Activities

Beechworth's **historic and cultural precinct** (☎ 1300 366 321; www.beechworthprecinct.com.au; precinct ticket adult/child/family \$13/6/25) consists of many interesting old buildings, including the excellent **Burke Museum** (☎ 5728 8067; Loch St; adult/child/family \$5/3/10; 🍷 9am-5pm). Named after Robert O'Hara Bourke, the explorer of Burke and Wills fame who was the police superintendent at Beechworth from 1854 to 1858, it shows gold-rush relics and an arcade of shopfronts preserved as they were over 140 years ago.

The **Beechworth Courthouse** (Ford St; adult/child/family \$5/3/10; 🍷 9am-5pm) is notable for Ned Kelly's first court appearance. See the cell where Ned was held in the basement behind the **Shire Hall**.

The new **Chinese Cultural Centre** (☎ 5728 2866; adult/child/family \$3/1/8; 🍷 10am-4pm Wed-Mon) displays the history of the 6000 Chinese who came to the area in the 1850s to seek their fortune.

The **Powder Magazine** (Gorge St; adult/child/family \$3/2/6) was an 1859 storage area for gunpowder. View the *Echoes of History* video at the **1858 Town Hall** (Ford St) roughly half-hourly.

The visitor centre runs two hour-long interpretive walking tours (adult/child/family \$8/5/15) covering Ned Kelly and the gold rush.

Sleeping

There's a host of B&Bs and self-contained cottages in the area. The visitor centre will book for you.

Old Priory (☎ 5728 1024; www.oldpriory.com.au; 8 Priory Lane; dm/s/d \$40/50/80, cottages \$105, incl breakfast) This historic convent is the cheapest digs in Beechworth and has lovely gardens and a range of rooms. It's often overrun by school groups.

La Trobe at Beechworth (☎ 5720 8050; www.latrobe.edu.au/beechworthhotel; Albert Rd; s \$70, d from \$95) The former 1867 Beechworth Lunatic Asylum is now part of La Trobe University and accommodates up to 200 people.

Kinross (☎ 5728 2351; www.innhouse.com.au/kinross; 34 Loch St; d incl breakfast \$155-180; 🏠) A former

Presbyterian minister's house, this elegant B&B retains many of its original 1850s features, with a few modernities like TV and internet.

Bank Mews (☎ 5728 2223; www.thebankrestaurant.com; 86 Ford St; d incl breakfast from \$175) The original stables and coach house of this historic building have been renovated to house four swish suites overlooking an attractive courtyard and garden.

Lake Sambell Caravan Park (☎ 5728 1421; www.caravanparkbeechworth.com.au; Peach Dr; unpowered/powered sites \$20/23, cabins from \$60) This shady park next to beautiful Lake Sambell has great facilities. The sunsets reflected in the lake are spectacular.

Eating & Drinking

Beechworth Bakery (☎ 5728 1132; 27 Camp St) Popular with locals and tourists, this famous bakery is great for pies and pastries.

Beechworth Provender (☎ 5728 2650; 18 Camp St) Gourmet deli specialising in local produce like Milawa cheeses, wines, chutneys and antipasto.

Green Shed Bistro (☎ 5728 2360; 37 Camp St; mains \$18-25; 🍷 lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Wed-Thu) This former printery is now a cosy place to warm your hands by the fire and check out the busy open kitchen.

Gigi's (☎ 5728 2575; 69 Ford St; mains \$19-26; 🍷 Thu-Tue) This rather haughty café and produce store serves Mod Oz and Italian food. Are we worthy?

Bank (☎ 5728 2223; 86 Ford St; mains \$20-28; 🍷 dinner daily, lunch Sun) Sophisticated dining amid the antique interior of this former bank building makes for a memorable culinary experience. The Mod Oz menu features duck, ostrich and buffalo, and regional wines by the glass.

Bridge Road Brewers (☎ 5728 2103; www.bridgeroadbrewers.com.au; Ford St; 🍷 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, Sun noon-11pm) Part of a huge emerging trend of Victorian 'microbreweries', Beechworth's own produces some excellent beers, offering tastings and cellar-door sales.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) has daily train/bus services from Melbourne via Wangaratta (\$44, 2¼ hours). **Wangaratta Coachlines** (☎ 5722 1843) runs to major centres nearby. Tickets for V/Line, CountryLink and Greyhound Australia buses can be booked at **Beechworth Animal World** (☎ 5728 1374; 36 Camp St).

GREAT ALPINE ROAD

The Great Alpine Rd is one of the great car-touring routes of Victoria. Though not as famous as the Great Ocean Rd, it is no less spectacular, travelling 308km from Wangaratta in the state's northeast to Bairnsdale in Gippsland, and can be traversed in either direction. From Wangaratta, the route can take in scenic detours through the Oxley/Milawa Gourmet Food Region, historic Beechworth and wineries in the Gapsted area. The road travels southeasterly through picturesque Bright at the base of Mt Buffalo, to Harrietville on the edge of the Alpine National Park. The climb up to Mt Hotham, around hairpin turns and over razorback ridges, with mountain tops tumbling away in every direction, is awe-inspiring. The road descends into pretty Omeo, past historic goldfields, then follows the Tambo River to Bruthen and Bairnsdale.

One of the great highlights of travelling in regional Victoria, the route is also popular with cyclists who can connect with the 94km Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail (www.railtrail.com.au) in Wangaratta or Bright.

YACKANDANDAH

☎ 02 / pop 650

An old gold-mining town set amid beautiful hills and valleys east of Beechworth, Yackandandah has been classified by the National Trust. The **Yackandandah visitor information centre** (☎ 6027 1988; www.uniqueyackandandah.com.au; High St) issues the free *A Walk in High Street* and *Yackandandah Touring Guide*.

Visit the **Lavender Patch** (☎ 6027 1603; Beechworth Rd; ☞ 9am-5.30pm) for some lavender ice cream, and the studio-gallery **Kirby's Flat Pottery** (☎ 6027 1416; ☞ 10.15am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), 4km south of Yackandandah.

The unsealed 14km **Yackandandah Scenic Forest Drive** begins at Bells Flat Rd and travels over former gold-mining territory through the Stanley State Forest.

The 1863 **Star Hotel** (☎ 6027 1493; 30 High St; d \$50) is an old country pub with decent rooms and food (mains \$9 to \$19). **Karalilla** (☎ 6027 1788; Ben Valley Lane; d \$150), 5km from town, offers country-homestead hospitality.

MYRTLEFORD

☎ 03 / pop 2700

Near the foot of Mt Buffalo, Myrtleford is yet another 'gateway to the alps'. The helpful **Alpine Visitor Centre** (☎ 1800 991 044; www.alpinevic.com.au; Great Alpine Rd) has information and a booking service for the area.

Sleeping & Eating

Myrtle Creek Farmstay Cottages (☎ 5753 4447; www.myrtlecreekcottages.com; d incl breakfast \$150, extra child \$25) Feed the horses and fluffy alpacas at this hands-on farmstay. Bed down in self-contained log cabins, each with a spa and well-equipped kitchen.

Alpine Enoteca Restaurant (☎ 1800 991 044; Great Alpine Rd; mains \$9-16; ☞ lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sun) Locals love this casual bistro in the Alpine Visitor Centre. Enjoy its airy ambience and chilled music as you hoe into a big bowl of risotto or pasta.

MT BUFFALO

☎ 03 / elev 1500m

Beautiful Mt Buffalo, Victoria's smallest ski resort, is four hours' drive from Melbourne and managed by Parks Victoria. The **resort** (www.mtbuffaloresort.com.au) seems beset with bad luck: the Cresta Valley ski lodge was destroyed by fire in December 2006 (see the boxed text, p578), and after trading at a loss for many years, the magnificent 1910 Mt Buffalo Chalet (once owned by the Victorian railways) has now closed indefinitely. A private operator still manages the ski lifts. There are a few downhill runs and some cross-country trails that are popular with beginners.

There are two skiing areas, Cresta Valley and Dingo Dell. Cresta is the main area, and has five lifts. The downhill skiing area is 27 hectares, and the eight runs are predominantly beginner and intermediate, with a vertical drop of 157m. Cresta Valley is the starting point for many of the **cross-country trails**. Dingo Dell is ideal for beginners and has a day-visitor shelter with a kiosk and ski school. It's usually open only on weekends.

The admission fee to Mt Buffalo National Park is \$10 per car (\$13 in winter, but only if ski lifts are operating), payable at the Mt Buffalo Entrance Station. Lift tickets cost adult/child \$49/29, and there are lift-and-lesson packages (adult/child \$55/40).

Track information and camping permits can be organised at the **Entrance Station** (☎ 5756 2328) or **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5755 1466) in Porepunkah.

Activities

Adventure Guides Australia (☎ 5728 1804; www.adventureguidesaustralia.com.au) offers abseiling, caving and rock climbing alpine-style. It also has half-day ski touring for \$88 per person and snow camping for \$330 (two days and a night in the wild).

Eagle School of Microlighting (☎ 5750 1174; www.eagleschool.com.au) has powered hang gliding from \$130 per hour, and tandem flights for \$300.

Sleeping

Remote camping is possible at Rocky Creek, which has pit toilets only. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5756 2328; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) issues permits at the Mt Buffalo Entrance Station. **Lake Catani** (sites \$21) has a summer camping ground, with toilets and showers.

Getting There & Around

There is no public transport to the plateau, though from Melbourne a daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) train to Wangaratta and bus to Bright (\$50) can drop you at Porepunkah, near the base of the mountain.

BRIGHT

☎ 03 / pop 2200

Spectacular in autumn, this picturesque leafy town in the foothills of the alps has been a popular year-round holiday spot since the 1870s. Bright is perfectly positioned to enjoy the Alpine National Park, skiing at Falls Creek and Mt Hotham, and a wide range of outdoor adventure activities. Great local produce and sophisticated restaurants make it a great base.

Information

Bright Internet Café (☎ 5750 1244; 4 Ireland St;

☞ 10am-9pm; ☞) Internet at \$5 per half-hour.

Bright visitor information centre (☎ 1300 551 117; www.brightescapes.com.au; 119 Gavan St; ☞) Has a very busy accommodation booking service as well as Parks Victoria information. Internet access costs \$6 per hour.

Activities

There are **walking trails** around Bright, including the 3km loop **Canyon Walk**, which starts from Star Rd Bridge and follows the Ovens

River. The 4km **Cherry Walk** heads from Centenary Park in the other direction along the Ovens, and a 6km track to **Wandiligong** follows Moses Creek.

The **Murray to Mountains Rail Trail** (www.railtrail.com.au) travels 30km from the old train station to Myrtleford via Porepunkah. Bike rental and tours are available from **Cyclepath Adventures** (☎ 5750 1442; 74 Gavan St; hire per hr/half/full day from \$14/20/28).

Alpine Paragliding (☎ 5755 1753; www.alpineparagliding.com; 100 Gavan St; ☞ Oct-Jun) offers tandem flights from \$130. **Eagle Microlights** (☎ 5750 1174; www.eagleschool.com.au) has tandem microlight flights from \$70. **Bright Helicopters** (☎ 0428-427 206) does joy rides starting from \$60 per person (minimum two) and **5 Star Adventure Tours** (☎ 5759 2555; www.5staradventure.com.au) has a five-hour kayak river trip including gourmet lunch for \$105 per person.

Sleeping

Bright has an abundance of accommodation but book ahead.

Bright Hikers Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 5750 1244; www.brighthikers.com.au; 4 Ireland St; dm/s/d/f/\$25/38/52/97; ☞) This efficient, clean, well-set-up hostel in the middle of town has a cosy lounge for winter nights, and a huge veranda for summer days.

Elm Lodge Motel (☎ 5755 1144; www.elmlodge.com.au; 2 Wood St; s/d from \$65/90; ☞) This restored 1950s pine mill has rooms for all budgets, located only a few minutes' walk from the town centre. There are landscaped gardens and friendly owners.

Ashwood House Cottages (☎ 5755 1081; www.ashwoodcottages.com.au; 22a Ashwood Ave; d from \$145; ☞) Three unique, corrugated-iron cottages set in bushland down by the Ovens River. All have creature comforts such as entertainment system, double spa and log fires.

our pick Odd Frog (☎ 5755 2123; www.theoddfrog.com; 3 McFadyens Lane; d \$150-250) Designed and built by the young architect-interior designer owners, these contemporary, eco-friendly studios feature light, breezy spaces and fabulous outdoor decks. The design is fabulous and the fit-out shows a deft artistic touch. The clever use of the hillside site features sculptural steel-frame foundations and flying balconies.

Villa Gusto (☎ 5756 2000; www.villagusto.com.au; 630 Buckland Valley Rd, Buckland; d incl breakfast \$245-325) An exquisite Tuscan-inspired villa, this classy place is run by Italy enthusiasts who stop at

nothing to ensure you are well cared for. It includes a superb restaurant (dinner Thursday to Sunday).

Bright Backpackers Outdoor Inn (☎ 5755 1154; www.brightbackpackers.com.au; 106 Coronation Dr; unpowered/poweredsites from \$20/25, cabins from \$70; 📶) This leafy park has good facilities.

Bright Caravan Park (☎ 5755 1141; www.brightcaravanpark.com.au; Cherry Ave; unpowered/poweredsites from \$21/25, cabins from \$68; 📶) Straddling pretty Morses Creek, five minutes' walk to shops.

Eating & Drinking

Cosy Kangaroo (☎ 5750 1838; 95 Gavan St; \$16-22) A great place to take the kids for burgers, pancakes and lime-spiders, and good grub for the grown-ups.

Our pick: Simone's Restaurant (☎ 5755 2266; 98 Gavan St; mains \$26-30; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sun) For 20 years owner/chef Patrizia Simone has been serving outstanding Italian food, with a focus on local ingredients and seasonal produce, in the rustic dining room of this heritage-listed house. This is one of regional Victoria's great restaurants and well worth the splurge. Bookings essential.

Sasha's of Bright (☎ 5750 1711; 2d Anderson St; mains \$18-30; 🍷 dinner) Seriously good, hearty old-style European cooking, with a reasonably priced, regional wine list. Try the goulash.

Bright Brewery (☎ 5755 1301; www.brightbrewery.com.au; 121 Great Alpine Rd) Since June 2006 this boutique brewery has been open next to the visitor information centre. The amber ale is superb and very hard to get outside Bright – grab a slab!

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) runs daily trains from Melbourne to Wangaratta; a connecting bus continues to Bright (\$50, four hours). During the ski season a regular bus operates from Bright to Mt Hotham (one way/return \$30/40, 1½ hours).

MT BEAUTY

☎ 03 / pop 2300

Mt Beauty, and its twin town of Tawonga South, is the gateway to the Falls Creek ski resort and the Bogong High Plains.

The **Alpine Discovery Centre** (☎ 1800 808 277; www.visitmtbeauty.com.au; 31 Bogong High Plains Rd; 🍷 9am-5pm) has an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1800 033 079; accommodation@mtbeauty.com.au). The information centre also houses displays

that highlight the region's history. **Rocky Valley Bikes** (☎ 5754 1118; Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga South; 🍷 9am-6pm; 📶) has internet access for \$4 for half an hour.

Activities

The 2km **Tree Fern Walk** and the longer **Peppermint Walk** both start from Mountain Creek Picnic and Camping Ground, on Mountain Creek Rd, off the Kiewa Valley Hwy. For information on longer walks in the area, visit the Alpine Discovery Centre.

Rocky Valley Bikes (☎ 5754 1118; www.rockyvalley.com.au; Kiewa Valley Hwy) offers mountain-biking for all levels, with bike hire from \$30 per day.

Bogong Horseback Adventures (☎ 5754 4849; www.bogonghorse.com.au; Mountain Creek Rd; half-/full-/4-day trips \$80/160/1200) runs excellent trips over the Bogong High Plains.

The Kiewa Valley is world-renowned for **trout fishing** from spring to autumn. For fly-fishing trips, try **Peter Panozzo Guided Fishing Tours & Lessons** (☎ 5754 4522; 18 Nelse St; per hr \$45) or **Angling Expeditions** (☎ 5754 1446; www.anglingvic.com.au).

Sleeping

Baensch's Lodge (☎ 5754 4041; www.baenschslodge.com.au; 16 St Bernard Dr, Tawonga South; dm/d from \$30/50) At this price you mightn't expect much, but this simple lodge is a terrific place for self-caterers, with a kitchen, lounge and laundry.

Snowgum Motel (☎ 5754 4508; www.snowgummotel.com.au; 245-247 Kiewa Valley Hwy; summer s/d/f \$79/85/130, ski season \$100/110/170; 📶) Snowgum is a pretty standard roadside motel, but it's well kept with good facilities, including a pool, and booze and croquet sets.

Braeview (☎ 5754 4756; www.braeview.com.au; 4 Stewarts Rd; d incl breakfast from \$120) Choose between traditional B&B rooms (with a country breakfast on the garden balcony) and self-contained cottages or apartments with spa.

Svärmisk (☎ 5754 4544; www.svarmisk.com.au; Falls Creek Rd; d from \$270) Mt Beauty's newest development is this architecturally designed clutch of beautiful apartments with everything that opens and shuts. There are mountain-bike trails at the back of the property and Falls Creek resort is just 30km up the mountain road.

Tawonga Caravan Park (☎ 5754 4428; www.mtbeauty.com/tawongacaravanpark; Mountain Creek Rd, Tawonga South; unpowered/poweredsites \$20/22, cabins from \$65) Turn off

the Kiewa Valley Hwy at the Bogong Hotel in Tawonga to find this caravan park by the Kiewa River.

Eating & Drinking

Mt Beauty Bakery & Café (☎ 5754 4870; cnr Hollands & Kiewa Sts) This swish bakery-bar-café with a sunny outdoor area offers a big range of cakes, focaccias and antipasto.

Recline Restaurant (☎ 5754 1878; Holland St; mains \$18-26; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sun) At last, a serious restaurant in the Mt Beauty township. Start with *teppanyaki* eye fillet pieces before a roasted lamb shank in red wine with mash.

Roi's Diner Restaurant (☎ 5754 4495; 177 Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga South; mains \$18-25; 🍷 dinner Thu-Sun) An unassuming timber shack on the highway, Roi's is an award-winning restaurant offering exceptional modern Italian cuisine.

Bogong Hotel (☎ 5754 4482; 169 Kiewa Valley Hwy; 🍷 lunch Sun, dinner Thu-Mon) The obvious spot for a beer, it also has a relaxed bistro with lovely views of the snow-capped mountains.

Getting There & Away

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) operates a train/bus service from Melbourne via Wangaratta (\$50, twice weekly). **Pyle's Coaches** (☎ 5754 4024; www.pyles.com.au) operates daily buses to Albury (one way/return \$25/40) and to Falls Creek daily in winter (\$25/42).

FALLS CREEK

☎ 03 / elev 1780m

Falls Creek is the most fashion-conscious and upmarket ski resort in Australia, combining a picturesque alpine setting among the snow gums with impressive skiing and infamous après-ski entertainment. Hordes of city folk make the 4½-hour journey from Melbourne at weekends during the ski season.

The skiing is spread over two main areas, the Village Bowl and Sun Valley. There are 19 lifts: 17% beginner, 60% intermediate and 23% advanced runs. The downhill area covers 451 hectares with a vertical drop of 267m. Night skiing in the Village Bowl operates several times a week.

You'll also find some of Australia's best **cross-country skiing** here. A trail leads around Rocky Valley Pondage to old cattlemen's huts, and the more adventurous can tour to the white summits of Nelse, Cope and Spion Kopje. These also provide walking routes in summer. The summit chairlift operates from

27 December to mid-January for walkers and mountain-bike riders.

Information

Falls Creek visitor information centre (☎ 5758 3224; www.falls creek.com.au) On the right-hand side at the bottom of the Falls Express chairlift, with plenty of information on the whole alpine region. The daily admission fee is \$28 per car during the ski season only. There are full-day lift tickets (adult/child/student \$90/45/77), and combined lift-and-lesson packages (\$136/128/165). One-day cross-country trail fees are adult/child/family \$12/6/30.

Frying Pan Inn (☎ 5758 3285; Falls Creek Rd; 📶) 'Friars', in the Bowl, has broadband internet for \$2 for 15 minutes.

Sleeping

Accommodation can be booked through **Falls Creek Central Reservations** (☎ 1800 033 079, 5758 3733; www.falls creek.com.au; Bogong High Plains Rd), **Mountain Multiservice** (☎ 1800 465 566, 5758 3499; www.mountainmultiservice.com.au; Schuss St) and **Go Snow Go Falls Creek** (☎ 1800 253 545, 9873 5474; www.albury.net.au/~gosnow).

Alpha Lodge (☎ 5758 3488; www.alphaskilodge.com.au; 5 Parallel St; summer dm/s/d \$27/51/72, ski season dm/d from \$96/234) This spacious lodge, open year-round, has a sauna and a large lounge with panoramic views. The communal kitchen, which has eight cooking stations, is well set up for self-caterers.

Cedarwood (☎ 5758 3393; www.cedarwoodfalls creek.com.au; 5 Schuss St; 2-night minimum d summer from \$220, ski season \$470) Cedarwood, open all year, has 27 apartments ranging from small studios with bathroom and kitchenette to palatial self-contained suites with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, full kitchen and laundry.

Viking Alpine Lodge (☎ 5758 3247; www.viking lodge.com.au; 13 Parallel St; d summer \$72, ski season dm/d \$110/330) Viking offers good-value accommodation all year with excellent communal facilities including lounge, kitchen and great views. Ski in, ski out.

Fruauf Village (☎ 1300 300 709; www.fvfalls.com.au; d per 2 nights summer from \$300, ski season from \$1040; 📶) The 25 luxurious, architect-designed apartments have everything an alpine chalet needs and more (free internet access, private outdoor hot tubs) plus the funky Milch café (below) and Glo cinema downstairs.

Eating

Milch Café Wine Bar (☎ 5758 3770; 4 Schuss St; mains \$12-18) The hip place to see and be seen, with

flavoursome Middle Eastern meze and a good wine list. In winter, this place is packed with skiers conducting post-mortems of their runs.

Mo's Restaurant at Feathertop (☎ 5758 3232; mains \$14-30; 14 Parallel St; ☎ dinner) This inviting restaurant features red-gum furniture, private alcoves and mood lighting.

Summit Ridge (☎ 5758 3800; 8 Schuss St; mains \$14-30; ☎ dinner) Another great dinner option, this rustic restaurant in the Summit Ridge apartments boasts an extensive wine list. High-country fine dining meets crisp Asian flavours. Bookings are essential.

Huski Produce Store (☎ 5758 3863; 3 Sitzmark St; mains \$16-28) The produce store in Falls Creek's newest and trendiest designer apartment building offers some of the best casual eating and fine dining on the mountain (naturally). Gourmet deli goods and takeaway are also available.

Winterhaven (☎ 5758 3888; 7 Slalom St; mains \$15-30; ☎ dinner) Mod Oz cuisine around a cosy open fire. Bookings essential.

Both **Snowland Shopping Centre** (☎ 5758 3318; 9 Slalom St), a licensed supermarket at the bottom of Halleys Comet chairlift, and **Wombat Café** (☎ 5758 3666) are open year-round.

Getting There & Around

Falls Creek is 375km and a 4½-hour drive from Melbourne. During the winter, **Pyle's Coaches** (☎ 5754 4024; www.pyles.com.au) operates daily buses between Falls Creek and Melbourne (one way/return \$78/125) and also runs services to and from Albury (\$44/70) and Mt Beauty (\$25/42).

The Over-Snow Taxi service (return \$30) operates between the car parks and the lodges from 8am to midnight (until 2am on Friday night). Car parking for day visitors is at the base of the village, next to the ski lifts.

If you want to ski Mt Hotham for the day, jump on the Helicopter Lift Link for \$105 return if you have a valid lift ticket.

HARRIETVILLE

☎ 03 / pop 150

Harrierville is a picturesque little town (www.harrierville.com) nestled below Mt Feather-top. During ski season a bus shuttles between the town and Mt Hotham, so it's a good spot for slightly cheaper off-mountain accommodation.

Ski and wheel-chain hire is available from **Hoy's** (☎ 5779 2658).

Harrierville is the starting and finishing point for various **alpine walking tracks**, including the popular Mt Feathertop walk, Razor-back Ridge and Dargo High Plains walks.

In late November the annual **Blue Grass Festival** (<http://bluegrass.org.au/Festivals/harrierville/index.cfm>) takes over the town. Early December heralds the **Lawnmowing Grand Prix**, a classy affair of lawnmower and snowmobile races.

Sleeping & Eating

Snowline Hotel (☎ 5759 2524; www.snowlinehotel.com.au; Great Alpine Rd; s/d from \$80/86) The Snowline has been operating for over 100 years, and offers inexpensive off-mountain accommodation for Mt Hotham skiers. It has a good bistro too (mains \$14 to \$22).

Pick & Shovel Cottage (☎ 5759 2627; www.pickandshovel.com.au; 1 Pick & Shovel Rise; d midweek/weekend incl breakfast \$110/135; ☎) This lovely cottage combines style with old-world charm and is professionally run by a helpful couple. Generous breakfast and complimentary champagne are a bonus.

Bella's (☎ 5759 2750; 231 Great Alpine Rd; ☎ breakfast & lunch) For great breakfasts and lunch, cakes and coffee or a glass of local wine until 5pm, this new café is the best in town.

Big Shed Café (☎ 5759 2672; Great Alpine Rd, Smoko; meals \$7-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon) A popular spot down the road towards Bright. This tobacco shed started out as a fruit-and-veg store before reinventing itself as a gourmet café.

Getting There & Away

No public transport operates to Harrierville. During the ski season a bus connects Harrierville with Mt Hotham (return \$25, twice daily). **Mountain View Holiday Retreat** (☎ 5759 2530) sells tickets and is the pick-up point. The road to Mt Hotham is sometimes closed because of snow in winter.

MT HOTHAM

☎ 03 / elev 1868m

Serious hikers and skiers head to Mt Hotham, the starting point for some stunning alpine walks between November and May, and home to 320 hectares of downhill runs, with a vertical drop of 428m. About 80% of the ski trails are intermediate or advanced. The Big D is open for **night skiing** every Wednesday and Saturday, and the village chairlift also runs between late December and early January and over Easter.

SKI RESORTS

Victoria's ski resorts offer some excellent downhill and cross-country skiing. The resorts have webcams showing conditions or you can contact the **Victorian Ski Report** (☎ 1902 240 523; www.vicsnowreport.com.au) for 24-hour road, snow and weather reports.

Mt Baw Baw (see p589) and **Mt Buffalo** (p582) are perfect for beginners. **Mt Buller** (p579) and **Falls Creek** (p585) are glamorous resorts where fashion-conscious snow-bunnies ski during the day and party hard at night. **Mt Hotham** (opposite) has a slightly more rustic and earthy feel, but still offers great downhill trails and lifts. Next door, pretty **Dinner Plain** (p588) is popular with cross-country skiers and as an accommodation base for Mt Hotham skiers.

The following snowfields offer cross-country skiing but accommodation is nearby off the mountain.

Mt Donna Buang The closest snowfield to Melbourne, 95km east via Warburton, for sightseeing and tobogganing.

Lake Mountain (☎ 03-5963 3288) Ski region, 120km northeast of Melbourne via Marysville, with 37km of beginner to advanced cross-country trails.

Mt Stirling (☎ 03-5777 0815) An excellent cross-country area a few kilometres northeast of Mt Buller, with over 60km of mostly advanced trails and a ski school.

Mt St Gwinear (☎ 03-5165 3204) Cross-country trails on this mountain, 171km from Melbourne via Moe, connect with Mt Baw Baw.

Mt Bogong Tough back-country skiing on Mt Bogong, Victoria's highest mountain. Accessed via Mt Beauty, 350km northeast of Melbourne; requires a long hike.

All the ski resorts are trying to attract summer visitors, when the wildflowers are in bloom and the walking and mountain-biking opportunities are many. During January a few ski lifts run for walkers and mountain-bikers.

Off-piste skiing in steep and narrow valleys is good. **Cross-country skiing** is also good, with 35km of trails winding through tree-lined glades.

You can obtain good walking notes from Parks Victoria in Omeo (p589) and Bright (p583). The most popular walk is to Mt Feathertop, but there are many others to choose from.

Information

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board (☎ 5759 3550; www.mthotham.com.au; ☎ 8am-5pm daily ski season, Mon-Fri other times) At the village administration centre. The ski-season admission fee is \$28 per car. Lift tickets per adult/child/student cost \$87/45/74. Lift-and-lesson packages are from \$130 for adults.

Sleeping

There are three booking agencies: **Mt Hotham Reservation Centre** (☎ 1800 354 555; www.hotham.com.au; Hotham Central) operates year-round; **Mt Hotham Accommodation Service** (☎ 1800 032 061, 5759 3636; www.mthothamaccommodation.com.au; Lawlers Apartments) operates during ski season only; and **Mt Hotham Central Reservations** (☎ 1800 657 547, 5759 3522; www.mthotham-centralres.com.au) can

book local and off-mountain accommodation throughout the year.

Tanderra Ski Lodge (☎ 1800 819 410; www.tanderra.hotham.com.au; Great Alpine Rd; 4-share low/high ski season \$160/215) Tanderra has excellent facilities and offers great value.

Asgard Alpine Club (☎ 1300 767 434; www.asgaard.com.au; Great Alpine Rd; dm per person low/high ski season \$65/95, 4-share with bathroom \$200/320) In a central location with terrific facilities this is another great-value option. BYO linen.

Gravbrot Ski Club (☎ 5759 3533; www.gravbrot.com; Great Alpine Rd; dm low/high ski season \$85/90, d low/high ski season \$300/400) The price at this homey place includes all meals and pre-dinner nibbles, making it startlingly good value for the ski fields. You need to bring your own linen.

Karnulurra Ski Club (☎ 5759 2517; karnbook@dragnet.com; low/high ski season per person \$162/57) A laid-back lodge, in a great location next to the Big D lift. It has a well-equipped kitchen for self-caterers.

Arlberg (☎ 5986 8200; www.ski.com.au/arlberg.hotham; Great Alpine Rd; s & d ste per 2 nights \$600-760; ☎) Smack bang in the centre of all the action, the multilevel Arlberg has a family bistro, heated indoor pool, sauna and spa. There are also organised activities for the kids.

Eating & Drinking

General (☎ 5759 3523; Great Alpine Rd; mains \$11-16; ☺ lunch & dinner; ♿) Usually the only place to stay open over summer. This general store-cum-pub does tasty pizzas and counter meals, and is a popular watering hole during ski season. Free wireless internet is a boon for laptop users.

Summit Bar (☎ 5759 3503; Snowbird Inn, Great Alpine Rd) Can get rather raucous, being the bar of choice for the young snowboarding pack, especially during its daily 'Jug Frenzy' sessions.

Some of the better eateries in the winter months (all closed in summer) are **Swindlers** (☎ 5759 4421; Hotham Central), which is also the place for an après-ski Glühwein; the Austrian-inspired **Zirky's** (☎ 5759 3542; Great Alpine Rd); and **Chiones** (☎ 5759 3626; Hotham Central), which features an impressive Mod Oz menu and a lovely deck.

Getting There & Around

Mt Hotham is 373km northeast of Melbourne and reached via the Hume Fwy (M31) and Harrierville (4½ hours), or via the Princes Hwy (A1) and Omeo (5½ hours). Contact **Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board** (☎ 5759 3550; www.mthotham.com.au) to check winter road conditions before deciding which route to take (chains must be carried).

In winter, **Trekset** (☎ 1800 659 009, 9370 9055; www.mthothambus.com.au) has daily buses from Melbourne to Mt Hotham (\$150 return), via Wangaratta, Myrtleford, Bright and Harrierville.

A free shuttle runs frequently around the resort from 7am to 3am; a separate shuttle service also operates to Dinner Plain. The free 'zoo cart' takes skiers from their lodges to the lifts between 8am and 6pm.

Mt Hotham Airport (☎ 5159 6777) services Mt Hotham and Dinner Plain. **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13) flies here throughout the week in the ski season from Sydney (one way from \$195).

The Helicopter Lift Link (return \$105, with a lift ticket) takes six minutes to fly to Falls Creek, but operates only on clear days.

DINNER PLAIN

☎ 03 / elev 1520m

Eleven kilometres east of Mt Hotham village is Dinner Plain (www.visitdinnerplain.com), a stylish alpine resort that's lovely in both winter and summer with attractive 'high country'

architecture and endless outdoor activities. The entire village, inspired by early cattle farmers' huts, was built in the mid-1980s from corrugated iron and local timber and stone.

There are excellent **cross-country trails** around the village, including the Hotham-Dinner Plain Ski Trail (10km one way). There is a beginners' lift; one-day tickets cost \$45/35 per adult/child.

Molony Ski Hire (☎ 5159 6450; ☺ 7.30am-6pm) has full hire options, and Dinner Plain Ski School has ski and snowboard packages available. It's a short 20-minute drive to Mount Hotham or visitors can use the convenient shuttle-bus service.

In summer the village is an ideal base for hiking – Parks Victoria notes available from information centres in Bright (p583) and Omeo (opposite) – or horse riding with **Dinner Plain Trail Rides** (☎ 5159 6445; www.dinnerplaintrailrides.com; 1½hr/half/full day \$80/120/180, ☺ Nov-Jun).

Specialising in mountain-bike hire, **Adventures with Altitude** (☎ 5159 6608; www.adventureswithaltitude.com.au; 1hr/half/full day \$14/39/60) provides trail maps and offer tours.

Sleeping & Eating

There are 200 chalets and lodges to choose from – for bookings contact either **Dinner Plain Central Reservations** (☎ 1800 670 019, 5159 6451; www.dinnerplain.com; Big Muster Dr) or **Dinner Plain Accommodation** (☎ 5159 6696; www.accommdinnerplain.com.au; Big Muster Dr). Dinner Plain is popular with cross-country skiers and the lodges here are much more low-key than the lux condos at the big ski resorts. Most have a minimum two-night stay in peak season.

our pick Currawong Lodge (☎ 1800 635 589, 5159 6452; www.currawonglodge.com.au; Big Muster Dr; s/d summer incl breakfast \$75/100, 2-night minimum ski season d incl breakfast \$185) Currawong Lodge has a huge communal lounge-and-kitchen area with a monster open fireplace, TV, DVD and stereo. Downstairs is a kid-friendly games room with a billiards table. There's a laundry and spa for those aching post-ski muscles. All rooms have bathrooms, and towels and linen are provided. For a cheapie, it's a helluva goodie!

Crystal Creek Resort (☎ 5159 6422; www.crystalcreekresort.com; Big Muster Dr; s/d summer \$115/160, winter \$150/225; ♿) Originally an Australian Army retreat, this sprawling complex is now a well-run hotel with all the comforts – spa, sauna and restaurant/bar – but a definite lack of pretension.

High Plain Lodge (☎ 5159 6455; www.highplainslodge.com.au; Big Muster Dr; s/d summer \$130/170, s/d incl breakfast ski season \$155/205) Superior motel-style accommodation with comfy rooms and cable TV. There's a decent bar and restaurant (lunch mains \$7 to \$15, dinner mains \$18 to \$25).

Dinner Plain Hotel (☎ 5159 6462; mains \$9-18) It looks somewhat like an overgrown mountain hut, with its split-level interior of huge timber poles and slabs, plus roaring open fires, but the bistro serves good pub grub.

OMEO

☎ 03 / pop 300

Nestled among hills thick with bushland, pretty Omeo is the southern access route to Mt Hotham. The road is sometimes snow-bound in winter; always check conditions before heading this way. In the gold-rush days of the 1850s, Omeo had the toughest and most remote goldfields in the state. The new **Omeo visitor information centre** (☎ 5159 1679; www.omeoregion.com.au; 152 Day Ave) was just setting up when we visited.

The **German Cuckoo Clock Shop** (☎ 5159 1552; Great Alpine Rd; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm) is worth a look. The Historical Park has a mud map to the **Oriental Claims Walk**.

The scenic Victoria Falls Camping Area, off the Great Alpine Rd, 18km west of Omeo, has pit toilets and a picnic area. **Omeo Caravan Park** (☎ 5159 1351; Old Omeo Hwy; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/20, d cabins from \$65) is alongside the Livingstone River.

Snug as a Bug Motel (☎ 5159 1311; www.motelomeo.com.au; 188 Day St; s/d from \$60/80) has three accommodation types, hosting couples and families in motel-type units, a roadside guesthouse or a cute self-contained cottage.

Golden Age Motel (☎ 5159 1344; Day Ave; s/d from \$77/90) is a beautiful Art Deco pub that's been converted into B&B-style accommodation. Its restaurant (mains \$13 to \$18, open Monday to Saturday) serves reliable fare of steaks, salads and soups.

Omeo Bankhouse (☎ 5159 1405; www.omeoregion.com.au/bankhouse; 154 Day Ave; d/q from \$110/160) is a restored two-storey bank that accommodates up to 10 people with its airy rooms, well-equipped kitchen and large backyard. Ask about group discounts.

Mesley's Restaurant (☎ 5159 1400; 166 Day St; mains \$23-28; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun) With crisp white table cloths, a fine wine list and a fancy à la carte menu that includes lettuce-and-trout parcels

and lamb in paperbark, Mesley's, in a historic timber-and-shingle shopfront, seems slightly incongruous in lil' backcountry Omeo.

Getting There & Away

Omeo Bus Lines (☎ 5159 4231) runs Monday to Friday between Omeo and Bairnsdale (\$32 one way, two hours). During the ski season **O'Connell's Bus Lines** (☎ 5159 1377) operates a winter service to Dinner Plain and Mt Hotham from Friday to Sunday; it also has inexpensive bunkhouse accommodation in Omeo.

ANGLERS REST

Beside the Cobungra River, about 30km north of Omeo, you'll find the legendary **Blue Duck Inn Hotel** (☎ 5159 7220; www.blueduckinn.com.au; Omeo Hwy; d from \$120), popular with fly-fishers, canoeists and bushwalkers. Self-contained units sleep up to eight. The hotel serves superb country meals and there's a good riverside BBQ area.

MT BAW BAW

☎ 03 / elev 1564m

This small ski resort, in the centre of the Baw Baw National Park, is a relaxed option for beginners and families. There are good beginner-to-intermediate runs, and a couple of harder runs. The downhill skiing area is 25 hectares with a vertical drop of 140m. It also has plenty of **cross-country skiing** trails, including one that connects to the Mt St Gwinear trails.

Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort Management Board (☎ 5165 1136; www.mountainbawbaw.com.au), in the centre of the village, provides tourist information and accommodation bookings. Several ski-hire places operate during the season, including **Mt Baw Baw Ski Hire** (☎ 1800 629 578, 5165 1120; www.bawbawskihire.com.au), which also books accommodation, and IDS Snow Sports in the **Alpine Hotel** (☎ 5165 1155). Ski season admission fees are \$30 per car for the day car park. The ski lifts operate only if there is snow and day tickets cost \$69/39 per adult/child; lift-and-lesson packages cost \$92/67. The new Frantic Frog Super Tube Park is \$25 for a five-ride ticket.

There's an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1300 651 136; accommodation@mountbawbaw.com.au). In the ski season, ski-club accommodation is available from about \$50/25 per adult/child (minimum two nights).

Kelly's Lodge (☎ 5165 1129; www.kellyslodge.com.au; Frostii Lane; 4-person r summer \$120, ski season \$275 is a superfriendly place and one of the few lodges open year-round. Meals here cost \$8 to \$16.

GOULBURN VALLEY & HUME FREEWAY REGION

You can put your foot down on the Hume Fwy (M31) as it isn't particularly scenic and the speed limit is usually 110km, although there are a few attractions off the freeway.

West of the Hume is the Goulburn Valley, Victoria's fruit bowl. The valley's other main crop is wine, and several wineries are worth a visit, notably the impressive Tabbilk and Mitchelton wineries near Nagambie.

East of the freeway are the foothills of the High Country.

GLENROWAN

☎ 03 / pop 350

Ned Kelly's legendary bushranging exploits came to their bloody end here in 1880. The story of Ned and his gang has become an industry in this small town and you can't drive through Glenrowan without being confronted by the legend.

Sights

Kellyland (☎ 5766 2367; Gladstone St; adult/child/family \$16/10/45; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) is an over-the-top theatre where Ned's story is told in different rooms by a cast of surprisingly lifelike computerised characters (it may be too scary for young children).

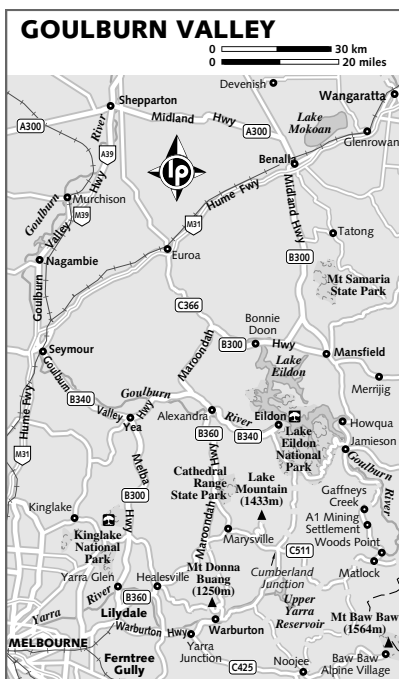
The 400-million-year-old **Warby Range State Park** extends about 25km north of Glenrowan and provided Ned Kelly and his gang with many vantage points.

Sleeping & Eating

Glenrowan Kelly Country Motel (☎ 5766 2202; www.kellycountrymotel.com; Main St; s/d/f from \$50/70/90; ☎) Spacious rooms overlook a small garden and BBQ area.

Glenrowan Bushland Caravan Park (☎ 5766 2288; Warby Range Rd; sites/cabins from \$20/50) In a relaxed bushland setting 2km north of town, this place is interesting with its many long-term residents. The turn-off is just north of Kellyland.

Glenrowan Hotel (☎ 5766 2255; Main St; mains \$8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's free of Kelly paraphernalia, but you'd swear the air was the same that Kelly breathed. Fortunately there's a courtyard.



WANGARATTA

☎ 03 / pop 17,000

The Ovens and King Rivers meet at Wangaratta (also known as 'Wang'). Its name comes from two local Aboriginal words meaning 'resting place of cormorants'. Wangaratta is the turn-off for the Great Alpine Rd, which leads to the High Country.

Almost world famous, the **Wangaratta Jazz Festival** (☎ 1800 803 944; www.wangaratta-jazz.org.au) attracts jazz players and buffs from around Australia and the world in early November.

Information

Wangaratta visitor information centre (☎ 1800 801 065, 5721 5711; www.visitwangaratta.com.au; Murphy St; ☎) In the old library.

Your Computer Zone (☎ 5721 4677; 64a Murphy St; ☎) Internet at \$5 for a half-hour.

Sights & Activities

At the **Wangaratta Cemetery** you'll find the grave of notorious bushranger Dan 'Mad Dog' Morgan. It contains most of Morgan's remains: his head was taken to Melbourne

for a study of the criminal mind, and the scrotum was supposedly fashioned into a tobacco pouch.

A bicycle and walking trail, the **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (www.railtrail.com.au) connects Wangaratta with Beechworth and Bright using disused railway lines. Maps are available at the information centre.

Sleeping

Pinsent Hotel (☎ 5721 2183; 20 Reid St; s/d \$35/70) This renovated pub has comfortable rooms upstairs.

Millers Cottage (☎ 5721 5755; www.millerscottage.com.au; 26 Parfitt Rd; s/d from \$57/67; ☎) This motel, on the northern side of town, has small comfortable rooms and a large garden, pool, playground and BBQ.

Gateway Wangaratta (☎ 1800 033 439, 5721 8399; www.wangarattagateway.com.au; 29-37 Ryley St; s/d/f from \$115/125/160; ☎) This modern motel has good standard rooms and more-expensive spa suites.

Painters Island Caravan Park (☎ 5721 3380; www.paintersislandcaravanpark.com.au; Pinkerton Cres; sites from \$22, d cabins from \$60; ☎) Set on 10 hectares on the banks of the Ovens River, just two minutes from town, this park has a playground, BBQ and camp kitchen.

Eating

Scribblers Coffee Lounge (☎ 5721 3945; 66 Reid St; meals \$8-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A friendly spot with outdoor seating, Scribblers has a varied menu including pastas and interesting quiches, pies and cakes.

Café Martini (☎ 5721 9020; 87 Murphy St; mains \$10-22; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Mon-Sat) A big and bustling family restaurant known for its wood-fired pizzas.

Vine Hotel (☎ 5721 2605; Detour Rd; mains \$12-24; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) This charming old pub hasn't changed much since Ned Kelly drank here. Check out the small history museum in the basement.

Getting There & Away

Wangaratta train station is just west of the town centre in Norton St. Daily **V/Line** (☎ 1361 96) trains from Melbourne (\$37, 2¼ hours) continue on to Wodonga (\$10). V/Line buses run daily from Wangaratta to Rutherglen (\$6).

SHEPPARTON

☎ 03 / pop 30,000

'Shep' is the regional centre of the Goulburn Valley, where the Goulburn and Broken Rivers meet. Fruit-picking work is the main attraction. Irrigation technology was introduced in 1912 and brought an agricultural boom.

Information

McPherson Media (☎ 5832 8000; 194 High St; ☎) Internet at \$7 per hour.

Shepparton visitor information centre (☎ 1800 808 839, 5831 4400; www.greatershepparton.com.au/visitors/vic; Wyndham St) At the southern end of the Victoria Park Lake.

Sights

Shepparton City Historical Museum (cnr High & Welsford St; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 1-4pm Sun or by appointment) is

THE KELLY GANG

Ned Kelly is Australia's greatest folk hero, and his life and death are embraced as part of the national culture. He's inspired a range of artists, including author Peter Carey, who wrote *True History of the Kelly Gang*, and painter Sidney Nolan, who produced a series of iconic works.

Before he became a cult hero, Edward 'Ned' Kelly was a common horse thief. Born in 1855, Ned was first arrested when he was 14 and spent the next 10 years in and out of jails. In a shoot-out at Stringybark Creek, Ned and his gang killed three police officers, and a reward was posted for their capture. The gang robbed banks at Euroa and Jerilderie, making a mockery of the police by locking them in their own cells and wearing their uniforms during the hold-up.

On 27 June 1880 the gang held 60 people captive in a hotel at Glenrowan. Surrounded by police, the gang were under siege for hours while wearing heavy armour made from ploughshares. Ned was shot in the legs and captured, and his gang, along with several of their hostages, were killed.

Ned Kelly was brought to Melbourne, tried and hanged on 11 November 1880. His last words were said to be 'Such is life.' His death mask, armour and the gallows on which he died are on display in the Old Melbourne Gaol (p484).

SEASONAL WORK

From January to April it's fruit-picking season, but start looking for work in December. Winter work in the vineyards is available from June to August.

The **Worktrainers Harvest Office** (☎ 1800 802 277; 361 Wyndham St) arranges employment. Some orchards offer basic accommodation or tent sites.

divided into sections devoted to transport, local agriculture, colonial clothing, shopping and communications. The huge 100-year-old, four-faced post-office clock chimes on the hour.

The **Bangerang Keeping Place** (Parkside Dr; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) has displays on the area's original Aboriginal owners.

Sleeping

Hotel Australia (☎ 5821 4011; cnr Maude & Fryers Sts; s/d \$40/60) This grand yellow pub, with its wide protected verandas, has simple rooms upstairs with their own exit down to a courtyard. Live bands play here Thursday to Saturday nights.

Overlander Hotel-Motel (☎ 5821 5622; overland@cv.quick.com.au; 97 Benalla Rd; s/d from \$70/80; 🍷 🚗) This looks like any big pub, but the motel units are spacious and quiet, with views of rolling paddocks. The central courtyard has a small pool and picnic area, and the dining room has a kids' play area.

Tirana Motel (☎ 5831 1766; 33 Wyndham St; s/d \$85/95; 🍷 🚗) This clean, well-run motel is probably the best value in town. The hosts are very friendly, and the high wall along the street blocks traffic noise.

Victoria Lake Holiday Park (☎ 5821 5431; info@vicalakeholidaypark.com.au; Wyndham St; sites from \$23, d cabins from \$68) Beside Victoria Lake, this friendly place has grass and trees, bicycle paths and walkways.

Eating

Lemon Tree Café (☎ 5822 2300; 98 Fryers St; mains \$13-19; 🍷 🚗) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Lemon Tree is a friendly place with breakfasts like French toast with bacon and maple syrup, and an interesting lunch menu with spicy lamb kofta.

Cellar 47 (☎ 5831 1882; 170 High St; mains \$20-25; 🍷 🚗) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This smart restaurant with its sleek black-and-glass bar is a long-

standing favourite. The menu includes Italian and Australian dishes.

Letizia's Café, Bar & Restaurant (☎ 5831 8822; 67 Fryers St; mains \$22-28) With a pleasant casual atmosphere, Letizia's serves terrific Mod Oz and Asian-influenced dishes.

Getting There & Away

Shepparton train station is east of the town centre. There are daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96) trains and buses to/from Melbourne (\$30, 2½ hours), and buses to/from Cobram (\$10).

V/Line buses also connect with Wodonga (\$28) and Benalla (\$10) daily, and with Mildura (\$48) and Bendigo (\$13) three times a week.

NAGAMBIE

☎ 03 / pop 1300

Nagambie is on the shores of **Lake Nagambie**, created by the construction of the Goulburn Weir in 1887. This area's main attractions are its wineries and water sports.

The **Nagambie visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 444 647, 5794 2647; www.nagambielake tourism.com.au; 145 High St) has a great range of information, along with free tastings and a small shop selling souvenirs and maps.

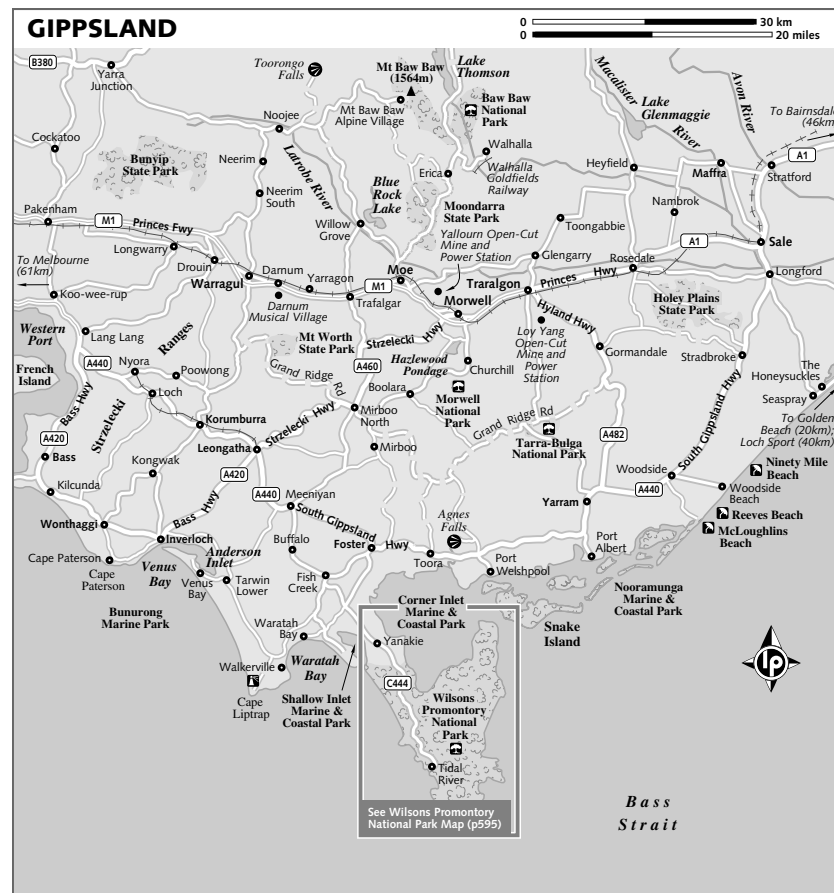
Two of the best-known wineries in Victoria, **Tahbilk Winery** (☎ 5794 2555; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun), off Goulburn Valley Hwy, and **Mitchelton Wines** (☎ 5794 2710, 5736 2222; Mitchellstown Rd; 🍷 10am-5pm), are just south of town.

GIPPSLAND

Gippsland sprawls along the southeastern corner of Australia and is packed full of national parks, lakes, deserted coastline and some of the most diverse wilderness, scenery and wildlife on the continent. The western part is divided into the Latrobe Valley, a coal-mining and electricity-generating centre, and South Gippsland, which includes the beautiful Wilsons Promontory National Park. East Gippsland, backed by the wild forests of the Great Dividing Range, includes the Lakes District and the Wilderness Coast.

Getting There & Away

The two major routes are the Princes Hwy/M1 and the South Gippsland Hwy. Many places of interest, such as Mallacoota, Marlo, Cape Conran and Bemm River, are off the Princes Hwy.



Most minor roads are unsealed and some roads in state parks are closed during the wetter winter months. Check road conditions and seasonal closures with **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) and keep an eye out for logging trucks.

BUSES

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96) has daily bus services along the Princes Hwy (A1) from Bairnsdale to Narooma in NSW and also Lakes Entrance via Lake Tyers. Another service, which runs twice a week, follows the Princes Hwy as far as Cann River, then goes north to Canberra. **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) has two daily services from Melbourne via the Princes Hwy to Sydney, stopping at towns along the way.

There are also regular V/Line buses from Traralgon to Sale via Maffra; Melbourne to Yarram, which stop along the South Gippsland Hwy; and Melbourne to Inverloch, which stop along the Bass Hwy.

Omeo Buses (☎ 03-5159 4231) runs between Bairnsdale and Omeo (\$31) on weekdays.

TRAINS

Bairnsdale is the end of the V/Line link from Melbourne. Daily services from Melbourne to Bairnsdale (\$44, 3½ hours) stop at all major towns along the Princes Hwy.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND

From Melbourne, the South Gippsland Hwy passes through the beautiful 'blue' rounded

hills of the Strzelecki Ranges and is the quickest route to Wilsons Promontory. An alternative coastal route is even more scenic, with some stunning ocean views.

Korumburra

☎ 03 / pop 2800

The first sizable town along the South Gippsland Hwy is Korumburra, situated on the edge of the Strzelecki Ranges. **Prom Country Information Centre** (☎ 1800 630 704, 5655 2233; www.promcountrytourism.com.au; South Gippsland Hwy) is on the way out of town next to Coal Creek.

Coal Creek Heritage Village (☎ 5655 1811; www.coalcreekvillage.com.au; adult/child/family \$15/8/35; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) is a re-creation of a 19th-century mining town. V/Line coaches from Melbourne's Southern Cross Station stop outside en route to Leongatha and Yarram.

Volunteers operate the **South Gippsland Railway** (☎ 1800 442 211, 5658 1111; www.sgr.org.au; adult/child/family return \$13/8/39), which runs heritage diesel trains along scenic tracks from Korumburra to Leongatha on Sunday and public holidays (four services).

There are several wineries in the area, including award-winning **Paradise Enough** (☎ 5657 4241; www.paradiseenough.com.au; Stewart's Rd, Kongwak; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon), 16km from Korumburra off Korumburra-Inverloch Rd, and **Djinta Djinta** (☎ 5658 1123; www.djintadjintawinery.com.au; 10 Stevens Rd, Kardella South; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun).

Wilsons Promontory National Park

With more than 80km of walking tracks, wonderful beaches and abundant wildlife, 'the Prom' is one of the most popular national parks in all of Australia. The wildlife around Tidal River is very tame: kookaburras and rosellas lurk expectantly (but you're not supposed to feed them), and wombats waddle out of the undergrowth seemingly oblivious to the campers and day-trippers.

Wilsons Promontory was an important area for the Kurnai and Boonwurrung Aborigines, and middens have been found in many places, including Cotters and Darby Beaches, and Oberon Bay. The southern-most part of mainland Australia, the Prom once formed a land bridge that allowed people to walk to Tasmania.

The only access road leads to **Tidal River** on the western coast, which has the Parks Victoria office and education centre, a petrol station, general store (with internet access),

open-air cinema (summer only), camp sites, cabins, lodges and facilities.

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 1800 350 552, 03-5680 9555; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Tidal River; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) Takes accommodation reservations and issues camping permits for outside the Tidal River area. Day entry to the park is \$10, which is included in camping fees.

ACTIVITIES

Bushwalking

The Prom's diverse walking tracks will take you through swamps, forests, marshes, valleys of tree ferns and long beaches lined with sand dunes. The park office has details of walks, from 15-minute strolls to overnight and longer hikes. For some serious exploration, buy a copy of *Discovering the Prom* (\$15).

The northern area of the park is much less visited. Most walks in this 'wilderness zone' are overnight or longer, and mainly for experienced bushwalkers. Wood fires are not permitted anywhere in the park.

Surfing

There's excellent surfing at Tidal River and even a **Wilsons Prom Surf School** (☎ 03-5680 8512) affiliated with the general store. Experienced surfers can get waves at Squeaky Beach, Darby Bay and elsewhere, but these are unpatrolled areas with strong currents, and potentially very dangerous.

TOURS

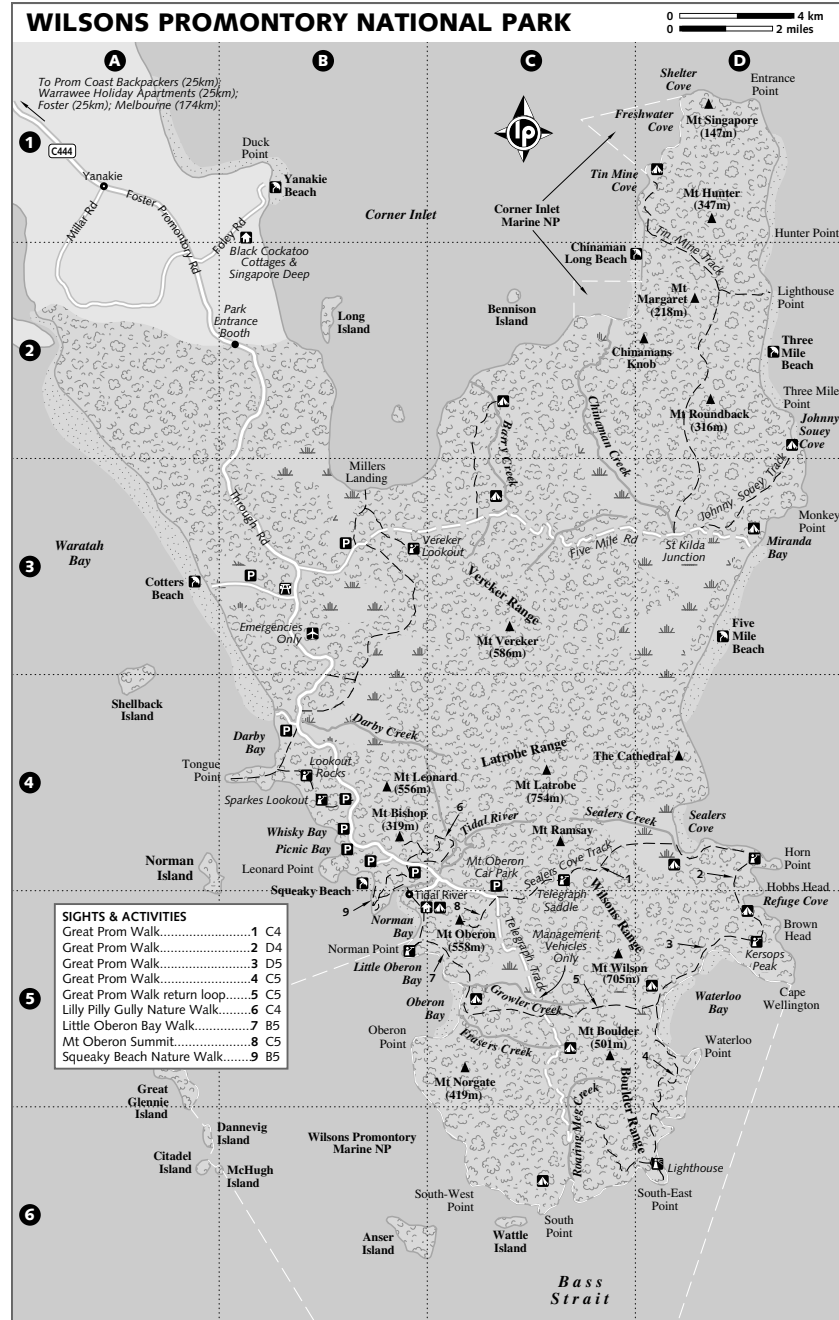
Bunyip Tours (☎ 03-9531 0840; www.bunyiptours.com; 2-day tour \$225) All-inclusive guided hiking tours based at Tidal River with return transfers from Melbourne. ISIC and YHA members receive discounts.

Hiking Plus (☎ 03-9431 1050; www.hikingplus.com; 4-day tour \$750) Offers a range of all-inclusive overnight hiking tours of the Prom that also include spa and massage treatments at the operator's Eight Acres Guesthouse in Foster.

SLEEPING

Hostels

Prom Coast Backpackers (☎ 03-5682 2171; http://gippsland.com/web/WarrabeeHolidayApartments; 40 Station Rd, Foster; dm/d/f \$25/60/75) There are no hostels in the park, but nearby Foster has this cosy renovated cottage with kitchen and lounge that sleeps 10. Ask the friendly owners about a lift to the Prom (around \$15 to \$20 per person depending on numbers). YHA members get discounts.



TOP FIVE PROM WALKS

From November to Easter a free shuttle bus operates between the Tidal River visitors' car park and the Mt Oberon car park (a nice way to start the Prom Circuit Walk). Return times and distances are given:

Great Prom Walk This is the most popular long-distance hike, a moderate 45km circuit across to Sealers Cove from Tidal River, down to Refuge Cove, Waterloo Bay, the lighthouse and back to Tidal River via Oberon Bay. Allow two to three days, and coordinate your walks with tide times, as creek crossings can be hazardous. It's possible to visit or stay at the lighthouse by prior arrangement with the park office.

Lilly Pilly Gully Nature Walk An easy 5km (two-hour) walk through heathland and eucalypt forests, with lots of wildlife.

Mt Oberon Summit Starting from the Telegraph Saddle car park, this moderate-to-hard 7km (2½-hour) walk is an ideal introduction to the Prom with panoramic views from the summit.

Little Oberon Bay An easy-to-moderate 8km (three-hour) walk over sand dunes covered in coastal tea trees with beautiful views over Little Oberon Bay.

Squeaky Beach Nature Walk Another easy 5km return stroll through coastal tea trees and banksias to a sensational white-sand beach.

Warrawee Holiday Apartments (☎ 03-5682 2171; d/f from \$90/110) Next to Prom Coast Backpackers and under the same management.

Huts, Cabins & Units

Tidal River accommodation must be booked well in advance through **Parks Victoria** (☎ 1800 350 552, 03-5680 9516). There are basic huts (four to six beds from \$55) in the park, as well as self-contained two-bedroom cabins (from \$137) and units (from \$95).

Nearby Yanakie offers several comfortable accommodation options for those day-tripping into the Prom.

Black Cockatoo Cottages (☎ 03-5687 1306; www.blackcockatoo.com; 60 Foley Rd, Yanakie; d \$120) Black Cockatoo Cottages offers glorious views of the Prom without leaving your very comfortable bed. These self-contained cottages are private and stylish.

Singapore Deep (☎ 03-5687 1208; www.singaporedeep.com.au; 170 Foley Rd, Yanakie; d \$230) Singapore Deep is a cut above the rest in terms of classy designer-cabin accommodation, with the same panoramic views over Wilsons Prom.

Camping

Bookings are essential for Tidal River's 450 camp sites during holiday periods. Sites for up to three adults (or two adults and two children) and one car cost \$21, plus \$5 per extra adult. Another 11 bush-camping areas around the Prom all have pit or compost toilets and most have water. Overnight hikers need camping permits (adult/child \$7/4), which should be booked ahead through the park office.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's no direct public transport between Melbourne and the Prom, though Prom Coast Backpackers (see p594) in Foster, about 60km north of Tidal River, can usually organise transfers to the Prom for between \$15 and \$20.

WEST GIPPSLAND & THE LATROBE VALLEY

From Melbourne, the Princes Hwy follows the power lines past dairy country to their source in the Latrobe Valley. The region between Moe and Traralgon contains one of the world's largest deposits of brown coal, which is consumed by power stations at Yallourn, Morwell and Loy Yang.

Yarragon

If you stop to shop anywhere along the highway, make it Yarragon. The town has reinvented itself into a Gippsland centre for quality art and gifts, and gourmet produce, and the area wears the moniker of **Gippsland Gourmet Deli Country** (www.gourmetgippsland.com).

Walhalla

☎ 03 / pop 18
Tiny Walhalla, 46km north of Moe, was one of Victoria's great gold-mining towns in the 19th century. Today just 18 people live in this picturesque town (www.walhalla.org.au) – less than 0.5% of the 5000 residents of the area in its gold-era heyday. Despite the inevitable heritage décor (the sepia-photo salesman has evidently been in town), it remains

one of the most scenic of Victoria's historic towns. The December 2006 fires came perilously close to Walhalla, burning out much of the surrounding bushland (see the boxed text, p578).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Take the circuit walk anticlockwise from the information shelter as you enter town. This passes the main sights before climbing the hill to follow the old timber tramway and heading back down to the car park. The tramway also leads to the **Australian Alps Walking Track** (www.australianalps.deh.gov.au/parks/walktrack), which goes to Canberra. There are other walks to Thomson Bridge, Poverty Point or on to the Baw Baw Plateau.

Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine (☎ 5165 6259; adult/child/family \$97/727), off Walhalla-Beardmore Rd, produced 13.7 tonnes of gold (more than \$50 million in today's money). Guided tours run at 1.30pm weekdays and noon, 2pm and 3pm on Saturday, Sunday and during school holidays.

You can also take a 25-minute ride into Walhalla on the **Walhalla Goldfields Railway** (☎ 5126 4201, recorded-info line 9513 3969; www.walhallaarail.com; adult/child/family return \$17/12/37). Trains depart at 11.30am, 1.20pm and 3.10pm from Thomson Bridge on Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday and school holidays. The December 2006 fires destroyed one of the railway bridges. **Copper Mine Adventure** (☎ 5134 6875; www.mountaintopexperience.com; tour \$18) operates rugged 1½-hour 4WD trips along old coach roads to a disused mine, on Wednesday and most weekends.

SLEEPING & EATING

Rawson Village (☎ 5165 3200; www.rawsonvillage.com; 1 Pinnacle Dr, Rawson; lodge s/d from \$36/46, motel s/d \$79/90) South of Walhalla, Rawson Village has a good range of accommodation. Lodge rooms sleep up to six.

Windsor House B&B (☎ 9882 5985, 5165 6237; www.windsorhouse.com.au; d incl breakfast from \$160) Spectacular Windsor House dates from Walhalla's heyday in 1878, and is listed by the National Trust. The guesthouse has been lovingly restored, with four-poster beds, open fires and a library of old books.

Walhalla Star Hotel (☎ 5165 6262; www.starhotel.com.au; Main Rd; d from \$199) The rebuilt historic Star offers stylish boutique-hotel accommodation with sophisticated designer décor and king-size beds. Nonguests should reserve a

table for dinner at Parker's restaurant (mains \$25 to \$28), within the hotel.

There are good bush-camping areas along Stringer's Creek.

Walhalla Lodge Family Hotel (☎ 5165 6226; mains \$12-15; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Wed-Mon) Prints of old Walhalla decorate this cosy one-room pub serving good-enough pub fare.

THE LAKES DISTRICT

The Gippsland Lakes comprise the largest inland waterway system in Australia. There are three main lakes that interconnect: Lake King, Lake Victoria and Lake Wellington. The 'lakes' are lagoons, separated from the ocean by a narrow strip of sand dunes known as Ninety Mile Beach. The dunes were artificially breached at Lakes Entrance in 1889 to allow ocean-going fishing boats to shelter in the placid waters. Despite nearby Bairnsdale and the Princess Hwy, the 600-sq-km Lakes area is remote, with just a half-dozen access points including Metung, Paynesville, Loch Sport and Lakes Entrance. Only those with a boat can truly appreciate this wonderful lakes system. The Lakes National Park protects 2400 hectares of native habitat.

Sale

☎ 03 / pop 12,850

This once-busy port town, active during the paddle-steamer era, has little to excite the traveller. Sale is the centre of the **Gippsland Wetlands** of lakes, waterways and billabongs. Two kilometres south of Sale, on the South Gippsland Hwy, is the Sale Common Wildlife Refuge with a wetlands boardwalk.

The **Sale visitor information centre** (☎ /fax 5144 1108; www.gippslandinfo.com.au; 8 Foster St; ☎) is on the Princes Hwy. There's also a **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5144 3048; 1 Lacey St) office. The **Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation** (☎ 5143 1644; www.ramahyuck.org; 117 Foster St) has information on the Bataluk Cultural Trail, which follows a network of Kurnai trails and trading routes between Sale and Cann River.

Ninety Mile Beach

Ninety miles (144km) of pristine and seamless sandy beach is backed by dunes, swamps and lagoons, stretching from Seaspray to Lakes Entrance. The beach is great for surf fishing and walking but can be dangerous for swimming, except at Seaspray, where it's patrolled.

GRAND RIDGE ROAD

The spectacular Grand Ridge Rd winds along the top of the Strzelecki Ranges, running from midway between Warragul and Korumburra to midway between Traralgon and Yarram, providing a fabulous excursion through fertile farmland that was once covered with forests of giant mountain ash trees. Pick it up north of Korumburra or south of either Trafalgar or Moe. The only place of any size along the route is the pretty township of **Mirboo North**, home to Gippsland's only brewery, the unassuming **Grand Ridge Brewery** (☎ 03-5668 1647) in the historic Butter Factory building.

One of the last remnants of original southern Gippsland forest is tucked in a rainforest gully 30km south of Traralgon in the **Tarra-Bulga National Park**. Camping isn't allowed in the park, but you can stroll to the **Cyathea Falls** or picnic in the northern section, on Grand Ridge Rd, where there's a **visitor information centre** (☎ 03-5196 6166; ☹ 10am-4pm Sat, Sun & holidays) and the 2km **Fern Gully Nature Walk**.

Camping is permitted at designated sites between Seaspray and Golden Beach. Seaspray has general stores, the **Seaspray Caravan Park** (☎ 03-5146 4364; sites \$20, d cabins from \$60), the only park near the beach, and **Ronnie's Tea Rooms** (☎ 03-5146 4420; 13 Trood St; ☹ Sat, Sun & holidays).

Kangaroos graze on front lawns at **Loch Sport**, surrounded by lake, ocean and bush, with some good swimming areas. **Marina Hotel** (☎ 03-5146 0666; mains \$15-24; ☹ lunch & dinner) has great sunset views and good fresh seafood.

A spit of land surrounded by lakes and ocean, **Ninety Mile Beach National Park** covers 2750 hectares of coastal bushland and is reached by road from Loch Sport, or by boat from Paynesville (5km). The **Parks Victoria office** (☎ 03-5146 0278) is at the park entrance near Loch Sport. The only camping is at **Emu Bight** (sites for up to 6 people \$15).

Mitchell River National Park

About 42km northwest of Bairnsdale, this park has some beautiful green valleys, camping areas and lovely hiking, including the two-day, 18km **Mitchell River Walking Track**. Its best-known feature is the **Den of Nargun**, a small cave that, according to Aboriginal stories, is haunted by a strange, half-stone creature, the Nargun.

Bairnsdale

☎ 03 / pop 10,900

Bustling Bairnsdale is the major town of this district. The **Bairnsdale visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 637 060, 5152 3444; www.lakesandwilderness.com.au; 273 Main St) can book accommodation and there's also a **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5152 0600; 73 Calvert

St) office. There's no real reason to stop here, other than to refuel or kip overnight.

SIGHTS

The **Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place** (☎ 5152 1891; 37-53 Dalmahoy St; adult/child \$4/3; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), behind the train station, is a Koorie cultural centre that explores Kurnai daily life before and after white settlement.

On the edge of town, the **MacLeod Morass Boardwalk** is a wetland reserve with walking tracks and bird hides.

Howitt Park is the starting point for the **East Gippsland Rail Trail** (www.eastgippslandrailtrail.com), a popular bike and walking track that leads 30km northeast to Bruthen and on through state forest to Lakes Entrance.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are numerous motels on the highway (Main St).

Riversleigh Country Hotel (☎ 5152 6966; www.riversleigh.info; 1 Nicholson St; d incl breakfast from \$145; ☹) Elegant rooms at this Victorian-era boutique hotel have brass beds, crisp linen and antique furnishings. Breakfast is served in the sunny conservatory. Riversleigh is open for lunch on Thursday and Friday, and for dinner Monday to Saturday (meals \$21 to \$25).

Mitchell Gardens Holiday Park (☎ 5152 4654; http://gippsland.com/web/MGHP; unpowered/powerd sites \$18/22, d cabins from \$55; ☹) East of town on the Mitchell River, this shady park has a pool and jetty.

River Grill (☎ 5153 1421; 2 Wood St; mains \$9-23; ☹ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) The newest addition to Gippsland's culinary scene, River Grill is both a funky daytime café and

a serious Asian/Mediterranean restaurant at night – breakfast on gourmet eggs and bacon over sourdough toast, and later dine on fragrant Thai chicken curry.

Metung

☎ 03 / pop 520

Metung is the nicest spot on the Gippsland Lakes – the unhurried charm of this picturesque village (www.metungtourism.com.au) on Bancroft Bay is contagious; its shoreline dotted with jetties and small wooden craft.

Boats (\$175 per day) and yachts (from \$1945 per week) are available from **Riviera Nautic** (☎ 5156 2243; www.rivieranautic.com.au; 185 Metung Rd).

For a dip, head to the safe swimming beach next to Lake King Jetty.

At high noon pelicans fly in from all around like bomber planes for the fish issued outside the Metung Hotel. Pelicans can tell the time. A highlight!

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is available through **Metung Accommodation** (Slipway Villas; ☎ 5156 2861; www.metungaccommodation.com).

Arendell Holiday Units (☎ 5156 2507; www.arendellmetung.com.au; 30 Mairburn Rd; d/f from \$70/90; ☹) These comfortable timber cottages are very 1970s and don't have water views but they sit a pleasant walk from the beach and town centre. Prices double during Christmas school holidays. BYO linen.

Metung Hotel (☎ 5156 2206; Kurnai Ave; meals \$16-26; ☹ lunch & dinner) The pub takes prime position, with its large wooden terrace and garden overlooking Bancroft Bay – the perfect spot for an afternoon Guinness. It serves good pub food and children's meals.

Mosaic (☎ 5156 2077; 57 Metung Rd; meals \$18-30; ☹ breakfast Fri-Sun, lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Book ahead for dinner at this popular restaurant, serving great tapas and Mod Oz cuisine, or drop in for a coffee.

Lakes Entrance

☎ 03 / pop 5300

In season, Lakes Entrance is a packed-out tourist town with a graceless strip of motels, caravan parks, minigolf courses and souvenir shops lining the Esplanade. Its saving grace is its picturesque location on the gentle waters of Cunninghame Arm, backed by sand dunes and fishing boats.

INFORMATION

Hai Q (☎ 5155 4247; cnr Myer St & the Esplanade; ☹) Internet at \$5 for a half-hour.

Lakes Entrance visitor information centre (☎ 1800 637 060, 5155 1966; www.lakes-entrance.com; cnr Princes Hwy & Marine Pde) Has plenty of information and books accommodation.

ACTIVITIES

A footbridge crosses the Cunninghame Arm inlet from the east of town to the ocean and **Ninety Mile Beach**. From December to Easter paddle boats, canoes and sailboats can be hired by the footbridge. Guided walks to spot nocturnal wildlife, in the company of an experienced naturalist, are run by **Wildlife at Night** (☎ 5156 5863; Wyungara Nature Sanctuary; adult/child/family \$22/13/55).

Several outfits organise cruises: **Corque** (☎ 5155 1508) Popular 4½-hour lunch cruise to Wyanga Park Winery (adult \$45, child under/over six years \$5/20), dinner cruises and Sunday brunch.

Mulloy Fishing Charters (☎ 0427-943 154, 5155 3304) Three-hour fishing cruises (\$40) on the lake from the jetty opposite 66 Marine Pde.

Peels Tourist & Ferry Services (☎ 5155 1246; Post Office Jetty) Daily two-hour cruises at 2pm (adult/child \$30/15) and daily four-hour cruise to Metung (adult/child \$44/13 including lunch) at 11am.

SLEEPING

Riviera Backpackers (☎ 5155 2444; www.yha.com.au; the Esplanade; dm from \$22, s/d from \$35/57; ☹ ☹) The YHA, east of town, is a good, clean hostel with a large kitchen and pool table. V/Line and other buses stop nearby on the Esplanade.

Kalimna Woods (☎ 5155 1957; www.kalimnawoods.com.au; Kalimna Jetty Rd; d \$105-145; ☹ ☹) Retreat from the town centre, 2km away, to rainforest, gardens, possums, birds, wood fires and spas. These log cottages with timber furnishings are spacious and comfortable.

Airdrie B&B (☎ 5156 5640; www.lakes-entrance.com/airdrie; 19 Cross St, Lake Tyres; s/d from \$110/140) Ten minutes from Lakes Entrance in the lovely community of Lake Tyres is this fantastically positioned purpose-built B&B, with stunning views over the lake and ocean. The two suites are large with all the comforts for a weekend getaway.

Goat & Goose (☎ 5155 3079; www.goatandgoose.com; 16 Gay St; d incl breakfast \$140-210) Bass Strait views are maximised at this wonderfully unusual, multi-storey, timber pole-framed house. The owners are friendly and all the rooms have spas.

Eastern Beach Caravan Park (☎ 5155 1581; www.easternbeach.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/24; 🚰) This park is refreshingly old style, with a bush setting by the Eastern Beach walking track into town (30 minutes). There's free wireless internet and BBQs. Prices almost double in peak season.

EATING

With one of Australia's largest commercial fishing fleets Lakes Entrance is a great place for fresh fish and chips – almost the town's signature dish. Grab a bundle, sit lakeside and fend off the seagulls.

Fisherman's Co-op (☎ 5155 1688; Bullock Island; 🕒 9am-5pm) You'll find the co-op on the right-hand side of Princes Hwy, when entering Lakes Entrance from the west. This is where the fishing boats unload their catch – fish, prawns and shellfish can be bought cheaply in the shop.

Ferryman's Seafood Café (☎ 5155 3000; mains \$17-32) This licensed floating restaurant (and fishmonger downstairs, open 8.30am to 5pm) will fill you to the gills with the freshest fish and seafood preparations.

Miriam's Restaurant (☎ 5155 3999; cnr Esplanade & Bulmer St; mains \$18-26; 🍷 dinner) Miriam's does terrific seafood and has a Spanish night on Thursday with three courses for \$25.

our pick Waterwheel Beach Tavern (☎ 5156 5855; 577 Beach Rd, Lake Tyers; mains \$20-29; 🍷 lunch & dinner) It's hardly a secret, but the Waterwheel in Lake Tyers, 10 minutes' drive from Lakes Entrance, offers some of the best bistro dining in Gippsland. The setting is superb, lakeside overlooking the ocean, and the food is classy but unpretentious.

Fresh Food Group (☎ 5155 4122; 204 Marine Pde; 🕒 Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) This interesting fruit-and-vegetable wholesaler and food store sells delicious deli items including jams, chutneys, cheeses, filled pasta and breads.

EAST GIPPSLAND & THE WILDERNESS COAST

Much of this region wasn't cleared for agriculture and contains some of the most remote and spectacular national parks in the state, making logging in these ancient forests a hot issue.

Unexciting Orbost is the major town and gateway to the Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks, and the Wilderness Coast. The magnificent coastal areas of Cape

Conran, Mallacoota and Croajingolong are all uncrowded, unspoiled and undeveloped.

Buchan

☎ 03 / pop 230

Buchan, a beautiful town in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, is famous for its spectacular limestone cave system that has been open to visitors since 1913.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Guided tours, alternating between **Royal Cave** and **Fairy Cave**, are run by **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5162 1900; adult/child/family \$13/7/32). The rangers also offer hard-hat guided tours to **Federal Cave** during the high season.

Snowy River Expeditions (☎ 5155 9353; www.karoodanpark.com; Gelantipy) runs one-, two- or four-day rafting trips on the Snowy (from \$135 per day all inclusive), abseiling and caving trips.

SLEEPING

Buchan Lodge Backpackers (☎ 5155 9421; www.buchanlodge.com; Saleyard Rd; dm incl breakfast \$20) There are good facilities here, including a fully equipped kitchen, large dining room and BBQ. It's a great spot for lounging about and taking in the country views.

Buchan Caves Caravan Park (☎ 5162 1900; Buchan Caves Reserve; unpowered/powerd sites \$13/18, d cabins \$60; 🚰) This picturesque camping ground has a camp kitchen and open fireplaces. It's managed by Parks Victoria.

Snowy River National Park

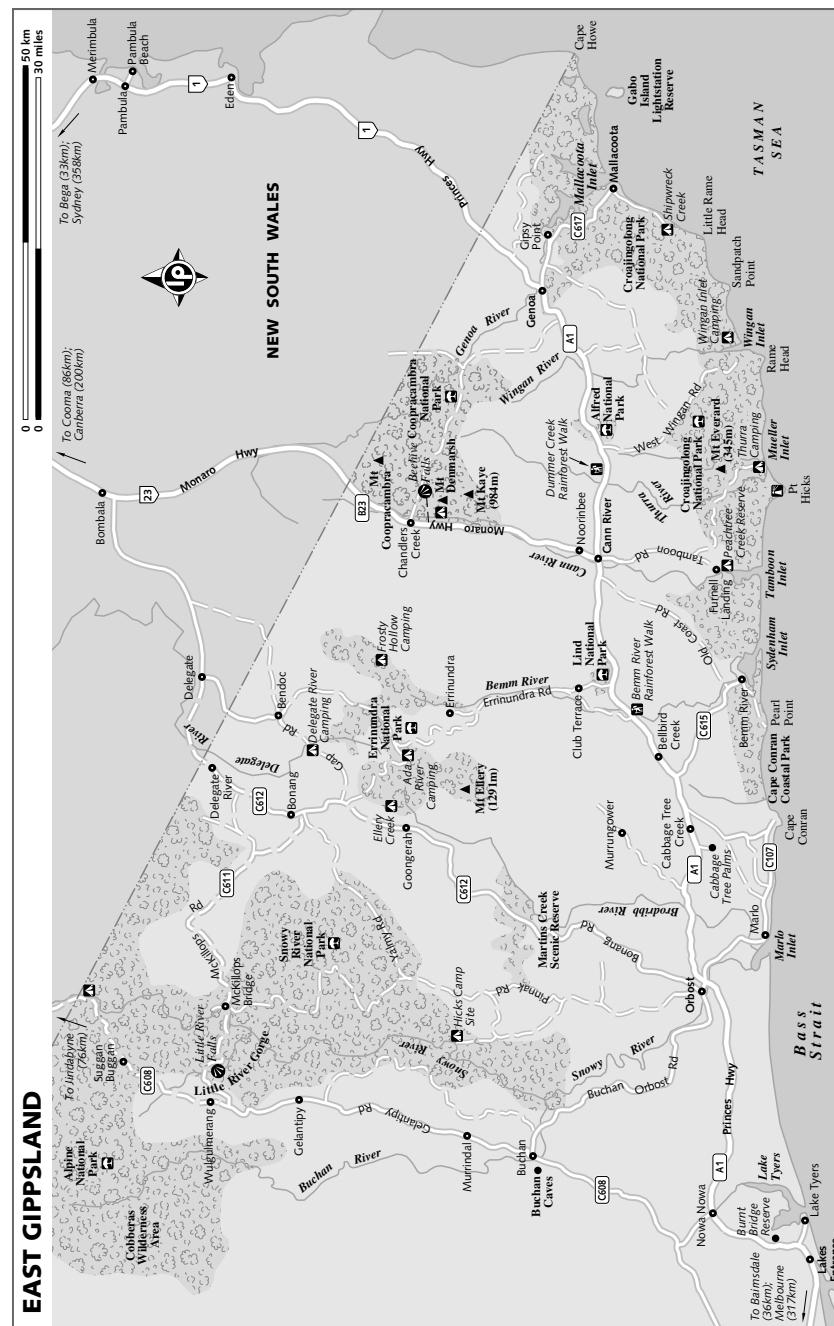
Dominated by gorges carved by the Snowy River, this is one of Victoria's most isolated and spectacular parks.

The main access roads are Buchan-Jindabyne Rd from Buchan and Bonang Rd (C612) from Orbost, and they are joined by McKillops Rd in the north, crossing the Snowy River at **McKillops Bridge**.

About 25km before the bridge, on the Gelantipy Rd, are **Little River Falls** and **Little River Gorge** lookouts. The latter, a 500m-deep gorge, is the deepest in Victoria.

Bushwalking and canoeing are popular but be prepared as conditions can change suddenly. The classic canoe or raft trip down the Snowy River, from McKillops Bridge to a finish point near Buchan, takes at least four days.

There are camp sites, toilets, fireplaces and river beaches along McKillops Bridge.



For information contact the park offices at **Buchan** (☎ 03-5162 1900), **Orbost** (☎ 03-5161 1222) or **Bairnsdale** (☎ 03-5152 0600).

Karoonda Park (☎ 03-5155 0220; www.karoonda.park.com; Gelantipy Rd, Gelantipy; dm/d/cabins incl breakfast \$24/58/95 🚰 🚰 🚰) is a working sheep-and-cattle property 40km north of Buchan. Fully catered packages are available (three-course meals \$14) and the owners may have work going. Snowy River Expeditions are based here (see p600), offering activities like abseiling, horse riding, caving and rafting.

Errinundra National Park

The Errinundra Plateau contains Victoria's largest cool-temperate rainforest. The national park covers just 25,100 hectares and sadly many adjoining areas are being logged.

The Bonang Rd passes the western side of the park, while the Errinundra Rd, from Club Terrace, runs through the centre. Both roads are unsealed, steep, winding and often closed in winter – check with Parks Victoria at **Bendoc** (☎ 02-6458 1456), **Cann River** (☎ 03-5158 6351) or **Orbost** (☎ 03-5161 1222; cnr Nicholson & Salisbury Sts).

Camping areas are at Delegate River on the Gap Rd connecting Bonang Rd with Bendoc, Frosty Hollow on the Hensleigh Creek Rd, Ada River on the Errinundra Rd and at Goongerah. There's a petrol station and general store at Bonang, a pub at Bendoc and another at Delegate River.

The **Wilderness Bike Ride** (☎ 03-51546637; www.wildernessbikeride.com.au) is a fantastic four-day 230km mountain-biking ride in April through the wilds of Errinundra and finishing in Orbost.

Orbost

☎ 03 / pop 2100

Orbost, by the Snowy River, services the surrounding farming and forest areas. The Princes Hwy passes just south of the town, the Bonang Rd heads north towards the Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks, and Marlo Rd follows the Snowy River south to Marlo and continues along the coast to Cape Conran.

Orbost visitor information centre (☎ 5154 2424; cnr Nicholson & Clarke Sts) is in the historic 1872 Slab Hut. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5161 1222; cnr Nicholson & Salisbury Sts) has information on road conditions in the forests.

Orbost Exhibition Centre (☎ 5154 2634; www.orbostexhibitioncentre.org; Clarke St; adult/child \$4/free; 🕒 10am-4pm) showcases stunning works by local timber artists.

SLEEPING

Commonwealth Hotel (☎ 5154 1077; 159 Nicholson St; s/d \$35/50) Predictable pub rooms with shared bathrooms and lounge, and the popular bar downstairs. Lunch and dinner is served Monday to Saturday (mains \$15 to \$21).

Snowy River Cottage (☎ 0438-083 014; www.lakes-entrance.com/snowycottage; 6 Nicholson St; d \$110) This refurbished old-style cottage, set in a pretty garden opposite Forest Park, has the nicest accommodation close to town.

Marlo

☎ 03 / pop 350

Marlo is a sleepy holiday town at the mouth of the Snowy River, 15km south of Orbost. It's a lovely spot, popular with anglers.

Tabbara Lodge (☎ 5154 8231; 1 Marlo Rd; d \$70; 🚰) is a little run-down but has large self-contained rooms, in shady gardens containing BBQs and playground.

Marlo Hotel (☎ 5154 8201; 17 Argyle Pde; d from \$120) offers indulgent suites with king-size beds, comfy sofas and antique furniture, with either a spa or fireplace. A massive veranda overlooks the jaw-dropping spot where the Snowy River flows into the sea. The restaurant has a varied bistro-style menu (lunch and dinner mains \$16).

Cape Conran Coastal Park

Cape Conran is one of the most beautiful spots in the state. The 19km coastal route from Marlo to Cape Conran is especially pretty and there are some great beaches, including the safest surfing beach in the region. Be sure to stop at **French's Narrows**, a pretty system of lakes that's home to countless water birds.

A rough track 4km east leads from the cape to the mouth of the Yeerung River, which is another good spot for swimming, canoeing and fishing. There are no shops at Cape Conran – bring provisions and drinking water. There's good surfing at West Cape beach. **Cabbage Tree Palms** is a short detour off the road between Cape Conran and the Princess Hwy. This is Victoria's only stand of native palms – a tiny rainforest oasis.

SLEEPING

Parks Victoria (☎ 03-5154 8438; www.conran.net.au; Yeerung Rd) manages the accommodation at Cape Conran.

our pick **Cape Conran Cabins** (4–8-person cabins from \$100) These large rustic cabins are fantastic,

resembling oversized cubby houses with lofty mezzanine sleeping areas. They have a remote, airy, beachcomber feel and are just a short walk to the beach. You could happily stay here for a week with enough food. The kitchenettes have cooking equipment but lack some basics (like an egg-flip), so bring some bits with you. **BYO** linen too.

Banksia Bluff Camping Area (sites for up to 4 people \$16) Right on the foreshore, the camping ground has toilets, cold showers and fireplaces; bring drinking water if you don't like the taste of bore water.

Cann River

☎ 03 / pop 250

Cann River is at the junction of the Princes and Monaro Hwys heading north into NSW. There are petrol stations, motels, a supermarket, hotel and caravan park here, as well as several places to grab a quick bite. There's a **Parks Victoria office** (☎ 5158 6351).

Coopracambra National Park

Remote Coopracambra (38,300 hectares) retains its original ecosystem virtually intact and supports many rare and endangered species. The landscape is rugged and spectacular, with deep gorges where the earliest fossil evidence of four-footed creatures was discovered. The only access is a 4WD track, which runs from the Monaro Hwy to Genoa. Beehive Falls are 2km from the Monaro Hwy, 28km north of Cann River.

The beautifully furnished, eco-friendly **Coopracambra Cottage** (☎ 03-5158 8277; 1606 Wangarabell Rd; d \$70) is 16km northwest of Genoa. The pastureland setting has emus, kangaroos, wombats, many birds and mountain views.

Mallacoota

☎ 03 / pop 1100

Laid-back Mallacoota, surrounded by the tumbling hills and beachside dunes of beautiful Croajingolong National Park, is our favourite place in Victoria. Its long empty ocean beaches, tidal rivermouths and vast Mallacoota Inlet are a paradise for swimmers, surfers, anglers and boaties. At Christmas and Easter it's a crowded family holiday spot, but most of the year it's pretty quiet.

INFORMATION

Mallacoota Information Shed (☎ 5158 0800; www.mallacoota.com; Main Wharf; 🕒 10am-4pm) On the

wharf with trompe l'oeil fisherfolk, useful information, maps and advice.

Mallacoota Newsagent (☎ 5158 0888; Allen Dr; 📺) Internet at \$3 for 15 minutes.

Parks Victoria (☎ 5161 9500; cnr Buckland & Allan Drs) Opposite the wharf.

ACTIVITIES

The 300km shoreline of Mallacoota Inlet is backed by national park. There are plenty of great short **walks** (from 30 minutes to four hours) around town, the inlet and in the bush – maps are available from the Information Shed.

There's sometimes **surf** at Bastion Point and always excellent **swimming** at Betka Beach where the Betka rivermouth runs with the tide.

Hire a boat (no licence required) and travel up the inlet. Cut the engine, drop the anchor and listen for a moment to the quiet sounds of the birds and the breeze through the trees of the national park. Then dive in for the most delicious nudie swim. There are many public jetties where you can tie your boat up and come ashore for picnic tables and toilets.

A number of operators offer cruises and boat hire:

Mallacoota Hire Boats (☎ 0438-447 558; Main Wharf) Hires out canoes (\$17 per hour) and motor boats (half-/full day \$75/120).

Porkie Bess (☎ 0408-408 094, 5158 0109; 2hr cruise \$30) A 1940s wooden boat offering fishing trips and cruises around the lakes, and ferry services for hikers (\$10 per person, minimum four).

Wilderness Coast Ocean Charters (☎ 0418-553 809) Runs trips to Gabo Island (\$70) and the Skerries (\$120) to view the seal colony off Wingan Inlet. Whales are sometimes spotted between September and November.

SLEEPING

Prices vary significantly with the seasons; book ahead for Christmas or Easter.

Mallacoota Hotel Motel & Backpackers (☎ 5158 0455; inncoota@speedlink.com.au; 51-55 Maurice Ave; dm \$22, motel s/d/f from \$55/66/75; 🚰 🚰) It's nothing fancy but offers good value. Motel rooms are large while backpackers' rooms are a bit shabby but share a good kitchen.

our pick **Karbeethong Lodge** (☎ 5158 0411; www.karbeethonglodge.com.au; 16 Schnapper Point Dr; d with/without bathroom from \$95/75) A calm serenity prevails as you rest on the broad verandas of this early-1900s timber guesthouse with uninterrupted views over Mallacoota Inlet. Karbeethong is

perfect for self-caterers, with a large communal kitchen like an upmarket hostel. The large guest lounge and dining room have open fires and period furnishings, while the bedrooms are small but neat and tastefully decorated.

Adobe Mudbrick Flats (☎ 5158 0329; www.adobeholidayflats.com.au; 17 Karbeethong Ave; d/f \$80/110) These creative and comfortable mud-brick flats were erected in the 1970s, and they haven't changed much since. With an emphasis on recycling and eco-friendliness, there's solar hot water and guests are encouraged to compost their kitchen scraps. Birds, lizards and possums can be handled outside your door. Very family-friendly, the flats sleep four people. BYO linen.

Mallacoota Houseboats (☎ 5158 0775; 3-night minimum \$850) These clean, cosy houseboats are a great way to explore Mallacoota's magic waterways. They sleep up to six and have a kitchen, toilet, shower and a BBQ on the deck.

Mallacoota Foreshore Caravan Park (☎ 5158 0300; camppark@bigpond.com; unpowered/powerd sites \$16/20, caravan d \$50) Grassy sites extend along the foreshore, with sublime views of the lake and its resident population of black swans and pelicans. Prices increase by 50% at Christmas and Easter.

EATING

Croajingolong Café (☎ 5158 0098; Allan Dr; mains \$7-11; ☺ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) Overlooking the inlet, this friendly café is a perfect place to linger over a latte and watch the world move slowly by. The menu offers some innovations and the fruit smoothies are great. Try the veggie brekky or the chicken with sage and mushroom on a bed of noodles.

Pub Bistro (☎ 5158 0455; 51-55 Maurice Ave; mains \$14-26; ☺ lunch & dinner) Good for a beer and a burger, or try the porterhouse in seafood sauce or creamy mushroom pasta. Bands play at the pub regularly in summer.

Tide Restaurant (☎ 5158 0100; cnr Maurice Ave & Allan Dr; mains \$17-25; ☺ dinner) Tide serves quality seafood from its prime lakeside position. Dine on the deck for unbeatable views.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Mallacoota is 23km off the Princes Hwy. From Melbourne you can catch a daily **V/line** (☎ 13 61 96) train to Bairnsdale and coach to Genoa (\$48 one way, 7½ hours), then get the **Mallacoota-Genoa Bus Service** (☎ 0408-315 615) which meets the V/line coach on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday (\$5 one way, bookings essential). If, however, the coach from Bairnsdale is late, the Mallacoota bus will *not* wait, and you'll spend two days in Genoa waiting for the next one.

Croajingolong National Park

The coastal wilderness park of Croajingolong (87,500 hectares) is one of Australia's finest national parks. It stretches for about 100km from Bemm River to the NSW border and includes unspoiled beaches, inlets and forests. The 200m sand dunes at Thurra are the highest on the mainland. Mallacoota Inlet is the largest and most accessible area. There's plentiful wildlife in the park, including huge goannas.

Walkers must be suitably equipped for long-distance walking, with sufficient maps and information on conditions. Contact **Parks Victoria** (☎ Cann River 03-5158 6351, Mallacoota 03-5158 0219) for information, camping permits and track notes. All access roads from the Princes Hwy, except Mallacoota Rd, are unsealed and can be very rough; check conditions with Parks Victoria.

The main camping areas are at Wingan Inlet, Shipwreck Creek, Thurra River and Mueller Inlet. You may need to bring water so check with Parks Victoria. You'll also need to book during the main holiday seasons; camping fees cost up to \$21 a site.

Point Hicks was the first part of Australia to be spotted by Captain Cook in 1770. Experience the windy and isolated ruggedness at **Point Hicks Lighthouse** (☎ 03-5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; up to 6 people from \$230), with ocean views and wood fires. There's a two-night minimum stay; bring all your own food.

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