

GIPPSLAND & WILSONS PROMONTORY

Gippsland is home to some of the most diverse, unspoilt and beautiful wilderness areas and beaches in the state. The region sprawls from just outside Melbourne right along the coast to the New South Wales border, edged by the imposing Great Dividing Range. You'll find towns with strong identities, isolated beaches, and more wildlife and bush than you'll see anywhere else in Victoria. You can get a taste of it just over an hour from Melbourne along Grand Ridge Rd, a sensational day-long drive along a mostly gravel road, punctuated by a winery and a brewery, and ending with the splendour of Tarra-Bulga National Park – a feast for the eyes with towering mountain ash and valleys of giant tree ferns.

Two hours from Melbourne is the popular South Gippsland beachside town of Inverloch, and the rugged and spectacular Bunurong Marine Coastal Park – perfect for indulging your surfing, snorkelling or diving passions, or just having fun swimming, rock-pool rambling or hanging out in cafés. Not much further on is the iconic Wilsons Promontory National Park, where you can immerse yourself in the carefully preserved pristine wilderness, with walking tracks ranging from easy strolls with prams to tough terrain for the intrepid.

Within two to three hours' drive of Melbourne are some quirky little towns like alternative Koonwarra, with its organic cooking school, day spa, and delightful general store/café, the increasingly upmarket fishing village of Port Albert, and the historic gold-mining township of Walhalla.

In the centre of the region are the huge Gippsland Lakes, dotted with coastal towns with jetties full of bobbing boats. The Lakes District is Australia's largest inland waterway system, a rich haven for birds, and a favourite for boating, fishing and swimming. It's separated by coastal dunes from the long stretch of Ninety Mile Beach, which has some superbly isolated beaches.

Beyond the Lakes it's a four-hour drive into East Gippsland, home to a third of Victoria's forests. Here you'll find fabulous and varied camping opportunities, modest cabins and lodges and the occasional lighthouse to stay in. One of the most accessible parks from Melbourne is Cape Conran Coastal Park, a fabulous park for wildlife spotting, nature walks, swimming, diving and fishing. Once you're past Cape Conran there are surprisingly few travellers. This wilderness coast is one of the most beautiful regions of the state, with the rugged mountains, raging river and deep ravines and gorges of the Snowy River National Park, pristine old-growth rainforests in Errinundra National Park, and isolated beaches, calm inlets and endless bush in the internationally recognised Croajingolong National Park.

NATURE

If you've only got time for one nature experience, make it [Wilsons Promontory National Park](#) (p278), with its extensive walking trails that can take any time from less than an hour to up to a few days. Here you'll find mountains, swamps, forests, squeaky white-sand beaches, pristine bushland teeming with wildlife, fern valleys and coastal vistas. Some of the finest walks include the 45km Great Prom Walk and the 7km ascent to Mt Oberon Summit (see p281 for more information on these and other walks). One day will give you a taste of the Prom, but at least two or three is ideal.

With more time you could visit [Cape Conran Coastal Park](#) (p294), with its abundance of pristine white-sand beaches, surf- and river-swimming, walking trails and Aboriginal cultural herit-

age. There's bush camping here, as well as cosy wooden huts, luxury safari tents and upmarket eco-cottages close by.

To really immerse yourself in the bush, travel further into the rugged [Snowy River National Park](#) (p292). If you have time and the inclination do a four-day white-water rafting trip down the river, otherwise check out the Little River Falls, camp at McKillops Bridge and travel through the park to [Errinundra National Park](#) (p293) for some driving and walking trips in this eco-wilderness.

Internationally renowned [Croajingolong National Park](#) (p296) has great camping options – Thurra River and Wingan Inlet are the best – or stay at Point Hicks Lighthouse.

If you're able, spend at least two days in each park to get a feel for them.

TOWNS

The tiny township of [Koonwarra](#) (p278), right on the South Gippsland Hwy, is a rejuvenating spot to spend the day – try a short cooking course at the organic cooking school, some indulgence time at the day spa, or perhaps a little wine tasting. Whatever, be sure to enjoy some slow food and take in the gardens at the legendary Koonwarra General Store.

Continue further up the South Gippsland Hwy to visit [Port Albert](#) (p281), a fishing village with a proud maritime history, all on display at the town's small museum. Don't leave town without trying some fish and chips, allegedly the best in the state, or checking out the general store with its gourmet café and eclectic shop. You could stay overnight and do a loop back to Melbourne via [Walhalla](#) (p283), once a prosperous gold-mining town, now one of Victoria's most scenic historic townships, built on a precipitous hillside. Walk around the township, tour an old mine, or stay longer and take in a ghost tour or a 4WD adventure around the area.

Heading further east to the Gippsland Lakes, there are numerous small townships to stop in, but the pick of them is [Metung](#) (p286). A few minutes drive off the highway, the road sweeps around the lake into the village, perched on a tiny spit of land. Hire a boat for an afternoon, take a cruise, and enjoy the café scene or a meal at the lakeside pub overlooking the water.

BEACHES

Just about any Gippsland beach is perfect if you want an expanse of white, sandy beach. [Ninety Mile Beach](#) (p285) offers just that – ninety miles of secluded beaches, with a few small towns dotted along the way. [Inverloch](#) (right) and [Lake Tyers Beach](#) (p289) are favourites with the bucket-and-spade brigade, with calm, safe swimming beaches, plus surf beaches for the grown-ups where you can take lessons if you're new to the game.

Further afield, [Cape Conran](#) (p294) and [Mallacoota](#) (p295) are beautiful beach spots offering inlet- or river-swimming, as well as some fantastic surf, both in idyllic bush settings.

DIVING

This region isn't famous for its diving but there are a few great dive sites here. The unassuming [Bunurong Marine & Coastal Park](#) (p277) in South Gippsland provides some of Australia's best diving opportunities, and close by, there's the opportunity to experience [Wilsons Promontory National Park](#) (p278) from a different angle.

In both these parks, local operators organise dives for certified divers and run courses for those interested in learning to dive.

Further up the coast at [Cape Conran Coastal Park](#) (p294), dives are offered most weekends for experienced divers.

INVERLOCH

pop 4140

Inverloch's proximity to Melbourne and its fabulous surf, calm inlet beaches and outstanding diving, snorkelling, restaurants and cafés make it a popular destination. It expands to bursting point during the Christmas school holidays, when visitors descend on the town's [inlet beaches](#) and the ocean [surf beaches](#) along the road to Cape Paterson, but somehow the town manages to maintain a down-to-earth vibe. Inverloch also draws the crowds when it hosts the popular [Inverloch Jazz Festival](#) (☎ 5674 3141; www.inverlochjazzfest.org.au) on the Labour Day long weekend each March.

If you want to learn to catch a wave, the [Learn to Surf Offshore Surf School](#) (☎ 5674 3374; 32 Park St; www.surfingaustralia.com.au; 2hr lesson \$45) offers lessons at the main town surf beach. Alternatively, find some solitude on the [Screw Creek Nature Walk](#) (40 minutes return), which starts from the Inverloch Foreshore Camping Reserve car park – an easy walk via dunes, swamps and grasslands with expansive views from the bluff.

INFORMATION

Bunurong Environment Centre & Shop (☎ 5674 3738; www.sgcc.org.au; cnr The Esplanade & Ramsey Blvd; ☎ 10am–4pm Fri–Mon, daily during school holidays) An abundance of books and brochures on environmental and

TRANSPORT: INVERLOCH

Distance from Melbourne 145km

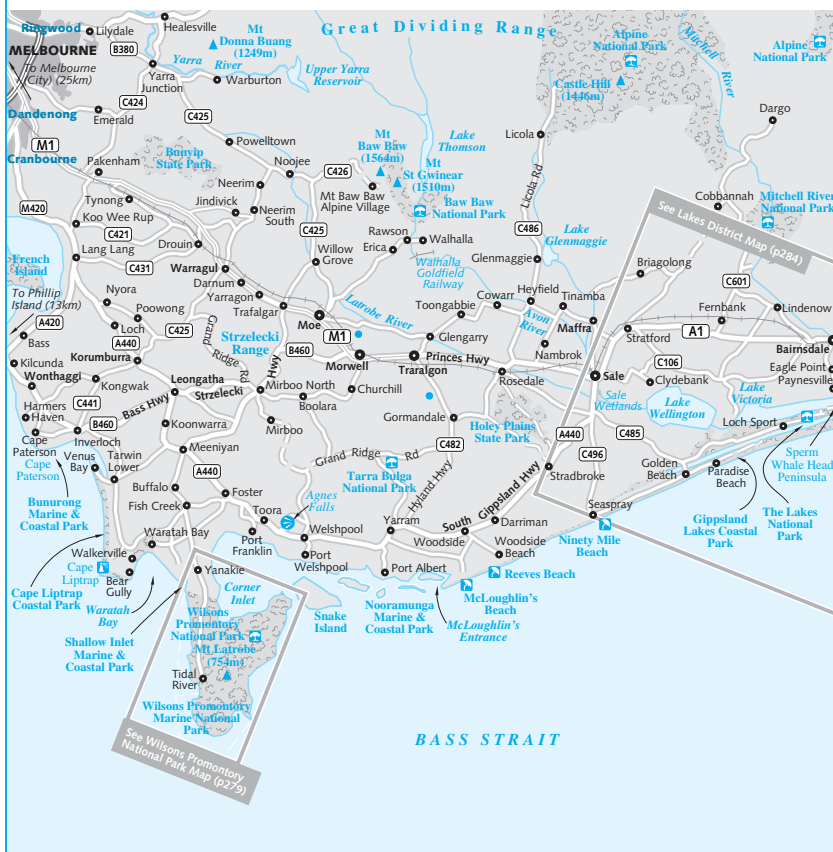
Direction Southeast

Travel time Two hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy) then exit at the South Gippsland Hwy and travel to Korumburra. From there take the Inverloch–Korumburra Rd.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) trains depart daily (twice on Saturdays) from Melbourne's Flinders St and Southern Cross stations for Dandenong, connecting with buses to Inverloch (\$13, 2¼ hours).

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sustainable-living topics. Environmental tours organised during school holidays.

Inverloch visitors centre (☎ 1300 762 433; www.visitorbasscoast.com; 39 A'Beckett St; 🕒 9am-5pm; 📺) Helpful staff can make accommodation bookings for free. Internet access \$1.50 per hour.

Sandsford Antiques (☎ 5674 3339; 13 A'Beckett St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; 📺) Wireless internet access \$4 per 30 minutes. Great coffee and light lunches available.

EATING

Kiosk (☎ 5674 3611; 2-4 Abbott St; meals \$4-18; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) This is a local favourite and the perfect breakfast spot. Just across from the beach, about a kilometre from the town centre, it's a little red shack turning out gener-

ous breakfasts, enormous muffins and tasty smoothies and juices.

Cafe Pajez (☎ 5674 1516; 27 A'Beckett St; lunch \$5-12, dinner \$17-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The wafting aroma of speciality curries will entice you into this warm, earthy café, festooned with rugs. Choose your own level of heat with their five-star curry-rating system.

Cafe Gabriel (5674 1178, 9a A'Beckett St; mains \$21-32; 🕒 lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) Adding an upmarket option to the Inverloch scene is this classy restaurant and bar. The tone here is refined.

SLEEPING

Inverloch Foreshore Camping Reserve (☎ 5674 1236; www.inverlochholidaypark.com.au; cnr The Esplanade & Ramsay Blvd; unpaved/powerd sites \$21/24) There's shade and privacy here and it's only a short toddle



over the scrub-covered dunes to the beach. The reserve is managed by the neighbouring Inverloch Holiday Park.

Moilong Express (☎ 0439-842 334; www.basscoast.info/moilong; 405 Inverloch-Venus Bay Rd; d \$100) These railway guards' vans, complete with traditional wood panelling and an old railway station clock, have been converted into very comfortable accommodation with a kitchen and a palatial queen-sized bed. With views over Anderson's Inlet, the carriages accommodate up to five people.

Lofts (☎ 1300 762 433; www.theloftapartments.com.au; Scarborough St; apt from \$150; 📺) Spread yourself out in these sleek, multilevel apartments with high ceilings and name-sake lofts. They're handily adjacent to the park, beach and shops. Some of these designer apartments have water views and most have a spa. They're managed

by several real estate agents, so it's easiest to book through the local visitors centre.

BUNURONG MARINE & COASTAL PARK

This surprising little marine and coastal park offers some of Australia's best snorkelling and diving, and a stunning, cliff-hugging drive between Inverloch and Cape Paterson. It certainly surprised the archaeological world in the early 1990s when dinosaur remains dating back 120 million years were discovered here (at the time it was thought that dinosaurs had become extinct about 40 million years earlier than that).

Head down from the car parks along the Cape Paterson-Inverloch Rd to the well-signposted

coves for fun rock-pool rambling. Eagles Nest, Shack Bay, the Caves and Twin Reefs are great for **snorkelling**; Eagles Nest, Shack Bay, Cape Paterson and Flat Rocks are also popular **scuba diving** sites. The Oaks is the locals' favourite **surf** beach. The Caves is where the **dinosaur dig** action is; the Bunurong Environment Centre & Shop (p275) runs tours here in January.

SEAL Diving Services (☎ 5174 3434; www.sealdiving.com.au; 7/27 Princes Hwy, Traralgon; PADI 4-day course \$575, 1-day double dive \$80, introductory dive \$99) SEAL offers PADI open-water dive courses in Inverloch in summer. Also available are one-day dives for beginners and experienced divers, and weekend trips for certified divers at Bunurong Marine & Coastal Park.

KOONWARRA

pop 750

This tiny township on the South Gippsland Hwy has built itself around the reputation of its general store, renowned for its fabulous café. There's also an organic fruit-and-vegetable shop and sustainable-living centre, and the inspiring **Peaceful Gardens Organic Cooking School** (☎ 5664 2480; www.peacefulgardens.com.au; Koala Dr; half/full-day \$75/100, children's half-day \$35) – Victoria's first organic-certified cooking school. It offers short courses in making cakes, bread, traditional pastries and pasta, and runs cooking classes for kids. There's a **Farmers Market** (☎ 6569 8208; ☎ 8am–1pm Sat) at Memorial Park on the first Saturday of each month, with organic everything (fruit, vegetables, berries, coffee) plus hormone-free beef and chemical-free cheeses. Alternatively you can completely indulge yourself at the **Koonwarra Day Spa** (☎ 5664 2332; www.koonwarraspa.com.au; 9 Koala Dr; most 30min treatments \$50), a new centre offering spas, saunas and body treatments ranging from a 30-minute mineral spa (\$30) to a six-hour pamper package (\$465).

TRANSPORT: KOONWARRA

Distance from Melbourne 142km

Direction Southeast

Travel time Two hours

Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) buses depart Melbourne's Southern Cross station for Leongatha (\$11, 2½ hours, five daily), five minutes' drive from Koonwarra.

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy) and exit at the South Gippsland Hwy.

EATING

Koonwarra Food, Wine & Produce Store (☎ 5664 2285; cnr South Gippsland Highway and Koala Drive; mains \$6–34; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri) Local produce and wines are on sale in this renovated timber building. Inside is a renowned café that serves simple food with flair, priding itself on using organic, low-impact suppliers and products. Soak up the ambience in the wooded interior, or relax at a table in the shaded cottage gardens, home to the **Outside Bit**, a quirky little nursery.

SLEEPING

Koonwarra Cottages (☎ 5664 2488; hayward@dcsi.net.au; South Gippsland Hwy; s & d \$110; ☎) These timber-lined, wooden cottages with spas and wood heaters have a cosy, country-kitchen feel. They're spotlessly clean and run by friendly owners.

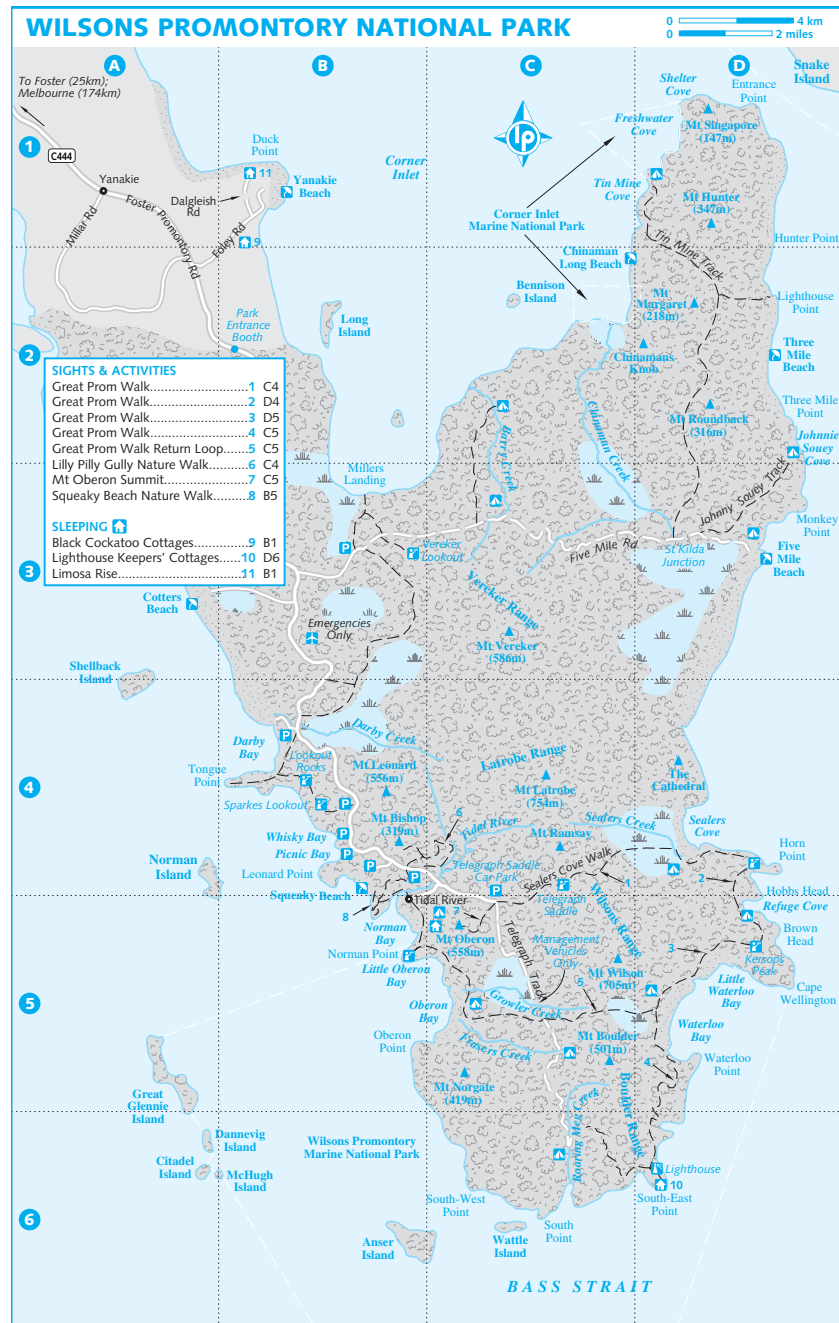
Lyre Bird Hill Winery & Guest House (☎ 5664 3204; www.lyrebirdhill.com.au; 370 Inverloch Rd; guesthouse s/d \$100/175, cottage d \$120; ☎) This popular winery (open 10am to 5pm Wednesday to Monday) has an old-fashioned B&B with light-filled rooms overlooking the garden. There are also rooms in a faded country cottage. A three-course dinner can be arranged (\$60), accompanied by house wines.

WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

'The Prom', as it's affectionately known, is one of the most popular national parks in Australia. It's not surprising given its accessibility from Melbourne, more than 80km of **walking tracks**, wonderful beaches for **swimming** and **surfing**, and abundant **wildlife**. The park caters to day-trippers looking for short walks, experienced hikers wanting a wilderness experience, and everyone in between.

Tidal River is the hub, and home to the Parks Victoria office, a general store, café and accommodation. The wildlife around Tidal River is incredibly tame: kookaburras and rosellas lurk expectantly (but you're not allowed to feed them), and wombats nonchalantly waddle out of the undergrowth.

There's an extensive choice of walking tracks here, taking you through swamps, forests, marshes, valleys of tree ferns and along beaches lined with sand dunes. The Parks Victoria office has brochures with 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 area are overnight or longer, and mainly for experienced bushwalkers; permits are required. For those into diving or surfing, **SEAL Diving Services** (p278) offer dives for certified divers, and **Learn to Surf Offshore Surf School** (p275) runs surfing lessons here.

Day entry to the park is \$10 per car (included in the overnight charge if you're camping).

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 1800 350 552, 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Tidal River; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) This office books all park accommodation, including permits for camping away from Tidal River.

TOURS

Bunyip Tours (☎ 1300 286 947, 9650 9680; www.bunyip.tours.com; tours 1-3-days \$110/160) Proudly carbon-neutral Bunyip Tours offers a one-day guided tour to the Prom from Melbourne, with the option of staying on another two days to explore by yourself. Camping costs and gear are included in the three-day trip. YHA members get a discount.

First Track Adventures (☎ 5634 2761; www.firsttrack.com.au) This Gippsland-based company organises customised bushwalking, canoeing and abseiling trips to the Prom for individuals and groups. Prices vary with group size and activity.

Hiking Plus (☎ 9431 1050; www.hikingplus.com; 5-day tours \$1420-1712) This tour company organises hikes to the Prom from nearby Foster, where it has comfortable

TRANSPORT: WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

Distance from Melbourne 215km

Direction Southeast

Travel time 3¼ hours

Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) buses from Melbourne's Southern Cross station travel daily (twice on Fridays) to Foster (\$16, 2¾ hours).

A bus service (☎ 0428 687 833) runs on Friday evenings at 7pm from Foster to Tidal River via Fish Creek (\$6.30, 1¼ hours), returning Sunday afternoon (departs 2.30pm).

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy) and exit at South Gippsland Hwy. At Meeniyan, take the Meeniyan-Promontory Rd.

guesthouse accommodation (including spa) for the start and end of each trip. Packages include a two- to three-day hike, meals, a massage and spa.

EATING

Stock up in Foster, which has supermarkets and a fruit shop, on your way to the Prom. In Tidal River the general store has supplies of all the basics, there's a takeaway, and the recent addition of a **café** (☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; mains \$12-19) serving light lunches and bistro-style meals.

SLEEPING

Tidal River

Tidal River accommodation is incredibly popular. Book well in advance through **Parks Victoria** (☎ 1800 350 552, 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au). Bookings can be made up to 12 months ahead.

Camp Sites (unpowered sites per car & 3 adults or 2 adults & 2 children \$21.50, extra adult/child/car \$5/2.50/6.50) Tidal River has 480 camp sites. For the Christmas school holiday period there's a ballot for sites (apply online by 31 July at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au). For this peak time Parks Victoria reserves some sites for overseas and interstate visitors; there's a two-night maximum stay, and the sites can be booked in advance. There are another 11 bush-camping areas around the Prom, all with pit or compost toilets, but no other facilities; you need to carry in your own drinking water. Overnight hikers need camping permits (adult/child \$7.50/3.50 per night), which should be booked ahead through Parks Victoria.

Huts (4-/6-bed \$60/92) These cosy wooden huts have bunks and kitchenettes, but no bathrooms.

Timber Cabins (d \$158) These spacious and private self-contained cabins have large, sliding glass doors and decking, and overlook the bush or river. They're simple but ultra-comfortable, with the luxury of a bathtub.

Safari Tents (d/f \$240/280) Nestled in bushland at Tidal River, these plush tents (which sleep up to four) are the latest addition to the park's accommodation. Besides comfortable queen-size beds, they also have bathrooms, and there's a shared tent kitchen.

Lighthouse Keepers' Cottages (8-12-bed cottages per person \$47-74) Magnificent, heritage-listed 1850s cottages with thick stone walls, on a pimple of land that juts out into the wild ocean. Kick back after the 19km hike here and watch ships

TOP FIVE PROM WALKS

The Prom's delights are best discovered on foot. Times and distances include walking back.

Sealers Cove Walk

This is the best overnight walk at the Prom. Start from the Telegraph Saddle car park and walk down Telegraph Track (it's better than returning uphill via this gnarly track) and stay overnight at beautiful Little Waterloo Bay (12km, 4½ hours). The next day, walk on to Sealers Cove via Refuge Cove and return to Telegraph Saddle car park (24km, 7½ hours).

Great Prom Walk

This is the most popular long-distance hike, a moderate circuit (45km, two or three days) across to Sealers Cove, down to Refuge Cove, Waterloo Bay, the lighthouse and back. Coordinate your walk with tide times, as creek crossings can be hazardous. It's possible to visit or stay at the lighthouse by prior arrangement with Parks Victoria (see Sleeping).

Lilly Pilly Gully Nature Walk

An easy walk (5km, two hours) through heathland and eucalypt forests, with lots of wildlife. Alternatively, take the longer route through stringy-bark forests (6km, two or three hours).

Mt Oberon Summit

This moderate-to-hard walk (7km, 2½ hours) starts from Telegraph Saddle car park, your efforts rewarded by excellent panoramic views from the summit. From November to Easter a free shuttle bus operates between Tidal River car park and Mt Oberon car park – a gentle way to start the Great Prom Walk.

Squeaky Beach Nature Walk

Another easy stroll (5km, two hours) returning through coastal tea trees and banksias to a sensational white-sand beach. Go barefoot on the beach and find out where the name comes from!

or whales passing by. You can usually visit the lighthouse itself, depending on ranger availability. Prices increase 50% on Saturday nights.

Around Tidal River

Limosa Rise (☎ 5687 1135; www.limosarise.com.au; 40 Dalglish Rd, Yanakie; d \$200-270; ☎) This new, luxury, self-contained accommodation has already won regional and state awards with its contemporary design of the three tastefully-appointed cottages. Full-length glass windows take complete advantage of sweeping views across Corner Inlet and the Prom's mountains.

Black Cockatoo Cottages (☎ 5687 1306; www.blackcockatoo.com; 60 Foley Rd, Yanakie; d \$140) These cottages are in Yanakie, the nearest settlement to the Prom. You can take in glorious views of the national park without leaving your very comfortable bed in these private, stylish, black-timber, self-contained cottages.

Prom Coast Backpackers (☎ 5682 2171; www.yha.com.au; 40 Station Rd, Foster; dm/d/f from \$25/60/80; ☎) There are no hostels in the park, but nearby Foster has this cosy, renovated cottage with contemporary wooden furnishings that sleeps 10. It's close to the shops and across the road from a good

playground. The friendly owners can usually organise a lift to the Prom for \$20. Prices are about 10% higher for non-YHA members.

Warraee Holiday Apartments (☎ 5682 2171; www.gippsland.com/web/warraeeholidayapartments; 38 Station Rd, Foster; d/f \$120/130; ☎) Next door to Prom Coast Backpackers and under the same management are these comfortable, two-bedroom apartments, some with air-conditioning.

PORT ALBERT

pop 250

Quaint old fishing village Port Albert is galloping into the 21st century with new up-market accommodation, cafés and a gallery opening. It's lost none of its charm, with the town's old buildings being carefully restored for more contemporary uses. The Port Albert town sign proudly pronounces itself as Victoria's first established port. The many historic timber buildings in the main street dating from its busy 1850s port days bear a brass plaque, detailing their age and previous use. Find out more about the town's heyday at the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 5183 2520; Tarraville Rd; adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 10.30am-4pm daily Sep-May, Sat & Sun Jun-Aug), where the lovely

TRANSPORT: PORT ALBERT

Distance from Melbourne 222km

Direction Southeast

Travel time Three hours

Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) drop-off is possible at the turn-off to Port Albert on the South Gippsland Hwy, but it's another 7km to Port Albert.

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy) and exit at the South Gippsland Hwy. Exit the highway at the Yarram—Port Albert turn-off.

volunteer staff will give you some quick highlights of Port Albert's maritime history, before leaving you to check out stories of shipwrecks, the town's whaling and sealing days and local Aboriginal legends.

EATING

General Store (☎ 5183 2291; 71 Tarraville Rd; mains \$10-22; ☺ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) This café/gallery in the 1856 general store has fast attracted a following. People travel a long way for the (limited) gourmet menu complemented with Gippsland wines (try the cheese platter with

crusty bread, marinated olives and fig relish). The Asian-influenced gallery has unexpected treasures such as Chinese peasant chairs and wooden croaking frogs, while the shop sells an eclectic range of books and gourmet local produce.

Port Albert Wharf Fish & Chips (☎ 5183 2434; Port Albert Wharf; meals from \$6; ☺ lunch & dinner) The fish and chips here are renowned, and fresh as can be.

SLEEPING

Port Albert Hotel/Motel (☎ 5183 2212; fax 5183 2429; 37 Wharf St; s/d \$55/75; ☺) Victoria's oldest continually-licensed pub still draws the crowds, with its friendly staff, down-to-earth vibe, quality bistro food (mains \$15 to \$30) and takeaway fish and chips (just ring the bell at the outdoor counter). The motel rooms are clean but faded.

Rodondo (☎ 5183 2688; susan333@optusnet.com.au; 74 Tarraville Rd; cottage \$75, B&B d/f \$140/160) The contemporary blends seamlessly with the historic in this renovated 1871 home. The rooms have a homely but luxurious feel, and the friendly hospitality adds to the satisfaction of staying here. There's also a cosy, self-contained cabin in the former wash house.

GRAND RIDGE ROAD

The spectacular 132km Grand Ridge Rd winds along the top of the Strzelecki Ranges, running from midway between Warragul and Korumburra to midway between Traralgon and Yarram. The (mostly) gravel road provides a fabulous excursion through fertile farmland, once covered with forests of giant mountain ash and valleys of giant tree ferns. You'll see such an abundance of these ferns you'll be blasé about them by the end of the drive.

The drive makes a great alternative to the Princes Hwy, but if you're going to travel the length of it allow the best part of a day. Pick the road up (signposted from the highway) south of Warragul. Only 3km along is the excellent **Wild Dog Winery** (☎ 5623 1117; www.wildogwinery.com.au; Warragul-Korumburra Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm), one of Gippsland's first wineries. It produces a great range of wines, all grown and bottled on its 30 acres, and has fabulous views across the Strzeleckis.

The only community of any size along the Grand Ridge Rd is the pretty township of **Mirboo North**, home to Gippsland's only brewery, the award-winning **Grand Ridge Brewery & Restaurant** (☎ 5668 2222; www.grand-ridge.com.au; Main St; mains \$16-29; ☺ lunch & dinner) producing chemical- and preservative-free beer. The restaurant food is fresh and prepared from local produce, including steaks from the local beef farm. Vegetarians are catered for too – try the slow-cooked lentil curry, cooked from scratch each time.

Continuing on, you'll pass through the rainforest gully of **Tarra-Bulga National Park**, one of the last remnants of the magnificent forests that once covered all of South Gippsland. There are some good short walks here, including the Tarra Valley Rainforest Walk to **Cyathea Falls** (1.5km, 35 minutes return) and the easy **Fern Gully Nature Walk** (750m, 15 minutes return). Camping is not permitted in the park but you can stay at the nearby **Tarra Valley Tourist Park** (☎ 5186 1283; www.tarra-valley.com; 1906 Tarra Valley Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$24/28, cabins with/without bathroom from \$100/75), nestled in rainforest with camping in a pretty riverside setting and cabin accommodation.

For sheer indulgence, stop at the **Tarra Valley Rainforest Retreat** (☎ 5186 1313; www.tarra-valleyrainforestretreat.com; 1788 Tarra Valley Rd; s/d 145/170; ☺), elegant Swiss chalet-style accommodation that doubles as a chocolate-making school. Chocolate appreciation courses with the resident chocolate maker cost \$50/55 for guests/nonguests.

WALHALLA

pop 18

This is one of the state's best-preserved and most charming historic towns. In its gold-mining heyday, Walhalla's population was 5000; now there are just 18 people. There's still plenty to see in Walhalla, and the windy drive up to the town is beautiful. Stringers Creek runs through the centre of the township – an idyllic valley encircled by a cluster of historic buildings set into the hillsides. Many of Walhalla's attractions are open year-round, but there's more happening on weekends, during high season and (oddly enough) on Wednesdays.

The best way to see the town is on foot – take the **circuit walk** (45 minutes) anticlockwise from the information shelter as you enter town. The trail passes the main sights before climbing up the hill to follow the old timber tramway then heading back down to the car park. There's a group of restored shops along the main street, including **Walhalla Post Office & Museum** (☎ 5165 6250; www.walhalla.org.au; admission \$2; ☺ 10am-4pm) which offers ghost tours (\$22, 1¼ hours) on the first three Saturdays of each month (7.30pm April to October, 8.30pm October to April).

Guided tours of the **Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine** (☎ 5165 6259; off Walhalla-Beardmore Rd; tours adult/child/family \$15/12/36; ☺ tours 1.30pm Mon-Fri, noon, 2pm & 3pm Sat & Sun, public & school holidays) give you a look at Cohens Reef, once one of Australia's top reef-gold producers. Almost 14 tonnes of gold came out of this mine.

You can take a very scenic 20-minute ride between Thomson Station (on the main road, 3.5km before Walhalla) and Walhalla on the **Walhalla Goldfields Railway** (☎ 9513 3969; rides adult/child/family \$17/12/37; ☺ from Thomson Station 11.40am, 1.40pm & 3.40pm Wed, Sat & Sun, public holidays, from Walhalla station 12.10pm, 2pm & 3.50pm). The train snakes along Stringers Creek Gorge, passing lovely, forested gorge country and crossing a number of trestle bridges.

Back in town, steps lead up a steep hillside to **Walhalla Cricket Ground**. **Walhalla Cemetery** gives a more sombre insight into the history of the area. The terrain here is so steep that some folk were buried vertically!

For some seriously rugged mountain adventuring, **Mountain Top Experience** (☎ 5134 6876; www.mountaintopexperience.com; trips adult & child \$20, family \$60) operates an 1½-hour 4WD Copper Mine Adventure trip most weekends and Wednesdays, along old coach roads to a disused mine.

TRANSPORT: WALHALLA

Distance from Melbourne 181km

Direction Southeast

Travel time 2½ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) and exit at Moe. Take the Moe-Rawson Rd and then Walhalla Rd.

EATING

Walhalla Lodge Family Hotel (☎ 5165 6226; Main St; mains \$14-22; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A cosy, one-room pub decked out with prints of old Walhalla and serving reasonable pub meals.

Parker's (☎ 5165 6262; www.starhotel.com.au; Main Rd; mains \$25-27; ☺ dinner) Housed in the rebuilt historic Walhalla Star Hotel, Parker's is an upmarket restaurant. No children under 12.

SLEEPING

Walhalla Star Hotel (☎ 5165 6262; Main Rd; s & d/tr \$199/229) The Star Hotel offers stylish, boutique-hotel accommodation with sophisticated designer décor and king-sized beds.

Camping (free) Walhalla's camp sites are free, and there are good bush camping areas along Stringer's Creek, as well as the designated North Gardens camping ground (with toilets) at the top of the town.

SALE

Sale is the gateway to the Lakes District, the largest inland waterway system in Australia. There's not a lot in the way of sights in Sale itself, but there's some fabulous accommodation, some classy restaurants and bars, and a striking entertainment centre here. It's an upmarket base from which to explore Ninety Mile Beach.

The **Sale Wetlands Walk** (4km, 1½ hours), close to the Princes Hwy, is a pleasant walk around the town lakes and incorporates an Indigenous Art Trail commemorating the importance of the wetlands to the local Gunai/Kurnai population.

Sale Common, a 300-hectare wildlife refuge with bird hides, an observatory, waterhole, boardwalks and other walking tracks is part of an internationally recognised wetlands system. The wildlife refuge is 2km south of Sale on the South Gippsland Hwy. The best time to visit is early

TRANSPORT: SALE

Distance 214km

Direction East

Travel time Three hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Sale.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) has train and train/bus services between Melbourne and Sale (\$20, 2½ hours, seven daily).

morning or late evening (wear some mosquito repellent) when you'll see lots of bird life.

The **Gippsland Art Gallery** (☎ 5144 3372; www.wel.lington.vic.gov.au/gallery; Civic Centre, 68 Foster St; adult/child \$3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) is always worth a look, exhibiting work by locally and nationally renowned artists and hosting touring exhibitions.

INFORMATION

Central Gippsland visitors centre (☎ 5144 1108; www.tourismwellington.com.au; 8 Foster St; ☎ 9am-5pm; 📺) Internet facilities and a free accommodation booking service.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; 1 Lacey St; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1-3.30pm Tue & Fri) Turn right at Foster St into Guthridge St, then right into Lacey St.

EATING

Relish@the Gallery (☎ 5144 5044; Gippsland Art Gallery, 68-70 Foster St; meals \$4-30; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) Take a table by the window and check out the old port of Sale while you tuck into dishes like the salmon, spinach, capers, red onion and goat's cheese omelette in this bustling café. There's also an extensive kids menu.

bis cucina (☎ 5144 3388; Wellington Entertainment Centre, 100 Foster St; breakfast & lunch \$6-22, dinner \$19-34; ☎ breakfast Sat & Sun, lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Relaxed and attentive service combined with carefully chosen modern Australian cuisine makes this a fine choice for both serious foodies and theatre-goers wanting a quick meal preshow. bis has the most sumptuous children's menu in Gippsland, with offerings such as organic chicken.

SLEEPING

minnies (☎ 5144 3344; www.minnies.com.au; 202 Gibsons Rd; s/d \$150/160; 📺) It takes some flair to make an

outlandish purple-and-green colour scheme not only work but look inspired, and indeed it does in the huge lounge area of this modern B&B. Choose between the funky green room and the more traditional rose room, with its antique-look bed head complete with rose imprints.

Cambrai Hostel (☎ 5147 1600; www.maffra.net.au/hostel/backpackers.htm; 117 Johnson St, Maffra; dm/d incl breakfast \$25/60; 📺) There's no backpackers in Sale, but in nearby Maffra this place is a budget haven. It's in a 120-year-old building that was once a doctor's residence, and is now a relaxed hostel with licensed bar, open fire and pool table in the cosy lounge, tiny self-catering kitchen and clean, cheerful rooms.

NINETY MILE BEACH

Isolated Ninety Mile Beach is a long, narrow strip of beach backed by dunes, swamplands and lagoons. The area is great for surf-fishing and walking, though the beaches can be dangerous for swimming, except where patrolled at Seaspray, Woodside and Lakes Entrance.

Between Seaspray and Lakes Entrance is the **Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park**, with oodles of low-lying coastal shrub, banksias and tea trees, and bursts of native wild flowers in spring. If you're interested in the challenge of hiking the length of the Ninety Mile Beach, permission for remote camping can be obtained from **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).

One of the main access roads to Ninety Mile Beach is from Sale to Seaspray, Golden Beach and **Loch Sport**, a small, bushy town sprawling along a narrow spit of land. It's the entry point to the **Lakes National Park**, a narrow strip of coastal bushland surrounded by lakes and ocean. It's a beautifully quiet little spot to set up camp, except in January when everyone else has the same idea. Banksia and eucalypt woodland abound with areas of low-lying heathland and some swampy salt-marsh scrub. In spring the park is carpeted with native wildflowers and has one of Australia's best displays of native orchids. You're likely to spot kangaroos, as well as wallabies, possums, emus and possibly

koalas. A loop road through the park provides good car access, and there are well-marked **walking trails**, including some short walks, and several picnic areas (BYO water). **Point Wilson**, at the eastern tip of the mainland section of the park is the best picnic spot and a popular gathering place for kangaroos (no feeding them of course). There's plenty of bird life too – more than 190 species have been sighted.

EATING

Marina Hotel (☎ 5146 0666; Basin Blvd, Loch Sport; mains \$15-23 ☎ lunch & dinner) Perched by the lake, this pub has a friendly vibe and superb sunset views. There's standard bistro food, featuring fish.

SLEEPING

Emu Bight Camp Site (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Lakes National Park; sites per 6 people \$12) This camp site is nestled in bushland, with pit toilets and fireplaces available. BYO water.

Seaspray/Golden Beach Camp Sites (Seaspray-Golden Beach Rd; free) These shady sites on the Ninety Mile Beach foreshore are idyllically close to the beach and hugely popular over summer. Some sites have barbecues and pit toilets, but you need to bring your own water or firewood. Hot showers are available at Golden Beach (\$2).

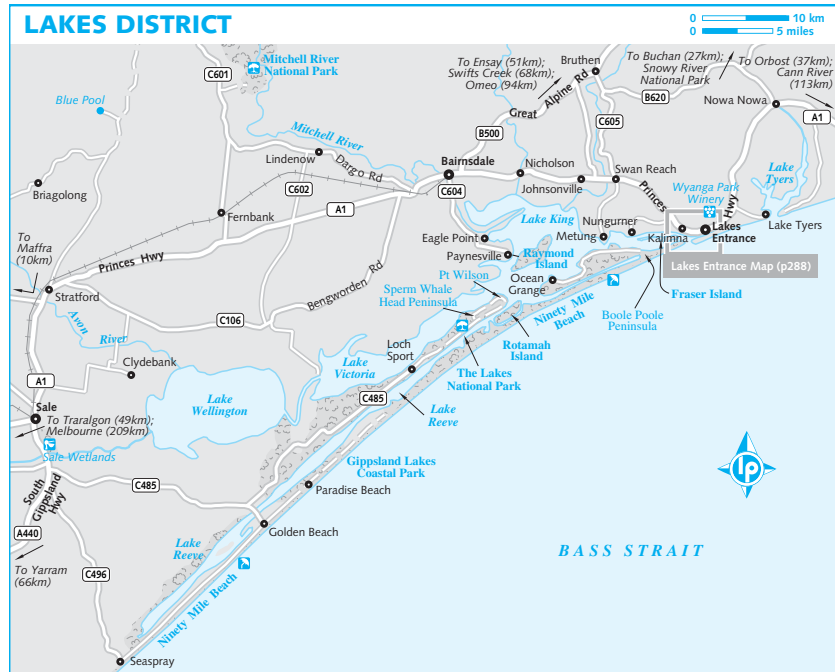
90 Mile Beach Holiday Retreat (☎ 5146 0320; www.90milebeachholidayretreat.com; Track 10, off Golden Beach-Loch Sport Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$26/28, caravans/bunk rooms d \$60/75, lodge & cottage d & f \$155-165) On a huge chunk of land a few kilometres from Loch Sport, this retreat has 2.4km of pristine beach frontage. It's separated from the rest of the world by 6km of dirt track. There are plenty of shady grassy areas for camping, small ex-Melbourne Olympic Village bunkrooms, and spacious, light-and-airy lodges. The comfortable self-contained cottage is nestled into the dunes, just a minute from the beach.

Gary Powers Real Estate (☎ 5146 0411; www.garypowersrealestate.com; Lot 217, Lake St, Loch Sport; houses per night \$110-250) This Loch Sport real-estate agent manages 40 holiday houses, ranging from ordinary to luxury, available for nightly or weekly rental.

BAIRNSDALE

pop 11,290

Bairnsdale is East Gippsland's commercial hub, with a bustling main street and a sprinkling of attractions.



TRANSPORT: NINETY MILE BEACH

Distance from Melbourne 240km

Direction East

Travel time 3¼ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Sale, then the C496 south to Seaspray.

Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place (☎ 5152 1891; 37-53 Dalmahoy St; adult/child \$3.50/2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a stirring Koorie cultural exhibition space that explores Gunai/Kurnai life from the Dreamtime until after white settlement. The exhibition traces the Gunai/Kurnai clan from their Dreamtime ancestors, Borun the pelican and his wife Tuk the musk duck, and covers life at Lake Tyers Mission, east of Lakes Entrance, now a trust privately owned by Aboriginal shareholders. The massacres of the Kurnai during 1839-49 are also detailed. The Keeping Place is signposted from the highway.

East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation (☎ 5153 1002; www.australiacouncil.gov.au; 222 Nicholson St; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is an art gallery featuring the work of local Aboriginal artists. The **East Gippsland Art Gallery** (☎ 5153 1988; www.eastgippslandartgallery.org.au; 2 Nicholson St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat) is a bright, open space that has regular exhibitions, mostly the work of East Gippsland artists.

On the edge of town (signposted from the highway at the roundabout as you arrive in Bairnsdale from the west) is the **MacLeod Morass Boardwalk**, an internationally recognised wetland reserve with walking tracks and bird hides – a peaceful change of pace.

INFORMATION

Bairnsdale visitors centre (☎ 1800 637 060, 5152 3444; www.lakesandwilderness.com.au; 240 Main St; ☎ 9am-5pm; 🗺️)

East Gippsland Shire Library (☎ 5152 4225; 22 Service St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon, 10am-1pm Tue, 9am-6pm Wed & Fri, 9am-7pm Thu, 9.30am-12pm Sat; 🗺️) Free internet access.

EATING

Peppers (☎ 5152 3217; 222 Main St; fish & chips \$8; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) This contemporary fish-and-chip shop adds flair to the usual offerings. Try its popular fish souvlaki smothered with *tzatziki*.

TRANSPORT: BAIRNSDALE

Distance from Melbourne 282km

Direction East

Travel time Four hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Bairnsdale.

Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs trains between Melbourne and Bairnsdale (\$25, 3½ hours, three daily).

Gourmet Deli (☎ 5152 1544; 144 Main St; dishes \$6-10; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) Stop by here for the best coffee and herbal tea in town. Gourmet sandwich ingredients are on display in their deli and served up in thick, crusty bread.

River Grill (☎ 5153 1421; 2 Wood St; mains \$27-36; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The newest addition to East Gippsland's culinary scene, River Grill offers contemporary fine dining with Mediterranean flair.

SLEEPING

Riversleigh Country Hotel (☎ 5152 6966; www.riversleigh.info; 1 Nicholson St; s/d incl breakfast from \$112/122; 🗺️) This Victorian-era boutique hotel offers elegant rooms with heritage furnishings. Breakfast is served in the sunny conservatory, and there's also a formal restaurant here (mains \$10 to \$33, open for lunch and dinner Monday to Saturday), maximising the use of local ingredients in inventive, modern cuisine.

Mitchell Gardens Holiday Park (☎ 5152 4654; www.mitchellgardens.com.au; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/23, cabins d \$50-86; 🗺️) East of the town centre on the banks of the Mitchell River, this is a friendly park with plenty of shade for cabins and a little for tents. The deluxe cabins have a lovely outlook over the Mitchell River.

METUNG

pop 730

Metung (www.metungtourism.com.au) is the nicest town on the Gippsland Lakes – the unhurried charm of this picturesque village on Bancroft Bay is contagious. It's an upmarket base for boating and fishing, and its shoreline is dotted with jetties and small wooden craft. Boats and yachts for cruising, fishing and sailing on the Gippsland Lakes are available from **Riviera Nautic** (☎ 5156 2243; www.rivieranautic.com.au; 185 Metung Rd; motor boat per day \$175, yachts per 3 days 4-/8-berth \$1170/1980). Fuel and a boating lesson are included – a fabulous way of exploring the lakes. There are countless islands, jetties and stretches of beach to moor your boat at night. If you prefer someone else to drive, take an afternoon cruise to Lakes Entrance onboard the **Director** (☎ 5156 2628; 2½hr cruise adult/child \$42/free; ☎ 3pm Tue, Thu & Sat). Drinks and local cheeses are included. The owners of *The Director* also hire out **sea kayaks** (per 1/4hr from \$25/65) for checking out the quiet waters of the lakes.

Opposite Metung Yacht Club on the edge of Bancroft Bay is **Legend Rock**, a sacred Aboriginal

site. According to Aboriginal oral histories, the rock represents a hunter who was turned to stone for not sharing the food he had caught. The road into town shaves past the rock.

Providing a new focus for the energetic local art scene is **Nu Art Metung** (☎ 5156 2909; www.nuartmetung.com; 69a Metung Rd; admission free; 10am-5pm Thu-Mon), a contemporary gallery hosting fine-art exhibitions and showcasing the work of local artists.

INFORMATION

Metung visitors centre (☎ 5156 2969; www.metungaccommodation.com.au; 3/50 Metung Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) Accommodation booking and boat-hire services.

EATING

Metung Galley (☎ 5156 2330; 3/59 Metung Rd; lunch \$10-18, dinner \$19-29; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Mon) Felicity and Richard's city hospitality experience shines through in this friendly, efficient café, serving up beautifully presented, quality food. The smoked trout, organic goat's cheese and rocket tart is delicious.

Metung Hotel (☎ 5156 2206; 1 Kurnai Ave; meals \$18-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) On the edge of the lake, and with an outdoor deck, Metung Hotel has had a makeover since top local restaurateur Archie was installed as manager. The bistro food is superb – the best you'll find in a Gippsland pub.

Nina's (☎ 5156 2474; 3/51 Metung Rd; dishes \$4-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Sun) Don't miss the organic coffee and Mindy's divine home-cooked brownies.

SLEEPING

Anchorage B&B (☎ 5156 2569; www.anchoragedbandbreakfast.com.au; 11 The Anchorage; d \$150; 🗺️) You'll receive a warm welcome here. Enjoy a sumptuous gourmet breakfast in the sunny guest breakfast room, then kick back in the bush garden and take in the water views. Fluffy towels, crisp sheets and soothing autumn tones make these rooms a very comfortable place to stay. Closed mid-June to mid-August.

McMillans of Metung (☎ 5156 2283; www.mcmillansofmetung.com.au; 155 Metung Rd; cottages/villas d \$165/245; 🗺️ 🗺️) This lakeside resort has won stacks of tourism awards for its complex of English-country-style cottages, set in three hectares of manicured gardens, and has expanded with some modern villas.

Moorings at Metung (☎ 5156 2750; www.themoorings.com.au; 44 Metung Rd; r \$140-270; 🗺️ 🗺️) In the heart

TRANSPORT: METUNG

Distance from Melbourne 312km

Direction East

Travel time 4¼ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Swan Reach then take the Metung turn-off.

Taxi Metung Taxis (☎ 5156 2005) Swan Reach to Metung (\$20, 5km).

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs from Melbourne to nearby Swan Reach (\$26, four hours, two daily), from where you can catch a taxi.

of Metung village, this large, contemporary apartment complex has motel rooms and self-contained units, all with water views. It's a luxuriously comfortable option with stylish rooms and a tennis court, indoor and outdoor pools and spa.

Metung Holiday Villas (☎ 5156 2306; www.metungholidayvillas.com; cnr Mairburn & Stirling Rds; cabins \$100-150; 🗺️ 🗺️) Metung's former caravan park has reinvented itself as a minivillage of luxury cabins. The landscaped bush gardens around them provide some privacy. Linen provided.

LAKES ENTRANCE

pop 4100

Lakes Entrance is the region's main tourist town and is popular. It's in a picturesque location on the gentle waters of **Cunninghame Arm**, backed by sand dunes and fishing boats, just a stroll from a magnificent stretch of ocean beach. It's probably best to focus on these virtues, rather than the town's enormous crop of caravan parks and graceless strip of motels, souvenir shops and minigolf courses lining the Esplanade.

In summer it's packed out, and you'll find businesses catering to every water-related whim you may have. 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 on the ocean side. This is also where the **Eastern Beach Walking Track** (2.3km, 45 minutes) starts, taking you through coastal scrub to the entrance itself, artificially created in 1889 to provide ocean access from the lakes system. From here you can loop back along Ninety Mile Beach.

To explore the lakes, three companies along Marine Pde offer **boat hire** (hire per 4/8hr \$90/150).

Several companies offer cruises on the lakes, including the following:

Corque (☎ 5155 1508; Post Office Jetty, The Esplanade; 4½hr cruise incl lunch & wine tasting adult \$50, child under/over 6 \$6/25) Popular daily lunch cruise to Wyanga Park Winery, and weekend dinner and Sunday brunch cruises.

Mulloy Fishing Charters (☎ 0427-943 154, 5155 3304; 3hr cruise adult/child \$40/20) Fishing cruises on the lake departing the jetty opposite 66 Marine Pde. Rods, tackle, bait and morning or afternoon tea provided.

Peels Tourist & Ferry Services (☎ 5155 1246; Post Office Jetty, The Esplanade; 2hr cruise adult/child \$34/17, 4hr Metung cruise with/without lunch \$44/12.50) These folks have been running cruises for almost a century. There's a lake cruise at 2pm daily, plus a longer cruise to Metung at 11am Wednesday to Monday.

Surfing lessons (gear provided) are run by the **Surf Shack** (☎/fax 5155 4933; 507 The Esplanade; 2hr lesson \$45) at nearby Lake Tyers Beach. The **Fisherman's Co-op Viewing Platform** (☎ 5155 1688; Bullock Island) provides a mesmerising view of fishing boats unloading their catch. There's often a boat there but you can phone ahead to check. The Co-op is just off the Princes Hwy: turn at the roundabout at the west end of Lakes Entrance. Also on

TRANSPORT: LAKES ENTRANCE

Distance from Melbourne 317km

Direction East

Travel time 4¼ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Lakes Entrance.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs between Melbourne and Lakes Entrance (\$28, 4¼ hours, two daily).

the Princes Hwy on the western side of town is **Kalimna Lookout**, a popular viewing spot. For an even better view of the ocean, lake and entrance (and a quieter location), take the road directly opposite Kalimna Lookout; you'll almost immediately see a sign to **Jemmy's Point Lookout**.

Lakes' newest offering is the blissfully indulgent **Illuka Day Spa** (☎ 5155 3533; www.esplanaderesort.com.au/dayspa; 1 The Esplanade; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Mon & Wed-Thu, to 8pm Tue, to 7pm Fri), where therapies range from a 30-minute aromatherapy tub (\$60) to the ¾-hour 'Illuka Dreaming' – a foot treatment, sea wrap (with pearl-and-keep body mud) and head-to-toe massage (\$350).

Guided walks to spot nocturnal wildlife, in the company of an experienced naturalist, are run by **Wildlife at Night** (☎ 5156 5863; Wyungara Nature Sanctuary, Veldens Rd; walks adult/child/family \$22/13/55; ☎ departs sunset Sat), signposted off the Princes Hwy 15km east of Lakes Entrance.

INFORMATION

Hai Q Computers (☎ 5155 4247; cnr Myer St & The Esplanade; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; ☎) A computer business with a quirky gift shop, offering internet access (\$7 per hour, including wireless).

Lakes Entrance Library (☎ 5153 9500; 18 Mechanics St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri; ☎) Free internet access.

Lakes Entrance visitors centre (☎ 1800 637 060, 5155 1966; www.lakes-entrance.com; cnr Princes Hwy & Marine Pde; ☎ 9am-5pm) Free accommodation and boat-trip booking service.

EATING & DRINKING

L'Ocean (☎ 5155 2253; 19 Myer St; ☎ lunch & dinner) With one of Australia's largest commercial fishing fleets, Lakes Entrance is a great place for fresh fish and chips (\$8). One of the local favourites is the award-winning L'Ocean, which also caters for the gluten-free crowd and serves delicious fried pumpkin.

Riviera Ice Cream Parlour (☎ 5155 2972; 583 The Esplanade; ice creams \$4; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) Organic ice cream – the perfect follow-up to fresh fish and chips.

Six Sisters & a Pigeon (☎ 5155 1144; 567 The Esplanade; meals \$6-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) On a sunny day, join the locals street-side or by the large open window with your newspaper or magazine. This licensed café adds style to standard café offerings. Try the eggs Atlantic with egg, smoked salmon, baked mushrooms and spinach on Turkish bread. You'll find the best coffee in town here, which goes nicely with the chocolate almond torte.

Ferryman's Seafood Cafe (☎ 5155 3000; Middle Harbour, The Esplanade; mains \$10-39; ☎ brunch, lunch & dinner) Propped in the harbour among a flotilla of fishing boats is this café, serving fish with flair. The salmon fillet, encrusted in pistachio nuts, with pomegranate sauce, is divine. It's child-friendly, with high chairs, a toy box and friendly staff. During business hours you can also buy fresh fish from the shop on the deck below.

Omega 3 (☎ 5155 4344; Shop 5, Safeway Arcade, Church St; ☎ 9am-5pm) This is the shop front for the local Fishermen's Co-op – the best place to buy fish in East Gippsland.

Kalimna Hotel (☎ 5155 1202; 1 Hotel Rd, Kalimna; 11am-1am Mon-Sat, to 11pm Sun) For a drink with views, you can't beat this hotel, signposted off the highway on the Melbourne side of Lakes Entrance.

SLEEPING

Goat & Goose B&B (☎ 5155 3079; www.goatandgoose.com; 16 Gay St; d \$140-210) Bass Strait views are maximised at this wonderfully unusual, multistorey, timber-pole-framed house. The owners are friendly, and all the gorgeously quaint rooms have spas.

Deja Vu B&B (☎ 5155 4330; www.dejavu.com.au; Clara St; d \$150-250; ☎) This imposing, sandstone-coloured, modern home has been built on the slope of a hill to maximise water views, and the bushy garden ensures privacy. After a sumptuous breakfast, canoe across the North Arm to town. Two-night minimum on weekends.

Kalimna Woods (☎ 5155 1957; www.kalimnawoods.com.au; Kalimna Jetty Rd; d \$115-155, f \$145-185; ☎) Retreat 2km from the town centre to Kalimna Woods, set in a large rainforest-and-bush garden, complete with friendly resident possums and birds. These country-style cottages with either spa or wood fire are spacious and comfortable.

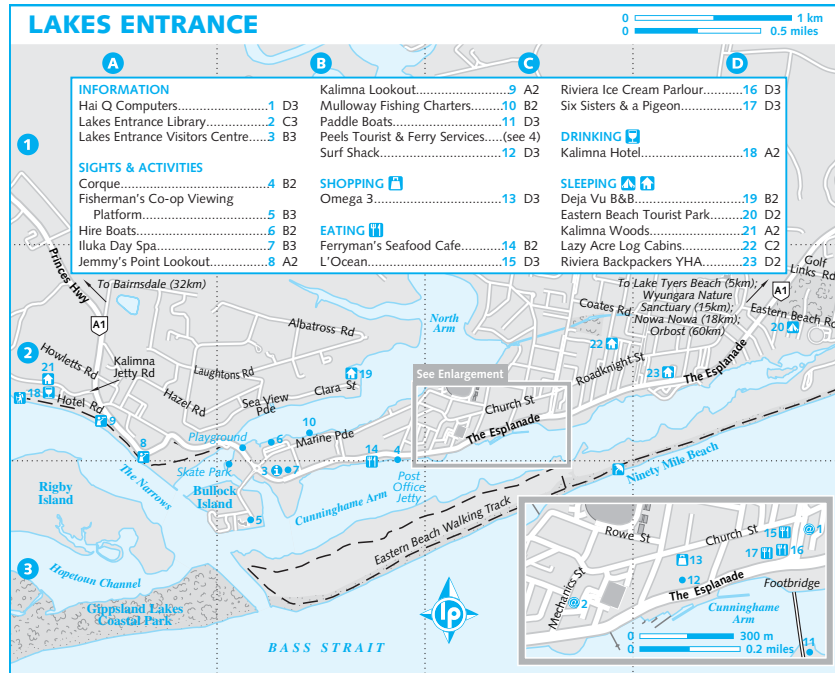
Eastern Beach Tourist Park (☎ 5155 1581; www.easternbeach.com.au; 42 Eastern Beach Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$23/27; ☎) Close to the beach, this park is refreshingly old-style. It has a bush setting by the Eastern Beach Walking Track (30 minutes into town) and free wireless internet.

Lazy Acre Log Cabins (☎ 5155 1323; www.lazyacre.com; 35 Roadknight St; d/f \$105/125; ☎) These small, self-contained timber cabins are shaded with old gum trees, and it's a friendly, relaxed place to stay. There's bicycle hire and a babysitting service, and disabled access is available.

Riviera Backpackers YHA (☎ 5155 2444; www.yha.com.au; 660-71 The Esplanade; YHA members dm/s/d/f \$19/30/44/86; ☎) Part of the Beaches Family Holiday Units complex, these YHA rooms are in old-style brick units, each with two or three bedrooms and a bathroom. There's a big communal kitchen, and lounge with pool table and internet access (\$2 for 15 minutes). Bike and fishing-rod hire are available. Non-YHA members pay a few dollars more.

LAKE TYERS BEACH

pop 550
This is a quiet alternative to Lakes Entrance, popular with surfers for the good surf breaks



TRANSPORT: LAKE TYERS BEACH

Distance from Melbourne 328km

Direction East

Travel time 4¾ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy). The turn-off to Lake Tyers Beach is 5km past Lakes Entrance.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) has a daily service to Lake Tyers Beach (\$29, 4¼ hours, once daily).

at Red Bluff, and with families for the calm lake waters and ocean beaches. Two-hour **boat cruises** (☎ 5156 5492; cruises adult/child/family \$25/15/70; ☎ departs 2pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Sat, 6.30pm Fri) aboard the electric-powered *MV Rumbeena* are a peaceful way to spend the afternoon. **Surfing lessons** are offered at Red Bluff by the Surf Shack (p288).

EATING

Waterwheel Tavern (☎ 5156 5530; 557 Lake Tyers Beach Rd; mains \$19-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Waterwheel has an inspired bistro menu and brilliant views over the lake. See if you can get through the sumptuous seafood platter for two.

SLEEPING

Lake Tyers Beach House (☎ 5156 5995; www.lakes-entrance.com/beamhouse/house.htm; 3 Larkins Pl; up to 4 people \$200) This sunny, four-bedroom house has a fabulous, artistically-inspired, hot-pink, retro-chic living area. Wander down the bushy garden path to a quiet stretch of ocean beach, or next door to the yoga studio to stretch out, take a class or have some private tuition. Two-night minimum stay.

Lakes Beachfront Holiday Retreat (☎ 5156 5582; www.holidayretreats.com.au; 430 Lake Tyers Beach Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$30/34, cabins d \$95-135, f \$119-149, beach cottages d/f \$170/184, villas \$350; ☎) These camp sites are the best you'll find outside of the area's national parks. Vegetation offers shade and privacy, and it's just a short stroll to the ocean beach. The park is almost totally surrounded by native bush, protecting local flora and fauna. Cabins are spotlessly clean and the luxury cabins are like mini motel rooms, complete with irons and hairdryers. Villas with all mod cons are the latest addition.

BUCHAN

pop 330

The sleepy town of Buchan in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains is famous for the spectacular limestone cave system at the **Buchan Caves Reserve**, open to visitors for almost a century. Underground rivers cutting through ancient limestone rock carved the caves and caverns, and local Aboriginal people lived in them more than 18,000 years ago. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5162 1900; www.parks.vic.gov.au; tours adult/child/family \$13/7/33) runs several guided caves tours daily, alternating between Royal and Fairy caves. They're both impressive: Royal has more colour, a higher chamber and extinct kangaroo remains; Fairy has more delicate decorations and fairy sightings have been reported(!). The rangers also offer hard-hat guided tours to the less developed Federal Cave during the high season. The reserve itself is a pretty spot with shaded picnic areas, **walking tracks** and grazing kangaroos. In-igation is guaranteed when taking a dip in the icy **rock pool** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm).

INFORMATION

Buchan General Store (☎ 5155 9202; 57 Main St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Local information.

Buchan Neighbourhood House (☎ 5155 9216, 6 Centre Rd; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Internet access \$4 per hour.

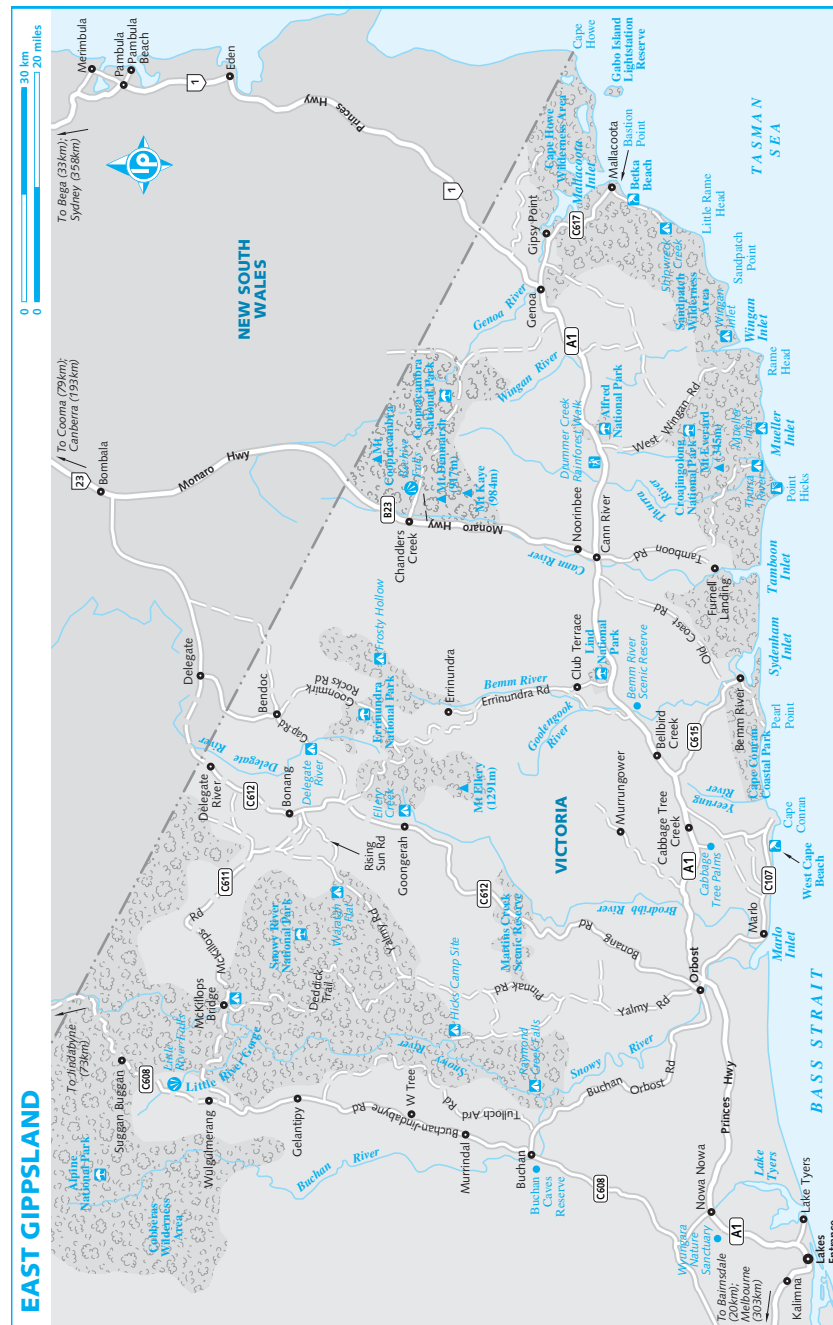
Buchan Valley Roadhouse (☎ 5155 9484; 52 Main St; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Sells petrol.

EATING

Caves Hotel (☎ 5155 9203; 49 Main St; mains \$15-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) This century-old timber pub has quality bistro meals and some wicked desserts (like the Mars Bar cheesecake).

SLEEPING

Buchan Caves Reserve (☎ 5162 1900; www.parks.vic.gov.au; Buchan Caves Reserve; unpowered/powerd sites \$13/18, cabins d & f from \$58, wilderness retreats s/d \$100/120; ☎) Edged by state forest, the camp ground within this reserve offers plenty of shady sites. There are a couple of standard cabins, plus new safari-style tents providing a luxury wilderness experience (think comfortable queen-size bed) without having to pitch your own tent. It's ideal for those who'd love to camp, if only it wasn't so uncomfortable.



TRANSPORT: BUCHAN

Distance from Melbourne 355km

Direction East

Travel time Five hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink, Monash Fwy, Princes Hwy) to Bairnsdale. Get on the Great Alpine Rd to Bruthen, then take the Bruthen-Buchan Rd.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) trains run to Bairnsdale. Buchan Bus 'n' Freight (☎ 5155 0356; www.buchanbusnfreight.com.au) operates a service on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from Bairnsdale to W Tree (\$14, 2¼ hours) and Buchan (\$14, 1¾ hours, three weekly).

Buchan Lodge Backpackers (☎ 5155 9421; www.buchanlodge.com; 9 Saleyard Rd; dm \$25) A short walk from the caves and the town centre, and just by the river, this friendly, rough-and-ready, timber-lined building is great for lounging about and taking in the country views. Staff will also organise a transport shuttle for those wanting to raft or canoe down the Snowy River. Children under 14 can stay by arrangement only. Rates include continental breakfast.

SNOWY RIVER NATIONAL PARK

This is one of Victoria's most isolated and spectacular national parks, dominated by deep gorges carved through limestone and sandstone by the Snowy River. The entire park is a smorgasbord of unspoiled, superb bush and mountain scenery. It covers more than 95,000 hectares and includes a huge diversity of vegetation, ranging from alpine woodlands and eucalypt forests to rainforests and even areas of mallee-type scrub. It is home to loads of wildlife, including the rare brush-tailed rock wallaby.

On the west side of the park, the views from the well-signposted cliff-top lookouts over **Little River Falls** and **Little River Gorge**, Victoria's deepest gorge, are spectacular. From there it's about 20km to **McKillops Bridge**, a huge bridge spanning the Snowy River, making it possible to drive across the park to Errinundra National Park (see **opposite**). There are also some sandy river beaches and swimming spots, and several good **short walks** around here. The hilly and difficult **Silver Mine Walking Track** (15km, six hours) starts at the eastern end of the bridge.

Walking and canoeing are the most popular activities, but you need to be well prepared for both – conditions can be harsh and subject to sudden change. The classic canoe or raft trip down the Snowy River from McKillops Bridge to a pull-out point near Buchan takes at least four days, and offers superb scenery: rugged gorges, raging rapids, tranquil sections and excellent camping spots on broad sand bars.

The two main access roads to the park are the Buchan-Jindabyne Rd from Buchan, and the Bonang Rd from Orbost. These roads are joined by McKillops Rd (also known as Deddick Valley Rd), which runs across the northern border of the park from Bonang to just south of Wulgulmerang. Various access roads and scenic routes run into and alongside the park from these three main roads. The 43km **Deddick Trail**, which runs through the middle of the park, is only suitable for 4WDs.

Good **scenic drives** in and around the park include McKillops Rd, Rising Sun Rd from Bonang, Tullock Ard Rd from just south of Gelantipy, and Yalmy Rd, which is the main access road to the park's southern and central areas, and places like Waratah Flat, Hicks Camp Site and Raymond Creek Falls. These roads are unsealed and usually closed during winter.

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 16 93; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) Provides information about camping and road conditions.

SLEEPING

McKillops Bridge Camp Site (free) This is the park's main camp site, though there are other free

TRANSPORT: SNOWY RIVER NATIONAL PARK

Distance 415km

Direction East

Travel time 6½ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Orbost, or turn off at Bairnsdale for Buchan, and follow the signposts from there.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) trains run to Bairnsdale. From there Buchan Bus 'n' Freight (☎ 5155 0356; www.buchanbusnfreight.com.au) operates a bus service to Karoonda Park on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (\$16, 2¾ hours, three weekly).

sites throughout the park. It's a beautiful spot and has toilets and fireplaces.

Karoonda Park (☎ 5155 0220; www.karoondapark.com; 3558 Gelantipy Rd; dm/d \$28/56, cabins per 6-10 people \$110; ♿ ☎ 📶) At Gelantipy, 40km north of Buchan on the road to Snowy River National Park, this cattle-and-sheep property has comfortable backpacker and cabin digs. Rates include breakfast; other meals are available. Activities available include abseiling (\$25 per hour), horse riding (\$35 per hour), wild caving (\$35 per hour) and white-water rafting (see **p294**).

ERRINUNDRRA NATIONAL PARK

Errinundra National Park contains Victoria's largest cool-temperate rainforest and is one of East Gippsland's most outstanding natural areas. The forests surrounding the park are a constant battleground between loggers and environmentalists who are trying to protect old-growth forests.

The national park covers an area of 25,600 hectares and has three granite outcrops that extend into the cloud, resulting in high rainfall, deep, fertile soils and a network of creeks and rivers that flow north, south and east. The park has several climatic zones – some areas of the park are quite dry, while its peaks regularly receive snow. This is a rich habitat for native birds and animals, which include many rare and endangered species such as the potoroo.

Errinundra is one of the best examples in the world of 'mixed forest' vegetation – it's dominated by southern sassafras and black oliveberry, with tall eucalypt forests providing a canopy for the lower rainforests. Some of the giant trees are many hundreds of years old.

You can explore the park by a combination of scenic drives, and short and medium-length walks. **Mt Ellery** has spectacular views; **Errinundra Saddle** is a rainforest boardwalk; and from **Ocean View Lookout** there are stunning views down the Goolengook River as far as Bemm River. The park also has **mountain plum pines**, some of which are more than 400 years old, which are easily accessible from Goonmirk Rocks Rd.

Nestled by the edge of the national park is tiny **Goongerah** (population 50), where there's a thriving community with two active community environmental organisations. **Goongerah Environment Centre** (☎ 5154 0156; www.geco.org.au) organises ongoing protests and blockades in the forest surrounding the park and has detailed

information about park drives and walks on its website. The other community group, **Environment East Gippsland** (☎ 5154 0145; www.eastgippsland.net.au), lobbies extensively on forest issues. It also provides people with the chance to explore the forests under the guidance of environmental experts at the **Forests Forever Ecology Camp** (☎ 5154 0145; www.eastgippsland.net.au; adult/child/teenager per day \$20/free/10) held each Easter at Ellery Creek camp site in Goongerah. Ecologists guide you through the forest, hoping you'll be awed by their beauty and complexity, outraged by their destruction, and will spread the word. You need to bring your own camping gear and food.

The main access roads to the park are Bonang Rd from Orbost and Errinundra Rd from Club Terrace. Bonang Rd passes along the western side of the park, while Errinundra Rd passes through the centre. Road conditions are variable and the roads are often closed or impassable during the winter months or after floods (check Parks Victoria in Orbost or Bendoc first) and watch out for logging trucks. Roads within the park are all unsealed, but are 2WD accessible. Expect seasonal closures between June and November, though roads can deteriorate quickly at any time of year after rain.

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 16 93, Orbost 5161 1222, Bendoc 02-6458 1456; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) Information about camping and road conditions in the park.

SLEEPING

Frosty Hollow Camp Site (sites free) This is the only camping area within the national park, on the eastern side. There are also free camping areas on the park's edges – at Ellery Creek in Goongerah, and at Delegate River.

Jacarri (☎ 5154 0145; www.eastgippsland.net.au/jacarri; cnr Bonang Hwy & Ellery Creek Track, Goongerah; s & d/f \$80/90) This gorgeous little cottage, made from recycled and plantation timber, is on Jill

TRANSPORT: ERRINUNDRRA NATIONAL PARK

Distance from Melbourne 474km

Direction East

Travel time Seven hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Orbost and follow the signs from there.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

You can't access most of the Snowy River or Errinundra National Parks with a 2WD, and sections of Croajingolong are only open to a limited numbers of walkers. However, there are a few companies providing organised trips into these beautiful wilderness areas.

An eco-tourism award winner, **Gippsland High Country Tours** (☎ 5157 5556; www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au; 5-7-day tour \$1190/1970) is an East Gippsland-based company running easy, moderate and challenging five- to seven-day hikes in Errinundra, Snowy River and Croajingolong National Parks. The Croajingolong trips include three nights accommodation in the Point Hicks Lighthouse. There's also a five-day bird-watching tour in Snowy River country.

A Goongerah-based organisation, **Rainforest Adventure Services** (☎ 5154 0174; www.rainforestadventures.com.au; 2-day walk incl meals \$120) runs weekend forest walks in Errinundra National Park, with overnight camping.

Snowy River Expeditions (☎ 5155 9353; www.karoondapark.com/sre; Karoonda Park, Gelantipy; tours per day \$135) is an established company, running adventure tours including one-, two- or four-day rafting trips on the Snowy. Half- or full-day abseiling or caving trips are also available. Costs include transport, meals and camping gear.

A mostly volunteer-run organisation, **Wilderness Bike Ride** (☎ 5154 6637; www.wildernessbikeride.com.au; 3-day ride incl meals & camp fees \$310) runs a finely-organised three- or four-day mountain-bike ride in April each year, usually through the wilds of Errinundra National Park.

Redwood's organic farm. It's solar-powered, has a slow combustion stove for heating and cooking, and sleeps four.

CAPE CONRAN COASTAL PARK

This is one of the most beautiful spots in the state. It's a blissfully undeveloped part of the coast, with long stretches of remote white-sand beaches. The 19km coastal route from Marlo to Cape Conran is particularly pretty, bordered by banksia trees, grass plains, sand dunes and the ocean.

Cape Conran is a fabulous spot for **walking** – Parks Victoria has a brochure detailing the many options. One favourite is the nature trail which meets up with the East Cape Boardwalk, where signage gives you a glimpse into how indigenous people lived in this area. Following an indigenous theme, take the West Cape Rd off Cape Conran Rd to **Salmon Rocks**, where there's an Aboriginal **shell midden** dated at more than 10,000 years old.

For some relaxed swimming, canoeing and fishing go to the **Yeerung River**. There's good surfing at **West Cape Beach**, where you can take lessons through the **Surf Shack** (see p288). For qualified divers, **Cross Diving Services** (☎ 5153 2010, 0407-362 960; per dive \$50) offers dives on most weekends (equipment hire available).

If you're staying in the park, keep an eye out for bandicoots and potoroos, whose numbers have increased in recent years following the introduction of the park's fox management program. Check out **Cabbage Tree Palms**, which can

be accessed from a number of points, and 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 (☎ 51548438; www.conran.net.au) manages the following three accommodation options in Cape Conran Coastal Park.

Cape Conran Cabins (cabin \$109) These self-contained cabins, which can sleep up to eight people, are surrounded by bush and are just 200m from the beach. Built from local timbers, the cabins are like oversized cubby houses with lofty mezzanines for sleeping. BYO linen. Rain water on tap.

Banksia Bluff Camping Area (unpowered sites \$17) This camping ground is right by the foreshore, with generous sites surrounded by banksia woodlands offering shade and privacy. The camping ground has toilets, cold showers and a few fireplaces, but you'll need to bring drinking water (or purchase it from the park office).

Cape Conran Wilderness Retreats (d/f \$120/150) Nestled in the bush by the sand dunes are these classy safari tents. All the simplicity of camping, but with comfortable beds and a deck outside your fly-wire door. Two-night minimum stay.

West Cape Cabins (☎ 5154 8296; www.westcapecabins.com.au; 1547 Cape Conran Rd; s & d/f \$175/205) Crafted from locally grown or recycled timbers, these self-contained cabins a few kilometres from the national park are a work of art. The timbers are all labelled with their species, and even the queen-size bed bases are made from tree trunks. The eight-seater outdoor spa

TRANSPORT: CAPE CONRAN COASTAL PARK

Distance from Melbourne 406km

Direction East

Travel time 5¼ hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Orbst and follow the signs to Cape Conran (via Marlo) from there.

adds to the joy. It's a 15-minute walk through coastal bush to an isolated beach.

MALLACOOTA

pop 980

Relaxed Mallacoota is completely surrounded by the internationally acclaimed Croajingolong National Park, and is one of the nicest towns in the state. Its long, empty ocean beaches, tidal river mouths and vast 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.

One of the best ways to experience the beauty of Mallacoota is by boat. The calm estuarine waters of Mallacoota Inlet have more than 300km of shoreline. There are many public jetties where you can tie your boat up and come ashore for picnic tables, toilets or to take a dip. **Mallacoota Hire Boats** (☎ 0438-447 558; Main Wharf, cnr Allan & Buckland Drs; motor boats per half-/full day \$85/145, canoes per hr \$17) is centrally located and hires out canoes and boats. No licence required; cash only. You can take a cruise aboard **MV Loch Ard** (☎ 5158 0764; Main Wharf, cnr Allan & Buckland Drs; 2hr cruise adult/child \$25/10), which has been plying the lakes for almost a century. This old wooden boat also does two- and three-hour trips, including one to the far side of the lake where the original Mallacoota settlement once was.

Wilderness Coast Ocean Charters (☎ 0418-553 809; Gabo Island \$60, Skerries \$120) runs trips to the Skerries seal colony to view these delightful creatures. Whales are sometimes spotted on trips from September to November. It also runs trips to Gabo Island from Bastion Point, leaving early in the morning with pick-up in the afternoon. On Gabo Island, the windswept 154-hectare **Gabo Island Lightstation Reserve**, 14km from Mallacoota, is home to sea birds and one of the world's largest colonies of little penguins. Whales, dolphins and fur seals are regularly

sighted off shore. The island has an operating **lighthouse** (tours adult/child \$10/5), built in 1862, which is the tallest in the southern hemisphere. Accommodation is also available here (see p296). **Mallacoota Air Services** (☎ 0408-580 806; www.mallacootaairservices.com; return per 3 adults or 2 adults & 2 children \$200) also provide access to the island.

There are plenty of great **short walks** around the town, the inlet, and in the bush, ranging from a half-hour stroll to a four-hour walk. The easy **Bucklands Jetty to Captain Creek Jetty Walk** (one way 5km, 1½ hours) starts about 4km north of the town and follows the shoreline of the inlet past the Narrows. The walk can be extended from Captains Creek via eucalypt forests to either Double Creek (3km) or the Mallacoota-Genoa Rd (3km). The **Mallacoota Town Walk** (7km, five hours) loops round Bastion Point, and combines five different walks, is also popular. Walking notes with maps are available from Parks Victoria and the visitors centre.

For good **surf**, head to Bastion Point or Tip Beach. There's swimmable surf and some sheltered waters at Betka Beach, which is patrolled during Christmas school holidays. There are also good **swimming spots** along the beaches of the foreshore reserve, at Bastion Point and Quarry Beach.

INFORMATION

Lucy's (☎ 5158 0666; 64 Maurice Ave; ☎ 8am-9pm; ☎) Have coffee and cake or Lucy's homemade rice noodles while you access the internet (\$2 per 15 minutes).

Mallacoota Newsagency (☎ 5158 0888; 14 Allan Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun; ☎) Internet access \$2.50 per 15 minutes. You can also plug in your own computer here.

TRANSPORT: MALLACOOTA

Distance from Melbourne 515km

Direction East

Travel time Seven hours

Car Take the M1 (CityLink/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Genoa then turn right to Mallacoota.

Train & Bus V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) train/bus services run one service daily to Genoa (\$36, seven hours). Mallacoota-Genoa Bus Service (☎ 0408-315 615) meets the V/Line coach on Monday, Thursday and Friday, plus Sunday during school and public holidays, and runs to Mallacoota (\$4, 30 minutes).

INFORMATION

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63, Cann River 5158 6351, Mallacoota 5161 9500; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) Contact offices in Cann River or Mallacoota for information on road conditions, overnight hiking, camping permits and track notes.

SLEEPING

The park's main camping areas are listed below. Given their amazing beauty, these camping grounds are surprisingly quiet, and bookings only need to be made for the Christmas and Easter holiday periods. Wingan and Shipwreck can be booked through **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63); Thurra and Mueller through **Point Hicks Lighthouse** (☎ 5158 4268).

Wingan Inlet (unpowered sites \$15.50) This serene and secluded site has superb sandy beaches and great walks. The Wingan River Walk (5km, 2½ hours return) through rainforest has great waterholes for swimming.

Shipwreck Creek (unpowered sites \$15.50) Only 15km from Mallacoota, this is a beautiful camping ground set in forest above a sandy beach. It's a small area with just five sites, and there are lots of short walks to do here.

Mueller Inlet (unpowered sites \$16) The calm waters here are fantastic for kayaking and swimming, and the camp sites are only a couple of metres from the water (not ideal for toddlers). It has eight sites, three of them walk-in, but it's the only camping ground without fireplaces. There's no vegetation providing privacy, but outside Christmas and Easter holidays it's usually quiet.

Thurra River (unpowered sites \$16) This is the largest of the park's camping grounds, with 46 well-designed sites stretched along the foreshore from the river towards the lighthouse. Most of the sites are separated by bush, and there are communal fireplaces and pit toilets. Both Thurra River and Mueller Inlet camping grounds are less than 5km from the lighthouse.

Bush Camping (unpowered sites per person \$5) Several other bush-camping sites lie along the Wilderness Coast Walk. BYO drinking water. Permits required.

Point Hicks Lighthouse (☎ 5158 4268, 5156 0432; www.gippslandlakesescapes.com.au/Properties/PointHicksLighthouse; up to 6 people \$250-295) This remote lighthouse has two comfortable, heritage-listed cottages that originally housed the Assistant Lighthouse Keepers. The cottages have sensational ocean views and wood fires.

TRANSPORT: CROAJINGOLONG NATIONAL PARK

Distance from Melbourne 450-525km (depending on entry point)

Direction East

Travel time 6½-7½ hours

Car Take the M1 (City Link/Monash Fwy/Princes Hwy) to Cann River and turn right for Thurra River and Mueller Inlet. Continue along the Princes Hwy past Cann River to take Wingan Inlet turn-off. Travel along the Princes Hwy to Genoa, turn right for Mallacoota for Shipwreck Creek.

intrepid, starts at Sydenham Inlet by Bemm River and heads along the coast to Mallacoota (you can start anywhere in between). **Thurra River** is a good starting point, making the walk an easy-to-medium hike (59km, five days) to Mallacoota. Tony Gray runs a **car shuttle** (☎ 5158 0472, 0408-516 482; up to 6 people \$212) to Thurra River from Mallacoota (leave your car at Mallacoota airport). Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* has an excellent detailed description of the walk from Thurra River to Mallacoota.

Croajingolong is a bird-watcher's paradise, with more than 300 recorded species (including glossy black cockatoos and the rare ground parrot), while the inland waterways are home to myriad water birds, such as the delicate azure kingfisher and the magnificent sea eagle. There are also many small mammals here, including possums, bandicoots and gliders, and some huge goannas.

Park vegetation ranges from typical coastal landscapes to thick eucalypt forests, with areas of warm-temperate rainforest. The heathland areas are filled with impressive displays of orchids and wildflowers in the spring.

Point Hicks was the first part of Australia to be spotted by Captain Cook and the *Endeavour* crew in 1770, and was named after his first Lieutenant, Zachary Hicks. There's a **light-house** here which is open for tours (see right), recanting tales of dark, stormy nights filled with ghosts and shipwrecks. You can still see remains of the SS *Saros*, which ran ashore in 1937, on a short walk from the lighthouse.

Access roads of varying quality lead into the park from the Princes Hwy. Apart from Mallacoota Rd, all roads are unsealed and can be very rough in winter, so check road conditions with Parks Victoria before venturing on, especially during or after rain.

modation is available in the three-bedroom Assistant Lighthouse Keeper's residence. Enjoy the extreme isolation (well, along with the 300-plus local animal species) and watch for migrating whales in autumn and late spring. Pods of dolphins and seals basking on the rocks are also regular sightings. Two-night minimum stay.

Mallacoota Houseboats (☎ 5158 0775; Karbeethong Jetty; 3-night minimum \$850) These houseboats are a divine way to explore Mallacoota's waterways. The clean and cosy boats sleep up to six and have a kitchen, toilet, shower and barbecue. Prices almost double in peak season.

Adobe Mudbrick Flats (☎ 5158 0329; www.adobeholidayflats.com.au; 17 Karbeethong Ave; flats \$80) These 1970s-built, eco-friendly, comfortable mudbrick flats are about 5km from the town centre. They're particularly fun for families, with birds to feed, a farmyard of ducks, and kangaroos and a lyrebird to look out for. Check out the gorgeous inlet views from the comfort of your hammock. You're encouraged to recycle, compost and conserve water. Linen costs extra.

Mallacoota Hotel, Motel & Backpackers (☎ 5158 0455; inncoota@bigpond.net.au; 51-55 Maurice Ave; dm \$22, motel s/d from \$65/80; ☎ ☎) The backpackers rooms here are a bit shabby, but there's a good shared kitchen, use of the motel pool and it's conveniently next door to the pub. Motel and family units overlook the lawn and pool.

CROAJINGOLONG NATIONAL PARK

Croajingolong is one of Australia's finest national parks, recognised by its listing as a World Biosphere Reserve by Unesco (one of 12 in Australia). This coastal wilderness park covers 87,500 hectares, stretching for about 100km from Bemm River to the NSW border. Magnificent, unspoiled beaches, inlets, estuaries and forests make this an ideal park for camping, walking, swimming and surfing. The five inlets – **Sydenham**, **Tamboon**, **Mueller**, **Wingan** and **Mallacoota** (the largest and most accessible) – are popular canoeing and fishing spots.

Two sections of the park have been declared Wilderness Areas (which means no vehicles, access to a limited number of walkers only and permits required): the **Cape Howe Wilderness Area**, between Mallacoota Inlet and the NSW border, and the **Sandpatch Wilderness Area**, between Wingan Inlet and Shipwreck Creek. The **Wilderness Coast Walk**, only for the well-prepared and

Mallacoota visitors centre (☎ 5158 0800; Main Wharf, cnr Allan & Buckland Dr; ☎ 10am-4pm) Operated by friendly volunteers.

Parks Victoria (☎ 5161 9500; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; cnr Buckland & Allan Drs) An information centre opposite the main wharf with excellent outdoor displays and information on Croajingolong and Mallacoota.

EATING

Croajingolong Cafe (☎ 5158 0098; Shop 3, 14 Allan Dr; mains \$5-13; ☎) breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) Overlooking the inlet, this is a great place for a coffee. Grab your newspaper and settle down to pancakes and wild berries or the enormous Veggie Brekky. No credit cards.

Mallacoota Hotel Motel (☎ 5158 0455; 51-55 Maurice Ave; mains \$15-29; ☎) lunch & dinner) The pub bistro provides hearty meals on its varied menu, with reliable favourites like chicken Kiev and vegetable risotto. Bands play at the pub regularly in the summer.

Tide Restaurant (☎ 5158 0100; 70 Maurice Ave; mains \$17-29; ☎) dinner) The service is attentive at Mallacoota's most upmarket dining option, with a prime lakeside setting. The menu features well-presented seafood. No credit cards.

SLEEPING

There are plenty of options here, though during Easter and Christmas school holidays you'll need to book well ahead and expect prices to be significantly higher.

Karbeethong Lodge (☎ 5158 0411; www.karbeethonglodge.com.au; 16 Schnapper Point Dr; d/f \$120/150) It's hard not to be overcome by a sense of serenity as you rest on the broad verandas of this early 1900s timber guesthouse, with uninterrupted views over Mallacoota Inlet. The large guest lounge and dining room have an open fire and period furnishings, and there's a mammoth kitchen if you want to prepare meals. The pastel-toned bedrooms are small but neat and tastefully decorated. The Lodge is signposted from the Genoa-Mallacoota Rd.

Mallacoota Foreshore Caravan Park (☎ 5158 0300; camppark@vicnet.net.au; cnr Allan Dr & Maurice Ave; unpowered/powerd sites \$17/21, caravans d \$65; ☎) Hundreds of grassy sites extend along the foreshore and have sublime views of the lake, with its resident population of black swans and pelicans. The sunsets and sunrises here are superb, and there's free internet access for campers.

Gabo Island Lighthouse (☎ Parks Victoria 13 19 63, 5161 9500; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; up to 8 people \$169) Accom-

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