

Capricorn Coast



Straddling the tropic of Capricorn, Rockhampton is the major hub of the Capricorn Coast, and rates as Australia's brash beef-farming capital, with pub rodeos, steakhouses and oversized bulls dominating the town. A short drive from the cattle capital is the sleepy coastal village of Yeppoon, the launch pad to the easily accessible and beautiful Great Keppel Island. North of Yeppoon the rugged and wild Byfield National Park has several back-to-nature bush retreats.

Further south, the industrial port town of Gladstone is the gateway to the Capricorn Coast's stunning offshore attractions – tropical islands and coral cays fringed with powdery white beaches and clear, turquoise waters. The deserted and sparsely inhabited islands of the southern Great Barrier Reef, especially Heron and Lady Elliot Islands, offers some of the best snorkelling and diving in Queensland. Day trips to the coral cays offer an unforgettable Barrier Reef adventure but to fully experience the magic of the islands, camp overnight on uninhabited Lady Musgrave Island.

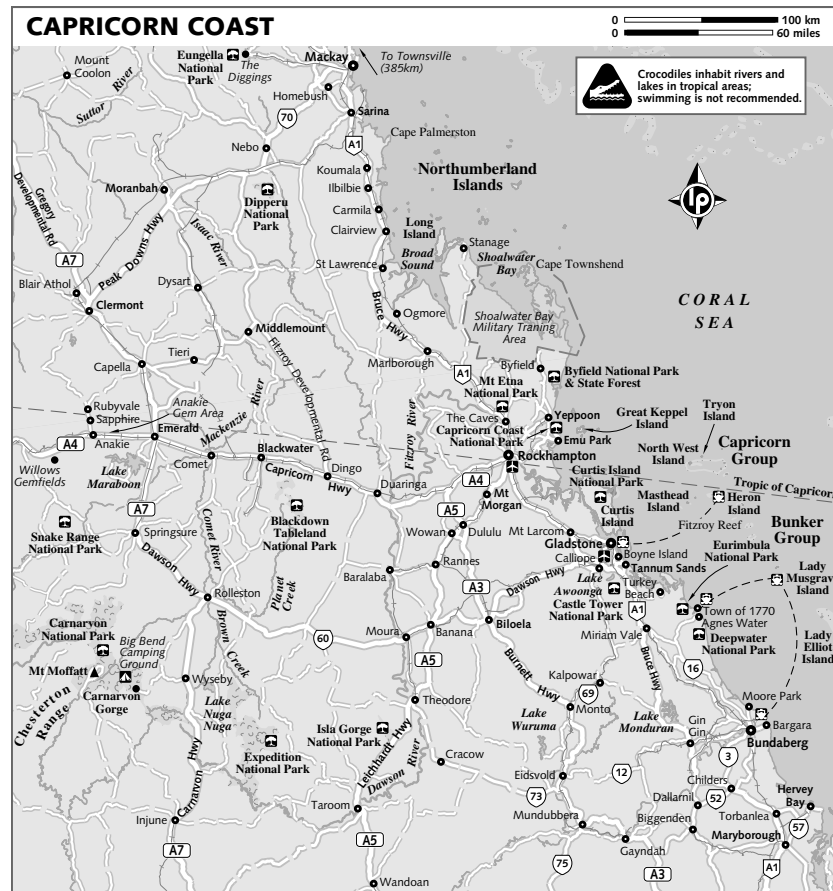
Remote beaches and windswept national parks can be found along the entire Capricorn Coastline, from Byfield National Park south to the relatively untouched seaside settlements of Agnes Water and the Town of 1770.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Diving the spectacular underwater coral gardens of **Heron Island** (p386) and **Lady Elliot Island** (p385)
- Playing castaway on the deserted islands and coral cays of the **Southern Reef Islands** (p385)
- Tucking into a huge steak in Australia's beef capital, **Rockhampton** (p386)
- Crawling through black holes and tight tunnels in the **Capricorn Caves** (p391)
- Surfing and chilling at Queensland's most northerly surf beach, **Agnes Water** (p380)
- Claiming a tropical beach for the day on **Great Keppel Island** (p393)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07 ■ www.capricorncoast.com.au ■ www.capricorn tourism.com.au



Getting There & Away

AIR

Both Rockhampton and Gladstone have major domestic airports.

Jetstar (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) Connects Rockhampton with Brisbane.

Qantas (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) Connects Rockhampton with Mackay, Gladstone, Brisbane and Sydney. Qantaslink connects Brisbane with Gladstone.

Tiger Airways (☎ 03 9335 3033; www.tigerairways.com) Connects Rockhampton with Melbourne.

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) Connects Rockhampton with Brisbane and Sydney.

BUS

The operators **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) and **Premier Motor**

Service (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) both have regular coach services along the Bruce Hwy. Greyhound operates regular services to and from Rockhampton, Gladstone and Agnes Water, while Premier Motor Service runs a Brisbane to Cairns route that stops at Rockhampton.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The Bruce Hwy runs all the way up the Capricorn Coast and passes through the region's major hub of Rockhampton.

The Burnett Hwy, which starts at Rockhampton and heads south through the old gold-mining town of Mt Morgan, is an interesting and popular alternative inland route to Brisbane.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32; www.traveltrain.com.au) operates frequent services between Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns and Longreach. The high-speed *Tilt Train* and the more sedate *Sunlander* operate on the coastal route. The *Spirit of the Outback* leaves Brisbane twice weekly and turns inland from Rockhampton to Longreach. For details, see the Getting There & Away sections of the relevant towns and cities.

AGNES WATER & TOWN OF 1770

☎ 07 / pop 1620

Surrounded by national parks and the Pacific Ocean, the twin coastal towns of Agnes Water and Town of 1770 are among Queensland's most appealing seaside destinations. The tiny settlement of Agnes Water has a lovely white-sand beach, the east coast's most northerly surf beach, while the even tinier Town of 1770 (little more than a marina!) marks Captain Cook's first landing in Queensland. The 'Discovery Coast' is a popular nook for surfing, boating, and fishing away from the crowds. To get here, turn east off the Bruce Hwy at Miriam Vale, 70km south of Gladstone. It's another 57km to Agnes Water and a further 6km to the Town of 1770.

Information

At Miriam Vale is the **Discovery Coast visitors centre** (☎ 4974 5428; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) but you'll also find visitors centres in town.

The **Agnes Water visitors centre** (☎ 4902 1533; Rural Transaction Centre, 3 Captain Cook Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) is opposite Endeavour Plaza. Next door, the **Agnes Water Library** (☎ 4902 1515; Rural Transaction Centre, Round Hill Rd; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) has internet access (\$4 for 30 minutes).

The **Discovery Centre** (☎ 4974 7002; Shop 12, Endeavour Plaza, cnr Round Hill Rd & Captain Cook Dr, Agnes Water) is a helpful, privately run information service.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS; ☎ 4974 9350; www.epa.qld.gov.au; Captain Cook Dr, Town of 1770) has information and brochures on the Eurimbula and Deepwater National Parks. Book camp sites through the Bundaberg office (☎ 4131 1600).

Sights & Activities

The **Miriam Vale Historical Society Museum** (☎ 4974 9511; Springs Rd, Agnes Water; admission adult/child \$3/free; ☎ 1-4pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) displays a

small collection of artefacts, rocks and minerals, as well as extracts from Cook's journal and the original telescope from the first lighthouse built on the Queensland coast.

Agnes Water is Queensland's northernmost **surf beach**. Learn to surf on the gentle breaks here with the highly acclaimed **Reef 2 Beach Surf School** (☎ 4974 9072, 0402 328 515; www.reef2beachsurf.com; 1/10 Round Hill Rd, Agnes Water; per lesson \$55).

Dive 1770 (☎ 4974 9359; www.dive1770.com) and **1770 Underwater Sea Adventures** (☎ 1300 553 889; www.1770underseadventures.com.au) offer a range of dive courses (Professional Association of Diving Instructors – PADI – Open Water from \$250), Great Barrier Reef and wreck dives (\$160).

Round Hill Creek at the Town of 1770 is a calm anchorage for boats, and there's good fishing and mudcrabbing upstream. **Fish 1770 Bait & Tackle** (☎ 4974 9227) at the marina hires out aluminium dinghies (half-/full day \$65/95).

Charter boats available for fishing, surfing, snorkelling and diving trips to the Great Barrier Reef include the **MV James Cook** (☎ 4974 9422; www.1770jamescook.com.au). The 14m vessel sleeps up to 10 people for tours of up to seven days. **Hooked on 1770** (☎ 4974 9794) has full- and half-day fishing and scenic charters starting from \$55 per person.

You can hire kayaks and canoes on the waterfront just north of the marina from **1770 Liquid Adventures** (☎ 0428-956 630; www.liquidadventures.com.au; 1hr hire kayak/canoe \$25/20) or join a 2½-hour sunset tour (from \$30), which offers wine and nibbles along with spectacular sunsets.

Adrenaline junkies can wave-jump, surf and slalom run in a surf-racing boat with **ThunderCat 1770** (☎ 0427-177 000; adult/child \$45/35) while **Wyndham Aviation** (☎ 0431-399 626; 1½hr flight per person \$85) flies over the headland for aerial views of dolphins and marine life.

Back on land, ride a chopper along back country roads with **Scooteroo** (☎ 4974 7696; www.scooterootours.com; 21 Bicentennial Dr; 3hr ride \$65; ☎ 3pm summer, 2.30pm winter, by appointment). The 60km tour offers scenic views of the coast and hinterland, with plenty of kangaroos and wallabies thrown in. All you need is a car licence as the machines are fully automatic. Wear long pants and closed-in shoes.

Tours

1770 Larc Tours (☎ 4974 9422; www.1770lartours.com.au) Runs fun full-day tours in its amphibious vehicles. The tours leave from the marina on Monday, Wednesday

STINGERS

The potentially deadly Chironex box jellyfish and Irukandji, also known as sea wasps or 'marine stingers', occur in Queensland's coastal waters north of Agnes Water (occasionally further south) from around October to April, and swimming is not advisable during these times. These potentially lethal jellyfish are usually found close to the coast, especially around river mouths. Fortunately, swimming and snorkelling are usually safe around the reef islands throughout the year; however, the rare and tiny (1cm to 2cm across) Irukandji has been recorded on the outer Reef and islands.

The large (up to 30cm across) Chironex box jellyfish's stinging tentacles spread several metres from its body; by the time victims see the jellyfish, they've already been stung. Treatment is urgent and similar for both species: douse the stings with vinegar (available on many beaches or from nearby houses) and call for an ambulance (if there's a first-aiders present, they may have to apply CPR until the ambulance arrives). Do *not* attempt to remove the tentacles.

Some coastal resorts erect 'stinger nets' that provide small areas offering good protection against Chironex, but not necessarily the smaller, rarer Irukandji. Elsewhere, you can wear a stinger suit for protection or simply stay out of the sea when stingers are around.

and Saturday and take in Middle Island, Bustard Head and Eurimbula National Park. It costs \$121.50/76.50 per adult/child, including lunch. It also runs daily one-hour sunset cruises (\$36.50/21.50).

All Aboard 1770 (☎ 0427-597 122) Dishes up pancakes with maple syrup on its 1½-hour breakfast cruises (adult/child \$35/20) along Round Hill Creek. It also offers sunset cruises (\$30/15) with tea, coffee and nibbles (BYO alcohol). Cruises leave the marina at 8am and 4.30pm.

Lady Musgrave Cruises (☎ 4974 9077; www.1770reefcruises.com; Captain Cook Dr; adult/child \$160/80) Has excellent day trips to Lady Musgrave Island aboard the *Spirit of 1770*. It takes 1½ hours to get there and five hours is spent at the island and its stunning blue lagoon. Coral viewing in a semisubmersible, lunch, morning and afternoon tea, snorkelling and fishing gear are provided on the cruises which depart the Town of 1770 marina at 8am every morning. For an extra cost you can go diving. Island camping transfers are available for \$320 per person, and the company runs a shuttle bus from Bundaberg (per person \$10 return).

Sleeping BUDGET

Most backpacker hostels organise pick-ups from the bus drop offs.

1770 Camping Grounds (☎ 4974 9286; camp ground1770@bigpond.com; Captain Cook Dr, Town of 1770; unpowered/powered sites \$24/27) A large but peaceful park with sites right by the beach and plenty of shady trees. Prices are for two people.

Cool Bananas (☎ 4974 7660; www.coolbananas.net.au; 2 Springs Rd, Agnes Water; dm \$25; ☎) This funky Balinese-themed backpackers has roomy six- and eight-bed dorms, open and airy communal areas, and is only a five-minute walk to the beach

and shops. Otherwise, you can laze the day away in a hammock in the tropical gardens.

1770 Southern Cross Tourist Retreat (☎ 4974 7225; www.1770southerncross.com; 2694 Round Hill Rd, Agnes Water; dm/d incl breakfast \$25/65, 2 night minimum stay; ☎ ☎) More of an ecoresort than a backpackers, this excellent retreat is set on 6.5 hectares of bushland 2.5km out of town. The three- and four-bed dorms are in clean, airy, timber cabins (all with en suites), there's an open-air meditation *sala* (where you'll sometimes see visiting Buddhist monks), an ultracool communal chill-out zone, kangaroos in the grounds, and a free shuttle bus to town. Bike hire is free or you can hire a scooter, and you can swim or fish in the lake. Highly recommended.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Mango Tree Motel (☎ 4974 9132; www.mangotremotel.com; 7 Agnes St, Agnes Water; s/d from \$85/95; ☎ ☎) Only 100m from the beach, this good-value motel offers large self-contained rooms (sleeping up to six) with the option of continental breakfast. There's also a licensed restaurant, Beachside Bar & Restaurant, next door (see p382).

Agnes Palms Beachside Apartments (☎ 4974 7200; www.agnespalms.com; Captain Cook Dr, Agnes Water; motel \$75, 1-1/2-bedroom apt \$85/120; ☎ ☎) Another good-value option are these pleasant fully self-contained apartments, which back onto dense rainforest. Each apartment has undercover car parking and private BBQ or you can bunk down in a motel room. A 300m boardwalk through the rainforest leads to the beach.

Sovereign Lodge (☎ 4974 9257; www.1770sovereignlodge.com; 1 Elliot St, Town of 1770; d \$120-220; ☎ ☎) This

lovely boutique accommodation has a range of immaculate self-contained rooms, some with excellent views from its hilltop perch. There's also a Balinese 'Body Temple' here where, among other offerings, you can be massaged, wrapped in clay, rubbed with hot rocks and scrubbed with salt.

our pick Sandcastles 1770 Motel & Resort (☎ 07-4974 9428; www.sandcastles1770.com.au; 1 Grahame Colyer Dr, Agnes Water; d garden villas/beach-home apt from \$130/160; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Set on 4 hectares of landscaped gardens and subtropical vegetation, Sandcastles has a range of accommodation options from well above average motel-style backpacker dorms (\$25) to luxury beach-home apartments and villas. The funky one- to four-bedroom Balinese-themed villas are large and airy and open on to a central courtyard. Some have a private pool. There's also a popular restaurant, Kahunas (see below), here as well as a small café.

Beach Shacks (☎ 4974 9463; www.1770beachshacks.com; 578 Captain Cook Dr, Town of 1770; d from \$168) These delightful self-contained tropical 'shacks' are decorated in timber, cane and bamboo. They offer grand ocean views and magnificent private accommodation just a minute's walk from the water.

Eating

our pick Saltwater Café 1770 & Tree Bar (☎ 4974 9599; Captain Cook Dr, Town of 1770; mains \$10-26; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This little salt-encrusted waterfront diner has plenty of charm and an atmospheric bar. Seafood is a prime offering – go for the mud crabs – and the pizzas are excellent.

Kahunas Pizza Bar & Grill (☎ 4974 9428; 1 Grahame Colyer Dr, Agnes Water; mains \$10-30; 🍷 dinner) At Sandcastles, Kahunas is a popular choice, especially for beer and pizza on a hot night. There's plenty of meat on the char-grill and the Moreton Bay bugs come in chilli, citrus, mornay or garlic sauce.

Beachside Bar & Restaurant (☎ 4974 9614; 7 Agnes St, Agnes Water; mains \$13-28; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) You can dine alfresco or indoors at this good restaurant next to Mango Tree Motel and the Agnes beach car park. The menu features seafood, poultry, meat and pasta, and the duck risotto is a recommended choice.

Yok Attack (☎ 4974 7454; Shop 22, Endeavour Plaza, cnr Captain Cook Dr & Round Hill Rd, Agnes Water; mains \$15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) This simple Thai restaurant is very popular with the locals and is highly recommended.

Aggies Restaurant (☎ 4974 9469; Agnes Water Tavern, 1 Tavern Rd, Agnes Water; mains \$22-28; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The large bistro in the tavern offers massive steaks and classic seafood baskets without much atmosphere but the shaded outdoor dining area is quite nice and the bar is a good place to meet the locals.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Only one of several daily **Greyhound** (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) buses detours off the Bruce Hwy to Agnes Water; the direct bus from Bundaberg (\$24, 1½ hours) arrives opposite Cool Bananas at 6.10pm. Others, including **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au), drop passengers at Fingerboard Rd, where a local **shuttle service** (phone 'Macca' ☎ 4974 7540; \$24) meets the bus.

EURIMBULA & DEEPWATER NATIONAL PARKS

South of Agnes Water is Deepwater National Park, an unspoiled coastal landscape with long sandy beaches, freshwater creeks, good fishing spots and two camping grounds. It's also a major breeding ground for loggerhead turtles, which dig nests and lay eggs on the beaches between November and February. You can watch nesting turtles and see emerging hatchlings at night between January and April, but you need to observe various precautions outlined in the QPWS park brochure (obtainable at the office in Town of 1770).

The northern park entrance is 8km south of Agnes Water and is only accessible by 4WD. It's another 5km to the basic camping ground at Middle Rock (no facilities) and a further 2km to the Wreck Rock camping ground and picnic areas, with rain and bore water and composting toilets. Wreck Point can also be accessed from the south by 2WD vehicles via Baffle Creek.

The 78-sq-km Eurimbula National Park, on the northern side of Round Hill Creek, has a landscape of dunes, mangroves and eucalypt forest. There are two basic camping grounds, one at Middle Creek with toilets only and the other at Bustard Beach with toilets and limited rainwater. The main access road to the park is about 10km southwest of Agnes Water.

Middle Rock in Deepwater and Middle Creek in Eurimbula have self-registration stands but you must obtain permits for the other campgrounds from the **Bundaberg QPWS** (☎ 4131 1600).

GLADSTONE

☎ 07 / pop 28,810

On first impression, the industrial town of Gladstone with its busy port, coal- and bauxite-loading terminals, oil tanks, alumina refinery and power station is rather uninspiring. Sometimes first impressions are right. There's little in the way to keep you in town; head straight for the marina, the main departure point for boats to the southern coral cay islands of Heron, Masthead and Wilson on the Great Barrier Reef.

Information

Gladstone City Library (☎ 4976 6400; 39 Goondoon St; 🍷 9.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7.45pm Thu, 9am-4.30pm Sat) Free internet access but you must book in advance.

QPWS (☎ 4971 6500; 3rd fl, 136 Goondoon St; 🍷 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Provides information on all the southern Great Barrier Reef islands, as well as the area's mainland parks.

Visitors centre (☎ 4972 9000; Bryan Jordan Dr; 🍷 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) Located at the marina.

Sights & Activities

If you have time to spare, drive up to the **Auckland Point Lookout** for views over Gladstone harbour, the port facilities and shipping terminals. A brass tablet on the lookout maps the harbour and its many islands.

The **Toondoon Botanic Gardens** (☎ 4971 4444; Glenlyon Rd; admission free; 🍷 9am-6pm Oct-Mar, 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), about 7km south of town, comprises 83 hectares of rainforest, lakes and Australian native plants. There's a visitor centre, an orchid house, and free one-hour guided tours between February and November (tours can be booked at the gardens or visitors centre). The gardens have wheelchair access.

ART DETOUR

Cedar Galleries (☎ 4975 0444; enquiries@cedargalleries.com.au; Bruce Hwy; 🍷 9am-4pm Thu-Sun) is a tranquil artists' bush retreat where you can watch painters and sculptors at work in the hand-built slab-hut studios. To unleash your creative genius you can take **art classes** (🍷 9am-12.30pm Sat; per lesson \$10) or just browse the gardens and the gallery. There's also a café, a beautiful hand-crafted wedding chapel, and winery cellar door but no accommodation, although aspiring artists are welcome to pitch a tent or sleep on the floor. If you're here on the first Sunday of the month you can watch local musicians do their thing at the monthly 'rock-star boot camp' (admission \$12).

This unique artists' colony (30km south of Gladstone) is signposted off the Bruce Hwy, 7km south of Calliope.

In the old town hall, the **Gladstone Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 4976 6766; cnr Goondoon & Bramston Sts; admission free; 🍷 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) displays a rolling programme of local and national exhibitions.

The picturesque **Gecko Valley Winery** (☎ 4979 0400; www.geckovalley.com.au; Glenlyon Rd; 🍷 11am-4pm Tue-Sun) offers wine tasting in a bush setting adjacent to the botanic gardens.

For those who have even more time in Gladstone, **Sable Chief Marine** (☎ 4972 3006) offers PADI dive courses (\$545).

If you're in the area, **market days** (ask the visitors centre for dates) at the **Calliope River Historical Village** (☎ 4975 7428; Dawson Hwy, Calliope; admission \$2; 🍷 8am-4pm), 26km south of Gladstone, are hugely popular. Held six times a year, the 200-plus stalls of arts, crafts, clothes, jewellery and local produce attracts over 3000 people. While here you can wander around the historical village's restored heritage buildings, including an old pub (licensed on market days), church, schoolhouse and a slab hut.

Tours

Gladstone's various industries, including the alumina refineries, aluminium smelter, power station and port authority, offer free **industry tours**. The one- or 1½-hour tours start at different times on different days of the week. Book at the visitors centre.

Curtis Ferry Services (☎ 4972 6990; www.curtisferry.com.au) Has a morning coffee cruise (adult/child \$18/10, 10.40am April to October) leaving the marina every Wednesday, taking in the highlights of the Gladstone harbour. It also connects Gladstone with Curtis Island.

MV Mikat (☎ 4972 3415; www.mikat.com.au) Fishing, diving and sightseeing cruises to the Swains and Bunker Island groups are the speciality of the 20m MV *Mikat*. Cruises are a minimum of three days.

DETOUR: CURTIS ISLAND

Curtis Island, just across the water from Gladstone, can't be confused with a resort island. Apart from swimming, fishing and curling up with a good book, its only real drawcard is the annual appearance of rare flatback turtles on its eastern shores between November and January. With advance notice (contact the Gladstone or Bundaberg QPWS), you can accompany the volunteer rangers on their nightly patrols. There's a free council camping ground and basic, self-contained units at **Capricorn Lodge** (☎ 4972 0222; d \$90). **Curtis Ferry Services** (☎ 4972 6990; www.curtisferryser.com.au; return adult/child/family \$28/20/76) connects the island with Gladstone on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Sleeping

Gladstone Backpackers (☎ 4972 5744; gladstonebackpackers@aapt.net.au; 12 Rollo St; dm/d \$25/55; ☎ ☎) This fairly central hostel has recently undergone renovations – with more to come. It's a friendly, family-run place in an old Queenslander, with a large kitchen, clean bathrooms and an airy outside deck. There's free use of bicycles and free pick-ups from the marina, bus, train and airport.

Barney Beach Caravan Park (☎ 4972 1366; barneybeachpark@bigpond.com.au; Friend St; unpowered/powerd sites \$25/26, cabins \$60-125; ☎ ☎ ☎) About 2km east of the city centre and close to the foreshore, this is the most central of the caravan parks. It's large and tidy, with a good camp kitchen and excellent self-contained accommodation. Complimentary transfers to the marina are available for guests visiting Heron Island. **Buslink Queensland** runs buses here; see opposite.

Auckland Hill B&B (☎ 4972 4907; www.ahbb.com.au; 15 Yarroon St; s/d \$120/175; ☎ ☎) The Auckland is a sprawling, comfortable Queenslander that provides six spacious rooms that come with king-sized beds. Each room is differently decorated: there is a spa suite and one with wheelchair access.

Harbour City Motel (☎ 4976 7100; harbourcitymotel@yahoo.com.au; 20-24 William St; r \$130) This decent motel in the centre of town has large rooms with modern bathrooms, and the motel has a licensed steakhouse.

Eating & Drinking

Gladstone Yacht Club (☎ 4972 8611; 1 Goondoon St; mains \$10-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) With daily buffet specials, the yacht club is a popular place to wine and dine on a budget. Dine on the deck overlooking the water.

Scotties Bar & Restaurant (☎ 4972 9999; 46 Goondoon St; mains \$12-35; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Fri only) Thai, Mediterranean, steak, seafood and pasta: this popular restaurant with a decidedly blue theme has an eclectic and always changing menu that includes a couple of vegetarian options. The walls bear interesting local artwork, and you can sit on the outside deck in the main street.

Kapers BYO (☎ 4972 7902; 124b Goondoon St; mains \$26-30; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) A bright, breezy, off-beat place with hand-painted tables, blackboards scrawled with gems on the meaning of life – including a memo from God – and an imaginative and varied menu.

Flinders (☎ 4972 8322; 2 Oaka Lane; mains \$30-40; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) This cosy restaurant specialises in seafood with tasty dishes such as steamed mud crabs served with hot butter, or with garlic cream, or Singapore-style chilli.

Bojangles Brasserie & Piano Bar (☎ 4972 2847; 6 Goondoon St) Cocktails and live bands.

Entertainment

Gladstone Entertainment Centre (☎ 4972 2822; 58 Goondoon St; ☎ box office 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Showcases various visiting live acts.

Players International Nightclub (☎ 4972 6333; Flinders Pde; ☎ 10pm-late) For late-night drinking and dancing.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Qantaslink (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) has several daily flights between Brisbane and Gladstone (\$110, 70 minutes) and two flights a day between Rockhampton and Gladstone (\$85, 25 minutes). The airport is 7km from the centre.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) has several coach services from Brisbane (\$105, 10½ hours), Bundaberg (\$45, 1½ hours) and Rockhampton (\$34, 2½ hours). The terminal for long-distance buses is at the Mobil 24 Hour Roadhouse, on the Dawson Hwy about 200m southwest of the centre.

BOAT

Curtis Ferry Services (☎ 4972 6990; www.curtisferry.com.au) has regular services to Curtis Island (opposite) five days per week. The service leaves from the Gladstone marina and stops at Farmers Point on Facing Island en route. Transport to North West and Masthead Islands can be arranged on request.

You can also access the islands with various charter operators (p383).

If you've booked a stay on Heron Island, the resort operates a launch (adult/child \$110/55, two hours) which leaves the Gladstone marina at 11am daily.

TRAIN

Queensland Rail (☎ 13 22 32; www.traveltrain.com.au) has frequent north- and southbound services passing through Gladstone daily. The *Tilt Train* stops in Gladstone from Brisbane (\$92.40, 6½ hours) and Rockhampton (\$28.60, one hour). The more sedate *Sunlander* and *Spirit of the Outback* trains take far longer.

Getting Around

Gladstone Airport is 7km south-west of town. **Buslink Queensland** (☎ 4972 1670) has four services daily from the airport into town. Catch either bus 2 or 3 and expect to pay from \$1 to \$3 depending on the route.

In general, public transport to places around Gladstone is severely limited. **Buslink Queensland** (☎ 4972 1670) runs local bus services on weekdays only, including a service along Goondoon St to Barney Point (and the rather unattractive Barney beach), which stops out the front of the caravan park there.

To book a taxi, call **Blue & White Taxis** (☎ 13 10 08).

**AROUND GLADSTONE
Tannum Sands & Boyne Island**

☎ 07 / pop 4140 & 3690

On the coast, 20km southeast of Gladstone, Tannum Sands is the local beachside hang-out. It's a quiet seaside village with a long stretch of pleasant parkland with BBQs and playgrounds along the foreshore at Millennium Esplanade. Across the Boyne River, Boyne Island is even less developed but both areas are popular with fishing and boating enthusiasts.

Boyne Island Motel & Villas (☎ 4973 7444; www.boynemotel.com.au; 3 Orana Ave; d \$85, 1-2-bedroom villas \$115/155; ☎ ☎) has roomy self-contained cabins in tropical gardens close to the beach.

Next door is **Breezes Café** (☎ 4973 3267; 1 Orana Ave; mains \$13-27; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun), about your only option other than shopping-centre cafés.

Lake Awoonga

Created by the construction of the Awoonga Dam in 1984, Lake Awoonga is a popular recreational area 30km south of Gladstone. Backed by the rugged **Mt Castletower National Park**, the lake has landscaped picnic areas, a café, BBQs, walking trails and bird life. You can hire canoes, boats and fishing gear (the lake is stocked with barramundi) from the **Lake Awoonga Caravan Park** (☎ 4975 0155; barra heaven/hotkey.com.au; Lake Awoonga Rd, Benaraby; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, cabins from \$75).

SOUTHERN REEF ISLANDS

If you've ever had 'castaway' dreams of tiny coral atolls fringed with sugary white sand and turquoise blue seas, you've found your island paradise in the southern Great Barrier Reef islands. From beautiful Lady Elliot Island, 80km northeast of Bundaberg, secluded and uninhabited coral reefs and atolls dot the ocean for about 140km up to Tryon Island, east of Rockhampton.

Several cays in this part of the Reef are excellent for snorkelling, diving and just getting back to nature – though reaching them is generally more expensive than reaching islands nearer the coast. Some of the islands are important breeding grounds for turtles and seabirds, and visitors should be aware of precautions to ensure the wildlife's protection, outlined in the relevant QPWS information sheets.

Camping is allowed on Lady Musgrave, Masthead and North West national park islands, and campers must be totally self-sufficient. Numbers are limited, so it's advisable to apply well ahead for a camping permit (\$4.50/18 per person/family). Contact the Gladstone QPWS (☎ 13 13 04; 4971 6500; 136 Goondoon St) or book online (www.epa.qld.gov.au).

Access is from Bundaberg, Town of 1770, Gladstone, or Rosslyn Bay near Yeppoon.

Lady Elliot Island

On the southern frontier of the Great Barrier Reef, Lady Elliot is a 40-hectare vegetated coral cay popular with divers, snorkellers and nesting sea turtles. The island is a breeding and nesting ground for many species of

tropical seabirds but its stunning underwater landscape is the main attraction. Divers can walk straight off the beach to explore an ocean-bed of shipwrecks, coral gardens, bommies (coral pinnacles or outcroppings) and blowholes.

Lady Elliot Island is not a national park, and camping is not allowed. Your only option is the low-key **Lady Elliot Island Resort** (☎ 1800 072 200; www.ladyelliott.com.au; per person tents from \$149, rooms from \$189). Accommodation at this no-frills resort is in basic tent cabins, simple motel-style units, or more expensive two-bedroom self-contained suites. Rates include breakfast and dinner, snorkelling gear and some tours.

The only way to reach the island is in a light aircraft. Seair (book through the resort) flies guests to the resort from Bundaberg and Hervey Bay for \$219/119 per adult/child return. You can also visit the island on a day trip from Bundaberg and Hervey Bay for \$275/146 (the price includes lunch and snorkelling gear).

Lady Musgrave Island

This tiny 15-hectare cay 100km northeast of Bundaberg sits on the western rim of a stunning turquoise blue reef lagoon renowned for its safe swimming, snorkelling and diving. A squeaky-white-sand beach fringes a dense canopy of pisonia forest, which brims with roosting bird life, including terns, shearwaters and white-capped noddies.

The entire island is an uninhabited national park and there is a QPWS camping ground on the island's west side. The camping ground has bush toilets but little else and campers must be totally self-sufficient, even bringing their own water. Numbers are limited to 40 at any one time, so apply well ahead for a permit through the **Environmental Protection Agency** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.qld.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18).

Lady Musgrave Cruises (☎ 1800 631 770, 4974 9077; www.1770reefcruises.com; adult/child \$160/80) operates transfers and day trips from the Town of 1770 marina (see p381).

Heron & Wilson Islands

With the underwater reef world accessible directly from the beach, Heron Island is famed for superb scuba diving and snorkelling, although you'll need a fair amount of cash to visit. A true coral cay, it is densely vegetated with pisonia trees and surrounded by 24 sq km of reef. There's a resort and research sta-

tion on the northeastern third of the island; the remainder is national park.

Heron Island Resort (☎ 4972 9055, 1800 737 678; www.heronisland.com; s/d incl buffet breakfast from \$399/420) covers the northeastern third of the island. Its comfortable accommodation is suited to families and couples; the Point Suites have the best views. Meal packages are extra, and guests will pay \$200/100 per adult/child for launch transfer, or \$440/270 for helicopter transfer. Both operate from Gladstone.

Wilson Island (www.wilsonisland.com; 2 nights incl all meals s/d from \$1530/1980), also part of a national park, is an exclusive wilderness retreat with six permanent tents and solar-heated showers. There are excellent beaches and superb snorkelling. The only access is from Heron Island and you'll need to buy a combined Wilson-Heron package and spend at least two nights on Wilson Island. Transfers between Wilson and Heron are included in the tariff.

ROCKHAMPTON

☎ 07 / pop 60,830

If the wide-brimmed hats, cowboy boots, and V8 utes don't tip you off, the large bull statues around town let you know you're in the 'beef capital' of Australia. With over 2.5 million cattle within a 250km radius of Rockhampton, it's no surprise the smell of bulldust hangs thick in the air. This sprawling country town is the administrative and commercial centre of central Queensland, its wide streets and fine Victorian-era buildings reflecting the region's prosperous 19th-century heyday of gold and copper mining and the beef cattle industry.

Straddling the tropic of Capricorn, 'Rocky' marks the start of the tropics but lying 40km inland and lacking coastal sea breezes, summers here can be unbearably hot and humid. Rocky has a smattering of attractions but is best seen as the gateway to the coastal gems of Yeppoon and Great Keppel Island.

Orientation

Rockhampton is about 40km from the coast. Queensland's largest river, the Fitzroy, flows through the heart of the city, with the small commercial centre (the oldest part of Rocky) on the southern bank. The long Fitzroy Bridge connects the city centre with the newer northern suburbs. Coming in from the south, the Bruce Hwy skirts the centre and crosses the river via the Neville Hewitt Bridge.

EXPERIENCING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Great Barrier Reef is one of Australia's World Heritage areas and one of the seven wonders of the natural world. Stretching 2000km from just south of the tropic of Capricorn (near Gladstone) to Torres Strait (just south of New Guinea), it is the most extensive reef system in the world.

The southern and fragmented end of the reef spreads itself as far as 300km from the mainland, but at the northern end the reef sits close to the coast in continuous stretches up to 80km wide. The lagoon between the outer reef and the mainland is dotted with smaller reefs, cays and islands. It's said you could dive here every day of your life and still not see the entire Great Barrier Reef. Consequently, selecting where to get wet can be quite bewildering. Some of the most popular ports providing good access to the reef are detailed here.

Agnes Water & Town of 1770

Tours (p380) take you to the beautiful reef lagoon at **Lady Musgrave Island**, for excellent snorkelling and diving.

Gladstone

Gladstone (p383) is the closest access point to the southern Reef islands and innumerable cays. Among these is **Lady Elliot Island** (p385).

Airlie Beach

The big attraction at Airlie Beach (p410) is spending two or more days aboard a boat and seeing some of the fringing coral reefs amid the **Whitsunday Islands**. There are, however, several fast catamarans that zoom out to pontoons moored on spectacular **Knuckle** and **Hardy Reefs**, which provide outstanding snorkelling and diving.

Townsville

Near Townsville (p424), **Kelso Reef** and the **Yongala shipwreck** are teeming with marine life. As well as overnight tours for divers, there are one- or two- day-trip options in glass-bottomed boats. The **Reef HQ Aquarium**, which is the Great Barrier Reef in a nutshell, is also here.

Mission Beach

Closer to the reef than any other gateway destination, Mission Beach (p440) is small and quiet and has a few boat and diving tours to the outer reef. Although the choice isn't big, neither are the crowds.

Cairns

The main launching pad for Great Barrier Reef tours: from Cairns (p450) you can do anything from relatively inexpensive day trips on huge, crowded boats to intimate five-day luxury charters. Some operators go as far north as **Lizard Island** for spectacular night diving and the famous Cod Hole.

Port Douglas

This swanky resort town (p463) is the gateway to the **Low Isles** and the **Agincourt Reef**, an outer ribbon reef with crystal-clear water and particularly stunning coral. Diving, snorkelling and cruising trips tend to be classier, pricier and less crowded than in Cairns.

Cooktown

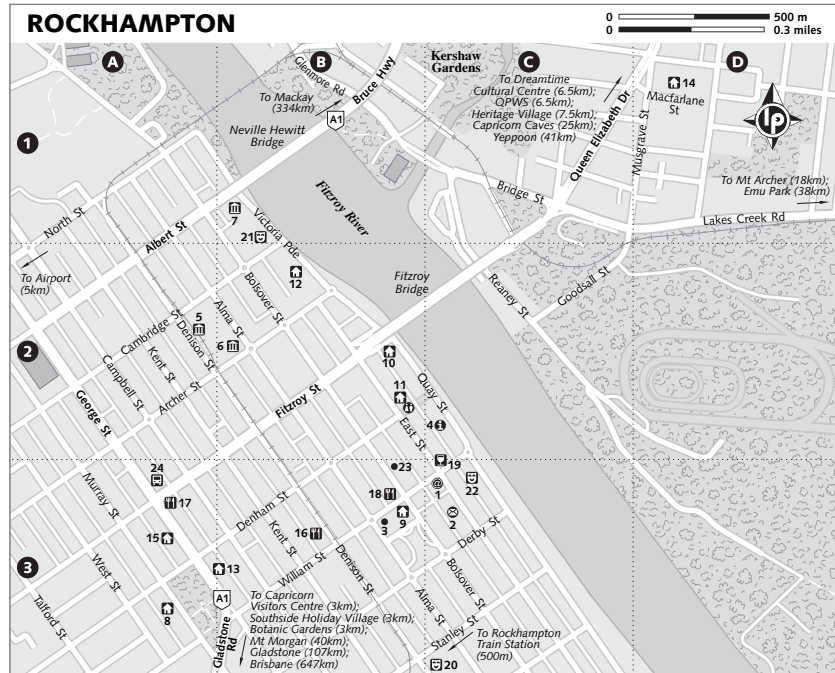
The lure of Cooktown (p474) is its close proximity to **Lizard Island**. A handful of tour operators promise unrushed experiences, but operations pretty much shut down between November and May.

Information

Capricorn visitors centre (☎ 4927 2055; Gladstone Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) Helpful centre on the highway beside the tropic of Capricorn marker, 3km south of the centre.

Cyber Oz Internet Café (☎ 4927 3633; 24 William St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri; per hr \$5)

Post office (☎ 13 13 18; 150 East St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)



QPWS (☎ 4936 0511; 61 Yeppoon Rd, North Rockhampton) About 7km northwest of central Rockhampton.

Rockhampton library (☎ 4936 8265; 69 William St; ☎ 9.15am-5.30pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 1-8pm Wed, 9.15am-8pm Thu, 9.15am-4.30pm Sat) Free internet access, but you need to book.

Rockhampton visitors centre (☎ 4922 5339; 208 Quay St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Very helpful central office in the beautiful former Customs House.

Sights & Activities

Rockhampton's **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 4922 1654; Spencer St; admission free; ☎ 6am-6pm) is a beautiful oasis with impressive banyan figs, tropical and subtropical rainforest, landscaped gardens and lily-covered lagoons just south of town. There's a formal Japanese garden, a café, and a small **zoo** (☎ 8am-5pm) with koalas, wombats, dingoes and a walk-through aviary.

In town, **Quay Street** has grand sandstone Victorian-era buildings dating back to the gold-rush days. You can pick up town walking maps from the visitors centres.

The excellent **Rockhampton City Art Gallery** (☎ 4927 7129; 62 Victoria Pde; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm

Tue-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) boasts an impressive collection of Australian paintings, including works by Sir Russell Drysdale, Sir Sidney Nolan and Albert Namatjira. Contemporary indigenous artist Judy Watson also has a number of works on display. The permanent collection is supplemented by innovative temporary exhibitions, for which there are varying admission charges.

About 7km north of town, the **Dreamtime Cultural Centre** (☎ 4936 1655; www.dreamtimecentre.com.au; Bruce Hwy; adult/child \$13.50/6.50; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, tours 10.30am & 1pm) is an engaging exploration of regional indigenous heritage and includes an art gallery, a sporting hall of fame, interpretive walking trails and excellent 90-minute tours.

The **Archer Park Station & Steam Tram Museum** (☎ 4922 2774; Denison St; adult/child/family \$6.60/4.50/15; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Fri) is housed in a former train station built in 1899. Through photographs and displays it tells the station's story, and that of the unique Purrey steam tram

Next door is the **Central Queensland Military & Artifacts Association Inc** (☎ 4921 0648; 40 Archer St; adult/concession \$5/4; ☎ 9am-4pm), with dis-

INFORMATION		Coffee House.....9 B3		Restaurant 98.....(see 12)	
Cyber Oz Internet Café.....1 C3	Criterion Hotel.....10 B2	Thai Tane.....18 B3			
Post Office.....2 C3	Downtown Backpackers.....11 B2				
Rockhampton Library.....3 B3	Motel 98.....12 B2				
Rockhampton Visitors Centre.....4 C2	Rockhampton Plaza Hotel.....13 B3				
	Rockhampton YHA.....14 D1				
	Welcome Hotel Motel.....15 A3				
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING ☎		ENTERTAINMENT ☎	
Archer Park Station & Steam Tram Museum.....5 A2	Central Queensland Military & Artifacts Association Inc.....6 B2	Bush Inn Bar & Grill.....(see 10)	Great Western Hotel.....20 C3	Pilbeam Theatre.....21 B1	Stadium.....22 C3
Rockhampton City Art Gallery.....7 B1		Coffee House.....(see 9)			
		Gnomes.....16 B3			
		Pacino's.....17 A3			
SLEEPING ☎		TRANSPORT			
Central Park Motel.....8 A3		Kern Arcade.....23 B3	Mobil Roadhouse.....24 A3	Sunbus Terminus.....(see 23)	

plays of Australian involvement in various military campaigns and wars. During WWII Rockhampton was home to 76,000 US servicemen and there's plenty of American memorabilia on display. Look out for some interesting 'trench art' pieces fashioned from discarded ammo casings, bullet shells and the like.

Rockhampton's **Heritage Village** (☎ 4936 1026; Bruce Hwy; adult/child/family \$7.70/4.50/22.70; ☎ 9am-4pm), 10km north of the city centre, is an interactive museum of replica historic buildings set in lovely landscaped gardens, and even has townspeople at work in period garb. There's also an visitors centre here.

Just north of the Fitzroy River, **Kershaw Gardens** (☎ 4936 8254; via Charles St; admission free; ☎ 6am-6pm) is an excellent botanical park devoted to Australian native plants. Its attractions include artificial rapids, a rainforest area, a fragrant garden and heritage architecture.

As a backdrop to the city, **Mt Archer** rises 604m out of the landscape northeast of Rockhampton, offering stunning views of the city and hinterland from the summit, especially at night. It's an environmental park with walking trails weaving through eucalypts and rainforest.

Tours

Highly recommended is **Capricorn Dave's Beef n Reef Adventures** (☎ 1800 753 786, 0427-159 655; www.capricorndave.com.au; day trip \$99). The whirlwind adventure tours around Rocky's hidden bush gems, swimming in billabongs, visiting an outback cattle station, and getting close to Australian wildlife. Lunch and transfers to and from your accommodation are included in the action-packed full-day tour. The random adventures continue on overnight trips with night-time wildlife spotting and cattle farm camping.

Sleeping BUDGET

Downtown Backpackers (☎ 4922 1837; fax 4922 1050; Oxford Hotel, 91 East St; dm \$20; ☎) Located upstairs over a boisterous bar, Downtown Backpackers offers basic, budget accommodation right in the centre of town. YHA and VIP members receive discounts.

Southside Holiday Village (☎ 1800 075 911, 4927 3013; www.sshv.com.au; Lower Dawson Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/26, cabins \$45-85; ☎) This is one of the city's best caravan parks. It has neat, self-contained cabins with elevated decking, large grassed camp sites, a courtesy coach and a good camp kitchen. It's about 3km south of the centre.

Rockhampton YHA (☎ 1800 617 194, 4927 5288; www.yha.com.au; 60 MacFarlane St; dm \$22, d \$50-59; ☎) The Rocky YHA has a spacious lounge and dining area and a well-equipped kitchen. It has six- and nine-bed dorms as well as doubles and cabins with bathrooms and there's a large patch of lawn to toss a ball around. The hostel arranges tours, has courtesy pickups from the bus station, and is an agent for Premier and Greyhound buses.

Criterion Hotel (☎ 4922 1225; www.thecriterion.com.au; 150 Quay St; s/d \$45/65, motel \$108; ☎) The Criterion is Rockhampton's grandest old pub with an elegant foyer and function room, a friendly bar and a great bistro (p390). Its top two storeys have dozens of period rooms, some of them beautifully restored, but although the rooms have showers the toilets are down the hall. The hotel also has a number of new 4.5-star motel rooms.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Welcome Home Motel (☎ 4927 7800; 156 George St; s/d \$78/85; ☎) On a busy thoroughfare, this basic motel has large, quite comfortable rooms but has a curious lack of bench space or hand basins in the bathrooms.

Rockhampton Plaza Hotel (☎ 4927 5855; www.rockhamptonplaza.com.au; 161-7 George St; d \$105-115; 📶 📺 📶; wi-fi) The Plaza has well-appointed, pretty typical four-star hotel rooms that overlook a park. There's a bar and restaurant and it's located a short stroll southwest of the centre and close to the train station.

Central Park Motel (☎ 4927 2333; CENPARK@bigpond.com; 224 Murray St; s/d \$106/121; 📶 📺 📶) In a quiet street opposite a park but close to the town centre, this motel has large rooms and suites catering for singles to families.

Coffee House (☎ 4927 5722; www.coffeehouse.com.au; 51 William St; r from 155; 📶 📺 📶) Generally popular with the business traveller, the Coffee House features beautifully appointed motel rooms, self-contained apartments and spa suites in central Rocky. There is a popular and stylish café-restaurant-wine bar (see below) on site.

Motel 98 (☎ 4927 5322; www.98.com.au; 98 Victoria Pde; d \$155; 📶 📺 📶) The smart Motel 98 has well-appointed, spacious rooms around a pool. The restaurant (see right) has a terrace overlooking the river, and a sound reputation as one of the best restaurants in town.

Eating & Drinking

Thai Tanea (☎ 4922 1255; cnr William & Bolsover Sts; mains \$10-20; 🍴 dinner) This unpretentious restaurant is recommended by the locals for consistently good Thai food.

Bush Inn Bar & Grill (☎ 4922 1225; Criterion Hotel, 150 Quay St; dishes \$10-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The Bush Inn has a modern western theme with stone floors, wooden booths and tables, and huge steaks to match. It's a popular spot for a drink and good pub grub.

Gnomes (☎ 4927 4713; 106 William St; mains \$13-19; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) In this charming courtyard café, you'll find gluten-free and vegetarian dishes in a casual BYO setting.

Coffee House (☎ 4927 5722; 51 William St; mains \$20-30; 🍴 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) A stylish though relaxed café-restaurant-wine bar (with an extensive wine list – and big Sunday brunches), this is also a popular spot to indulge in local seafood and beef.

our pick Pacino's (☎ 4922 5833; cnr Fitzroy & George Sts; mains \$20-37; 🍴 dinner Tue-Sun) Oozing Mediterranean warmth with its stone floors, wooden tables and potted fig trees, this stylish restaurant serves delicious Italian favourites such as *osso bucco* and pasta cooked a dozen different ways.

Restaurant 98 (☎ 4927 5322; www.98.com.au; 98 Victoria Pde; mains \$22-37 🍴 lunch & dinner) One of Rocky's finest, this licensed dining room features modern Australian versions of kangaroo, steak, lamb and seafood. Sit inside or on the terrace overlooking the Fitzroy River.

Ginger Mule (☎ 4927 7255; William St; 🍴 4pm-late Wed-Sat) An urban-chic wine bar, this place draws the Friday night crowd for a spot of tapas and cocktails.

Entertainment

Great Western Hotel (☎ 4922 3888; 39 Stanley St) Looking like a spaghetti western film set, this grand old pub is home to Rocky's cowboys and gals. Out back there's a rodeo arena where every Friday night bucking bulls toss cowboys in the air. Great entertainment!

Stadium (☎ 4927 9988; 234 Quay St; admission after 10pm \$7; 🍴 late Fri & Sat) This is the place most partygoers head after the pubs. It's a large, flashy club with a sporty theme – you dance on a mini basketball court.

Pilbeam Theatre (☎ 4927 4111; Victoria Pde) This plush 967-seat theatre is located in the Rockhampton Performing Arts Complex and hosts a range of national and international acts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Jetstar, Qantas, Tiger Airways and Virgin Blue connect Rockhampton with various cities. See p379 for more details.

BUS

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 20 30; www.greyhound.com.au) has regular services from Rocky to Mackay (\$60, four hours), Brisbane (\$114, 11 hours) and Cairns (\$178, 18 hours). All services stop at the **Mobil roadhouse** (91 George St). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) operates a Brisbane-Cairns service, stopping at Rockhampton.

Young's Bus Service (☎ 4922 3813) to Yeppoon (\$8.10, 45 minutes) includes a loop through Rosslyn Bay and Emu Park. Buses depart from the Kern Arcade in Bolsover St.

TRAIN

The **Queensland Rail** (☎ 1300 131 722, 4932 0453) *Tilt Train* and *Sunlander* connect Rockhampton with Brisbane (from \$102) and Cairns (\$167). The journey takes seven to 11 hours, depending on which service you take. The *Spirit of*

CAPRICORN CAVES & BENT-WING BATS

In the Berserker Ranges, 24km north of Rockhampton near the Caves township, the amazing **Capricorn Caves** (☎ 4934 2883; www.capricorncaves.com.au; Caves Rd; adult/child \$20/10; 🕒 9am-4pm) are not to be missed. These ancient caves honeycomb a limestone ridge and on a guided tour through the caverns and labyrinths you'll see cave coral, stalactites, dangling fig-tree roots, and little insectivorous bats. The highlight of the one-hour Cathedral tour is the beautiful natural rock cathedral where a haunting rendition of 'Amazing Grace' is played to demonstrate the cavern's incredible acoustics. Every December traditional Christmas carol sing-alongs are held in the cathedral. Also in December, around the summer solstice (1 December to 14 January), sunlight beams directly through a 14m vertical shaft into Belfry Cave creating an electrifying light show. If you stand directly below the beam, reflected sunlight colours the whole cavern with whatever colour you're wearing.

Daring spelunkers can book a two-hour adventure tour (\$60) that takes you through tight spots with names such as 'Fat Man's Misery'. You must be at least 16 years old for this tour.

The Capricorn Caves complex has BBQ areas, a pool, kiosk, and **accommodation** (unpowered/powered sites \$20/25, cabins from \$90). Prices are for two people.

Nearby, **Mt Etna National Park** (☎ 4936 0511; adult/child \$8/4; 🕒 tours 5.30pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat Dec-Feb) is one of only five known maternity sites of the little bent-wing bat and accommodates 80% of the Australian population. There are no facilities and access is restricted. Rangers run night tours of the bat caves (bookings essential) from the Caves township.

the Outback also connects Rockhampton with Brisbane (\$102, 10 hours), Emerald (\$94, five hours), and Longreach (\$111, 11 hours) twice weekly. The train station is 450m southwest of the city centre.

Getting Around

Rockhampton airport is 5km south of the centre. **Sunbus** (☎ 4936 2133) runs a reasonably comprehensive city bus network operating all day Monday to Friday and Saturday morning. All services terminate in Bolsover St, between William and Denham Sts. There's also a taxi service in town, **Rocky Cabs** (☎ 13 10 08).

YEPPOON

☎ 07 / pop 13,290

Pretty little Yeppoon is a small seaside town with a long beach, a calm ocean and an attractive hinterland of volcanic outcrops, pineapple patches and grazing lands. The handful of quiet streets, sleepy motels and beachside cafés attract Rockhamptonites beating the heat, and tourists heading for Great Keppel Island only 13km offshore.

Information

The extremely helpful **Capricorn Coast visitors centre** (☎ 1800 675 785, 4939 4888; www.capricorncoast.com.au; Scenic Hwy; 🕒 9am-5pm) is beside the Ross Creek roundabout at the entrance to the town.

Click On Central (☎ 4939 5300; cnr Mary & James Sts) has internet access for \$5 per hour. The **Yeppoon library** (☎ 4939 3433; 78 John St) has free internet access.

Sights & Activities

Champions Brock Experience (☎ 1300 798 405; www.championsbrockexperience.com.au; 15 Jabiru Dr; adult/child \$32/14; 🕒 10am-4pm Thu, Fri & Mon, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) has the country's largest collection of racing legend Peter Brock's race and road cars. Entry is by guided tour only; tours commence on the hour and last 50 minutes.

Nearby, the **Horse & Carriage** (☎ 4939 5951; www.thehorseandcarriage.com; cnr Rockhampton Rd & Millroy Dr; adult/child \$10/5; 🕒 10am-2pm Tue-Sun) has Queensland's largest collection of horse-drawn vehicles on display, as well as photographs and memorabilia of pioneering Australia.

Rosslyn Bay Marina, 7km south of Yeppoon, is the departure point for yacht charters, tours, and the ferry (see p394) to Great Keppel Island. **Funtastic Cruises** (☎ 0438-909 502; www.funtasticcruises.com; full-day cruise adult/child \$90/75) operates full-day snorkelling trips to Middle Island on board its 17m catamaran, with a two-hour stopover on Great Keppel Island, morning and afternoon tea, and all snorkelling equipment. It can also organise camping drop offs to islands en route. **Sail Capricornia** (☎ 0402-102 373; www.keppelbaymarina.com.au) offers

full-day snorkelling cruises on board a 12m yacht (adult/child \$99/65 including lunch) as well as sunset and overnight cruises.

Golfers should check out Rydges Capricorn Resort (below).

Sleeping

Beachside Caravan Park (☎ 4939 3738; Farnborough Rd; unpowered/power sites \$18/21) This neat little camping park north of the town centre boasts an absolute beachfront location. It has good amenities and grassed sites with some shade but no cabins or on-site vans.

our pick **Surfside Motel** (☎ 4939 1272; surfsideptyldt@bigpond.com; 30 Anzac Pde; s/d \$85/100; ☎) Across the road from the beach and close to town, this strip of lime green motel units epitomises Queensland summer holidays. The rooms have basic amenities but they're clean and cheerful. Great value.

Driftwood Motel & Holiday Units (☎ 4939 2446; www.driftwoodunits.com.au; 5-7 Todd Ave; s/d \$95/150; ☎) Huge self-contained units at motel prices with absolute beach frontage make Driftwood a great bargain. There are good family units with separate bedrooms and there's a children's playground, but there's a four-night minimum stay in high season.

While Away B&B (☎ 4939 5719; www.whileawaybandb.com.au; 44 Todd Ave; s/d incl breakfast \$100/120; ☎) With four good-sized rooms and an immaculately clean house with wheelchair access, this B&B is a perfect, quiet getaway – note that there are no facilities for kids. There are complimentary nibbles, tea, coffee, port and sherry as well as generous breakfasts.

Rosslyn Bay Inn (☎ 4933 6333; www.rosslynbayinn.com.au; Vin E Jones Dr; r from \$115; ☎) At the marina. You'll find comfortable studio rooms and one- and two-bedroom units, as well as a bar and restaurant.

Beachfront 55 (☎ 4939 1403; www.beachfront55.com.au; 55 Todd Ave; units \$129, villas from \$285; ☎) The comfortable fully self-contained units have private BBQs and courtyards while the three-bedroom villa has a private pool, overlooks a garden and has ocean glimpses.

Rydges Capricorn Resort (☎ 1800 075 902, 4925 2525; www.capricornresort.com; Farnborough Rd; d \$200-350; ☎) This large and lavish golf resort, about 8km north of Yeppoon, offers standard hotel rooms through to plush self-contained apartments. There's a huge pool, a gym and several bars and restaurants. The resort's two immaculate golf courses are open to the public at

\$80 for 18 holes, which includes a motorised buggy. Club hire costs another \$15.

Eating & Drinking

Shore Thing (☎ 4939 1993; 6 Normanby St; mains under \$14; ☎ breakfast & lunch) At this breezy little café on the main street you can tuck into sandwiches, focaccias, wraps and big breakfasts.

Goosehorn (☎ 4939 5610; Normanby St; mains \$10-28; ☎ 7am-late) A very metro-chic café-restaurant-wine bar with cool lighting, polished cement floors and a groovy atmosphere. You can nibble on tapas or nachos or something more substantial like pasta, steaks or Moreton Bay bugs. Also has an interesting cocktail list.

Keppel Bay Sailing Club (☎ 4939 9537; Anzac Pde; mains \$10-34; ☎ lunch & dinner) Choose between the beachfront clubhouse and deck with good steaks and seafood or cross the road for a cheap buffet meal and the din of countless pokies at Spinnakers.

Thai Take-Away (☎ 4939 3920; 24 Anzac Pde; mains \$12-20; ☎ dinner) A popular Thai BYO restaurant where you can sit outside on the sidewalk, catch a sea breeze, and satisfy those chilli and coconut cravings.

our pick **Megalomania** (☎ 4939 2333; Arthur St; mains \$20-35; ☎ 11am-late) Another ultracoal urban hang-out with a stone floor, slatted wooden blinds and an urban-islander vibe, this is a great place for a dinner or a drink. The menu changes weekly.

Michael's on Matthew Flinders (☎ 4930 2700; 105 Matthew Flinders Dr, Cooee Bay; mains \$20-35; ☎ dinner Mon-Sun, breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch Fri-Sun) With a Mediterranean setting and breathtaking views of the bay, Michael's is the place for fine dining and intimate dinners.

Strand Hotel (☎ 4939 1301; 2 Normanby St; cnr Anzac Pde) The Strand has live music every weekend and is especially known for its Sunday afternoon Parilla, a South American themed BBQ with music to match.

Getting There & Away

Yeppoon is 43km northeast of Rockhampton. **Young's Bus Service** (☎ 4922 3813) runs frequent buses from Rockhampton (\$8.10 one way) to Yeppoon and down to the Rosslyn Bay marina.

If you're heading for Great Keppel or the Reef, some ferry operators will transport you between your accommodation and Rosslyn Bay marina. If you're driving, there's a free day car park at the marina. For secure under-

cover parking, the **Great Keppel Island Security Car Park** (☎ 4933 6670; 422 Scenic Hwy; per day from \$8), is on the Scenic Hwy south of Yeppoon, close to the turn-off to Rosslyn Bay marina.

AROUND YEPPOON

Emu Park

☎ 07 / pop 2970

The drive south from Yeppoon and Rosslyn Bay passes three fine headlands with good views – **Double Head**, **Bluff Point** and **Pinnacle Point**. After Pinnacle Point the road crosses **Causeway Lake**, a saltwater inlet where you can hire fishing boats, bait and tackle for a spot of estuary fishing. About 19km south of Yeppoon is Emu Park, a small seaside town with more good views and the **Singing Ship** memorial to Captain Cook – a curious monument of drilled tubes and pipes that emit mournful whistling and moaning sounds in the breeze.

Fifteen kilometres along the Emu Park–Rockhampton road, the **Koorana Crocodile Farm** (☎ 4934 4749; www.koorana.com.au; Coowonga Rd; adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 10am-3pm, tours 10.30am & 1pm) is a simple farm with lots of crocs destined to become fashion accessories or the odd restaurant meal.

If you plan on staying in this sleepy village, **Bell Park Caravan Park** (☎ 4939 6202; bellpark@primus.com.au; Pattinson St, Emu Park; unpowered/power sites \$18/22, cabins \$84) has spacious sites, clean amenities and comfortable cabins a stone's throw from the beach.

Byfield

The hinterland north of Yeppoon is largely undeveloped state forest and national park bordering the large Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area (which is strictly off limits). The Byfield National Park and State Forest forms the **Byfield Coastal Area**, a wild and scenic region of rocky headlands, long sandy beaches, heath land, forest, mangrove-lined estuaries, rain-forested creeks and granite mountains. There are five **camping grounds** (☎ 13 13 04; www.epa.gov.au; per person/family \$4.50/18): Upper Stony Creek, Red Rock, Waterpark Creek, Nine Mile Beach and Five Rocks. There's a self-registration stand at Red Rock but the other camp sites must be prebooked. Both Nine Mile Beach and Five Rocks are on the beach and you'll need a 4WD to access them. When conditions are right, there's decent surf at Nine Mile.

The tiny town of Byfield is a pleasant 40km drive north of Yeppoon and consists of a general store, a school and a cluster of houses.

Just south of Byfield, **Nob Creek Pottery** (☎ 4935 1161; 216 Arnolds Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) is an outstanding working pottery and gallery nestled in leafy rainforest where you can see the potters at work.

our pick **Waterpark Eco-Tours** (☎ 4935 1171; www.waterparkecotours.com; 201 Waterpark Creek Rd; 2-3hr tours \$25; cabin \$100; ☎) Offers excellent river trips in a silent, electric-powered boat, and a horse-drawn carriage ride through a working tea-tree plantation. If you find it hard to leave the genuine hospitality on offer, there's a fully self-contained timber cabin on the 97-hectare farm where you can swing in a hammock, swim in the creek or just relax for a while.

Ferns Hideaway (☎ 4935 1235; www.fernshideaway.com.au; 67 Cahills Rd; unpowered sites \$24, d \$150; ☎) north of Byfield, is a secluded bush oasis in immaculate gardens that offers canoeing and nature walks. The timber homestead has a quality à la carte **restaurant** (mains \$13-25; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Sat, breakfast Sun), while nestled among the trees are cosy self-contained cabins with wood fires. Campers have hot showers included in the tariff.

The **Byfield General Store & Café** (☎ 4935 1190; 223 Byfield Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Wed-Mon, to 2pm Tue) has basic grocery supplies and a simple courtyard café serving pies, sandwiches and burgers. You can get fuel here and also some very good information about the national park.

GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND

Great Keppel Island has a stunning natural landscape of rocky headlands, forested hills, and a fringe of powdery white sand lapped by clear azure waters. Numerous 'castaway' beaches ring the 14-sq-km island while natural bushland covers 90% of the interior. A string of huts and accommodation options sit behind the trees lining the main beach but the developments are low-key and relatively unobtrusive. Only 13km offshore from Yeppoon, and with good snorkelling, swimming and bush walking, Great Keppel is an easily accessible and tranquil island retreat.

The sudden closure of Great Keppel Island Resort in February 2008 (at the time of research) has left tour operations and activities in a state of flux. Please check with the Capricorn Coast visitors centre (p391) on the current status.

Sights

Great Keppel's beaches are simply gorgeous. Take a short stroll from **Fisherman's Beach**, the

main beach, and you'll find your own deserted stretch of white sand. There is fairly good coral and excellent fish life, especially between Great Keppel and Humpy Island to the south. A 30-minute walk south around the headland brings you to **Monkey Beach**, where there's good snorkelling. A walking trail from the southern end of the airfield takes you to **Long Beach**, perhaps the best of the island's beaches.

There are several bushwalking tracks from Fisherman's Beach, the longest and perhaps most difficult leads to the 2.5m 'lighthouse' near **Bald Rock Point** on the far side of the island (three hours return).

You can see an **underwater observatory** off Middle Island, close to Great Keppel. A confiscated Taiwanese fishing junk was sunk next to the observatory to provide a haven for fish.

Activities

The **Watersports Hut** on the main beach hires out snorkelling equipment, kayaks and catamarans.

Keppel Reef Scuba Adventures (☎ 4939 5022; www.keppeldive.com; Putney Beach) offers introductory dives for \$120, snorkelling trips (per person \$38), and also hires out snorkelling gear (per day \$15).

Tours

The ferry from Rosslyn Bay marina, **Freedom Fast Cats** (☎ 1800 336 244, 4933 6244; adult/child \$63/42) operates a coral cruise to the best location of the day (depending on tides and weather), which includes viewing through a glass-bottomed boat and fish feeding. It also has full-day cruises (adult/child \$130/85) including coral viewing, fish feeding, snorkelling, boom netting and a barbecue lunch.

Sleeping

Without Great Keppel Island Resort, accommodation options are severely limited. The resort is undergoing extensive renovations and refurbishments but will not re-open in the foreseeable future.

Holiday homes can be rented through the **Capricorn Coast visitors centre** (☎ 1800 675 785, 4939 4888; www.capricorncoast.com.au; Scenic Hwy, Yeppoon; ☎ 9am-5pm) in Yeppoon. Six- and eight-bedroom homes can be rented in their entirety or the rooms can be rented as individual motel-style suites.

Great Keppel Island Backpackers & Holiday Village (☎ 4939 8655; www.gkiholidayvillage.com.au; dm \$33, s/d

tents \$58/80, cabins with bathroom \$130, 2-bedroom houses from \$210) offers various types of good budget accommodation (including four-bed dorms and cabins that sleep three). It's a very friendly, relaxed place with shared bathroom facilities and a decent communal kitchen and BBQ area. Snorkelling gear is free and the village operates a water-taxi service for tours and island drop offs (from \$20 per person) and motorised canoe trips around Middle Island (\$35 per person).

Keppel Lodge (☎ 4939 4251; www.keppellodge.com.au; Fisherman's Beach; s/d \$100/130, each additional person \$50) is a pleasant open-plan house with four large bedrooms (with bathrooms) branching from a large communal lounge and kitchen. The house is available in its entirety – ideal for a group booking – or as individual motel-type suites.

our pick Svendsen's Beach (☎ 4938 3717; www.svendsensbeach.com; Svendsen's Beach; cabins per night \$285, minimum 3 night stay) This secluded boutique castaway retreat has two luxury tent-bungalows on separate elevated timber decks overlooking lovely Svendsen's Beach. The environmentally friendly operation has solar heating, wind generators, rainwater tanks and an ecofridge, and the communal beach-kitchen has a BBQ and stove-top. The artistic owner has fashioned decorative wooden sculptures and furnishings including a quaint candlelit bush-bucket shower. It's the perfect place for snorkelling, bushwalking and romantic getaways. Transfers from the ferry drop off on Fisherman's Beach are included in the tariff.

Eating

Self-caterers will need to bring all their supplies as there are no grocery stores, and only one restaurant, on the island.

Island Pizza (☎ 4939 4699; The Esplanade; dishes \$6-30; ☎ check blackboard for opening times) This friendly place prides itself on its gourmet pizzas with plenty of toppings. The pizzas are rather pricey but still tempting. Also available are hot dogs and pasta.

Getting There & Away

Freedom Fast Cats (☎ 1800 336 244, 4933 6244; www.keppelbaymarina.com.au) departs the Keppel Bay marina in Rosslyn Bay (7km south of Yeppoon) at 9am Tuesday to Sunday, returning at 4pm. On Tuesday and Friday there's also a 10am ferry from the island, and a 3.30pm service from Rosslyn Bay to the island. The return

ISLAND CASTAWAY

'I love my castaway life.' Lyndie Malan sailed into Svendsen's Beach on Great Keppel Island 17 years ago and fell in love with the island...and a modern-day Robinson Crusoe, Carl Svendsen, who has lived his entire life on the island. This environmentally aware couple run a boutique ecotourist retreat at Svendsen's Beach (opposite) where guests can swim in secluded bays, snorkel the reefs or spend hours beachcombing for shells and driftwood.

'I love the bird life, the kookaburras and rainbow lorikeets, and the wonderful nocturnal birds like the curlews with their sad, plaintive cries. The walking tracks and fringing coral reefs give a 'desert island' feel to the place. We're a retreat not a resort, and we're trying really hard to cut our carbon footprint to almost nothing. But the thing I love the most is that turtles still lay their eggs on the island. Everything about turtles is kind of mysterious and magical, and if you're incredibly lucky you can encounter a girl laying her eggs on an evening walk.'

Lyndie's passion for her island life spills into her paintings and artistic driftwood pieces that decorate the retreat, and her passion for nature has inspired guided turtle tours, and books on local bushwalking and snorkelling hot spots for her guests.

A few days on Svendsen's Beach is a taste of modern-day castaway life, and like Lyndie you'll love the fact there are no neighbours and that you can sing as loud as you like.

fare is \$41/22.50/107.50 per adult/child/family. If you have booked accommodation, check that someone will meet you on the beach to help with your luggage. Note that ferry departure times have been affected by the closure of Great Keppel Island Resort – ring to confirm times before planning your trip.

OTHER KEPPEL BAY ISLANDS

Great Keppel is the largest of 18 stunning continental islands dotted around Keppel Bay, all within 20km of the coast. Unlike coral cay islands, which are formed by the build-up of tiny fragments of coral, algae and other reef plants and animals, continental islands were originally rocky outcrops of the mainland ranges.

These beautiful islands feature clean, white beaches and impossibly clear water ranging from pale turquoise through to deep indigo blue. Several have fringing coral reefs excellent for snorkelling or diving. You can visit **Middle Island**, with its underwater observatory, or **Halfway** and **Humpy** Islands if you're staying on Great Keppel. Some of the islands are national parks where you can maroon yourself for a few days of self-sufficient camping.

To camp on a national park island, you need to take all your own supplies, including water. Camper numbers on each island are restricted. For information and permits call the **QPWS** (www.epa.gov.au) Rockhampton (☎ 4936 0511); Rosslyn Bay (☎ 4933 6608).

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