

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Western Australia (WA) offers every type of accommodation. Experiences range from the self-catering crowds in the caravan parks and camping grounds and the communal conviviality of hostels, to gourmet breakfasts in guesthouses and relaxing resorts, plus the gamut of hotel and motel lodgings. Just don't expect to find all of the above in the one town.

Listings in the Sleeping sections of this guidebook are ordered in budget order. For Perth, places that charge up to \$80 per double have been categorised as budget accommodation. Midrange prices are from \$80 to \$150 per double, while the top-end tag is applied to places charging more than \$150 per double.

PRACTICALITIES

- Leaf through the *West Australian* or the national *Australian* broadsheet from Monday to Saturday, and the *Sunday Times* on Sunday.
- Switch on the box to watch the ad-free ABC, the government-sponsored and multicultural SBS, or the commercial TV stations Seven, Nine and Ten.
- Plug your hairdryer into a three-pin adaptor (not the same as British three-pin adaptors) before plugging into the electricity supply (220-240V AC, 50Hz).
- DVDs you buy or watch will probably be Region 4 and will be based on the PAL system.

In areas other than Perth, budget is classified as doubles up to \$60, midrange from \$60 to \$100, and top end over \$100.

In most areas you'll find seasonal price variations. Over summer and at other peak times, particularly school and public holidays, prices are usually at their highest, whereas outside these times discounts and lower walk-in rates can be found. One exception is the far North, where the Wet season (November to April) is the low season and prices can drop by as much as 50%. High-season prices are quoted in this guidebook unless otherwise indicated.

B&Bs

The WA bed and breakfast (B&B) options include everything from restored miners' cottages, converted barns, rambling old houses, upmarket country manors and beachside bungalows to a simple bedroom in a family home. Tariffs are typically in the \$70 to \$150 (per double) bracket, but can be much higher for exclusive and/or historic houses. For online information, try www.australianbandb.com.au, www.babs.com.au or www.ozbedandbreakfast.com.

Camping & Caravan Parks

Whether you're packing a tent, driving a campervan or towing a caravan, camping in

the bush is a highlight of travelling in WA. In the outback and up north you often won't even need a tent, and nights spent around a campfire under the stars are unforgettable. WA has roadside overnight stops (designated by a '24' symbol) for travellers on the road that are free and usually well positioned to break up a long drive. The handy *WA Main Roads* brochure, available at most visitors centres, covers these and details the facilities available at each stop.

Designated camp sites in national parks and state forests are often the most convenient place to stay if you want to explore a park over a few days. They cost \$6.50 per adult with no or basic facilities other than a place to pitch your tent. For sites with showers (including unpowered caravan sites) the price is \$7.50 per person. Note that you will also need to pay national park entrance fees – this is separate to the camping fee. If you're exploring several parks, it makes sense to pick up a one month national parks pass (\$35).

Commercial caravan parks and camping grounds are found all over WA and are excellent value. Idyllically located parks can be seductive – often people end up staying months rather than days once they see that the fishing or surfing is unsurpassable! Large parks offer powered and unpowered sites. Expect to pay around \$20 per site for camp sites and \$25/18 for powered/unpowered caravan sites. Increasingly, caravan parks are offering more 'cabin' or 'motel' style accommodation with ensuites, and these can often be better than the town's hotel/motel accommodation – although, for most, you will need your own linen. Expect to pay upwards of \$80 for these per cabin.

Before you head off be sure to get a free copy of the guide to *Caravanning, Camping and Motorhoming in WA*, available at visitors centres around the state, or visit the website www.caravanwa.com.au.

Farm & Station Stays

For a true outback experience, some of the state's farms and stations offer a rural getaway. The Gascoyne, Pilbara and Murchison areas of WA are popular spots for station stays. At some you can kick back and watch other people raise a sweat, while others require you to pull your weight. Most accommodation is very comfortable – in the main homestead (B&B-style, many providing dinner on re-

quest) or in self-contained cottages on the property. Other farms provide budget options in outbuildings or former shearers' quarters – providing you an opportunity to wear that Akubra hat without looking silly. Check out options on the websites for **WA Farms, Stations & Country Retreats** (www.farmstaywa.com) and **Australian Farmstay** (www.australiafarmstay.com.au).

Hostels

Hostels are a highly social and very economical fixture of the WA accommodation scene. The ones that are good are very, very good indeed, many with swimming pools, bars, weekly BBQs and free transport. Staff can offer help in securing seasonal work.

HOSTEL ORGANISATIONS

The **Youth Hostel Association** (YHA; ☎ 9287 3300; 300 Wellington St, Perth; www.yha.com.au; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is part of the **International Youth Hostel Federation** (IYHF; www.hihostels.com), also known as **Hostelling International** (HI). So if you're already a member of that organisation in your own country, your membership entitles you to YHA rates in the relevant WA hostels. Visitors to Australia should purchase a HI card preferably in their country of residence, but can also buy one at major local YHA hostels at a cost of \$35 for 12 months; see the HI website for further details. Australian residents can become full YHA members for \$52/85 for one/two years; join online, at a state office or any youth hostel.

VIP Backpackers (☎ 07 3395 6111; www.vipbackpackers.com) has a few members in WA (several in Perth) and many more around Australia and overseas. For \$39 you'll receive a 12-month membership, entitling you to discounts on accommodation and a 5% to 15% discount on other products such as air and bus transport, tours and activities. You can join online, at VIP hostels or at larger agencies dealing in backpacker travel.

INDEPENDENT HOSTELS

WA has a rapidly growing group of independent hostels of varying quality. Fierce competition for the backpacker dollar means that standards are generally kept pretty high – and there are plenty of bonus enticements, such as free internet access, courtesy buses, and discount meal and beer vouchers. If you crave peace and quiet, avoid the 'party places'; instead, stay in smaller, more intimate hostels

where often the owner is also the manager. Note that in some rural areas hostels have become permanent addresses for workers looking for employment and are often booked out. Wherever possible we've omitted these from the book.

Independent backpacker establishments typically charge \$19 to \$26 for a dorm bed and \$40 to \$60 for a twin or double room (usually without bathroom), often with a small discount if you're a member of YHA or VIP.

Hotels & Motels

In the more touristy areas hotels are generally comfortable but anonymous. These places tend to have a pool, restaurant/café, room service and the expected mod-cons. We quote 'rack rates' (official advertised rates) throughout this book, but often hotels/motels offer regular discounts and special deals.

For comfortable midrange accommodation that's available all over the state, motels (or motor inns) are the places to stay. Prices vary and there's rarely a cheaper rate for singles, making them better for couples or groups of three. Most motels are reasonably modern, low-rise and have similar facilities (tea- and coffee-making, fridge, TV, air-con, bathroom) but the price will indicate the standard. You'll mostly pay between \$70 and \$150 for a room. In rural areas it pays to book ahead as this accommodation is often booked out by government workers or tour groups.

Pubs

Pubs (from the term 'public house') in Australia are often called hotels – and they do often have accommodation. In country towns, pubs are invariably found in the town centre and as they were generally built during boom times, they're often the grandest buildings in town. In tourist areas some of these pubs have been restored as heritage buildings, but generally the rooms to rent remain old-fashioned, with a long, creaky amble down the hall to the bathroom. You can sometimes rent a single room at a country pub for not much more than a hostel dorm, and you'll be in the social heart of the town to boot. But if you're a light sleeper, never book a room above the bar.

Standard pubs have singles/doubles with shared facilities starting from around \$30/50 – obviously more if you want a private bathroom. Some pubs have separate motel-style accommodation at the back of the hotel as

well. Few have a separate reception area – just ask in the bar if there are rooms available. For women travellers, see p259.

Rental Accommodation

The ubiquitous holiday flat resembles a motel unit but has a kitchen or cooking facilities. It can come with two or more bedrooms and is often rented on a weekly basis – prices per night are higher for shorter stays. For a two-bedroom flat, expect to pay anywhere from \$60 to \$95 per night. The other alternative in major cities is to take out a serviced apartment. The **Tourism WA** (www.westernaustralia.com) website has a database of serviced and unserviced apartments. **Number Six** (www.number-six.com.au) has a number of excellent apartments in great locations around Fremantle and Margaret River.

If you're interested in a shared flat or house for a long-term stay, delve into the classified advertisements sections of the daily newspapers; Wednesday and Saturday are usually the best days. Notice boards in universities, hostels, bookshops and cafés are also good to check out.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

ACTIVITIES

With all of this brilliant sunshine and incredible landscapes and seascapes, it's little wonder that activities in WA are based around the great outdoors. WA has some remarkable bushwalking terrain and peaceful camping options, quite often located in pristine national parks. Cycling tours are popular in the south of the state, with some fun mountain-biking terrain to test your skills. WA is a fishing enthusiast's notion of heaven, with surf, stream and game fishing on the agenda – not to mention the challenge of the hard fighting (and tasty!) barramundi.

If you want to get in the water, the diving and snorkelling in WA are fantastic – in the crystal-clear waters you will encounter reefs

teeming with sea life. Back up on the surface, WA is a world-renowned destination for surfers, windsurfers and kite-surfers. WA is one of the world's prime places to do some wildlife-watching – whales, dugongs, whale sharks and dolphins are just some of the visitors you'll encounter. For more details, check out the Outdoors chapter, p37.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most shops and businesses in WA are open from 8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, and from 8.30am to 5pm on Saturday. Sunday trading is from noon to 6pm in the principal tourist precincts of Perth and Fremantle, and some suburban areas such as Subiaco and Northbridge – though opening times differ from shop to shop. In the larger towns there is one late-shopping night each week with doors open until 9pm. In central Perth it's Friday; in the suburbs it's Thursday. Supermarket hours vary; you will find that delis (milk bars) and convenience stores often open until late.

Banks are normally open from 9.30am to 4pm Monday to Thursday and until 5pm on Friday. Post offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, but you can also buy stamps on Saturday morning at post-office agencies (operated from newsagencies) and from Australia Post shops in the major cities.

Restaurants in Perth, and the larger, more tourist-oriented towns, typically open at noon for lunch and between 6pm and 7pm for dinner; most dinner bookings are made for 7.30pm or 8pm. Restaurants are typically open until at least 9pm but tend to serve food until later on Friday and Saturday. Pubs and bars often open for lunchtime tipples and continue well into the evening, particularly from Thursday to Saturday. In WA's small towns where there are only one or two options for meals, dinner service is generally finished by 8pm.

Keep in mind that nearly all attractions are closed on Christmas Day.

CHILDREN Practicalities

Perth and most major towns have centrally located public rooms where parents can go to nurse their baby or change nappies; check with the local tourist office or city council for details. While many Australians have a

relaxed attitude about breast-feeding or nappy changing in public, some don't.

Many motels and the better-equipped caravan parks have playgrounds and swimming pools, and can supply cots and baby baths – motels in the more touristy areas may also have in-house children's videos and child-minding services. Top-end hotels and many (but not all) midrange hotels are well versed in the needs of guests who have children. B&Bs, on the other hand, often market themselves as sanctuaries from all things child-related. Many cafés and restaurants lack a specialised children's menu, but many others do have kids' meals, or will provide small serves from the main menu. Some also supply high chairs.

Child concessions (and family rates) often apply for such things as accommodation, tours, admission fees, and air, bus and train transport, with some discounts as high as 50% of the adult rate. However, the definition of 'child' can vary from under 12 to under 18 years. Accommodation concessions generally apply to children under 12 years sharing the same room as adults. On the major airlines, infants travel free provided they don't occupy a seat – child fares usually apply between the ages of two and 11 years.

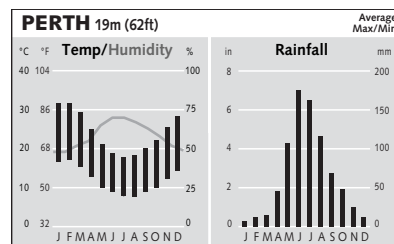
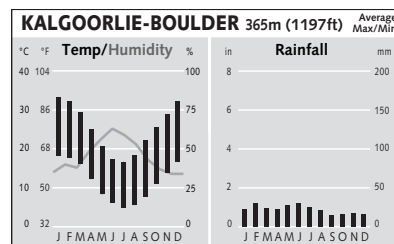
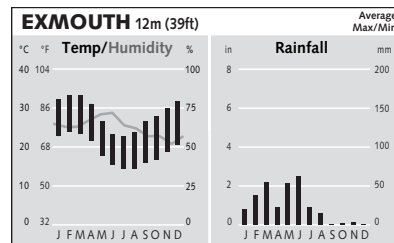
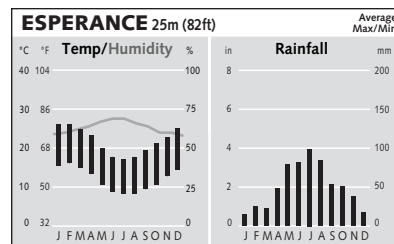
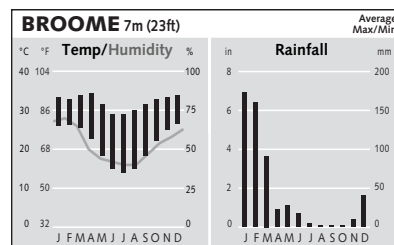
Medical services and facilities in Australia are of a high standard, and items such as baby food formula and disposable nappies are widely available in urban centres. Major hire-car companies will supply and fit booster seats for you at a charge.

Sights & Activities

WA is one big children's playground, with no shortage of active, interesting and educational things to do. Destinations such as Broome, Monkey Mia and Kalbarri are fantastic for children, with excellent beaches, parks and the chance to interact with the local wildlife, while Perth offers up some fascinating educational opportunities at its museums and galleries – perfect if the weather turns nasty. Every town or city has at least some parkland and many have public skateboard parks. For more ideas on how to keep kids occupied, see p67.

CLIMATE CHARTS

WA's size means there's a lot of climatic variation. See p11 for more information on the seasons.



CUSTOMS

For comprehensive information on customs regulations, contact the **Australian Customs Service** (☎ 1300 363 263, 02 6275 6666; www.customs.gov.au).

When entering Australia you can bring most articles in free of duty provided that customs is satisfied they are for personal use and you'll be taking them with you when you leave. There's a duty-free quota per person of 2.25 litres of alcoholic beverages, 250 cigarettes and dutiable goods up to the value of \$900 – note that perfume concentrates are included in this.

When it comes to prohibited goods, there are a few things you should be particularly conscientious about. The first is drugs, which customs authorities are adept at sniffing out. If you are carrying prescription drugs or medicines, it is advisable to have a letter or prescription from your medical practitioner describing your medication and medical condition.

The second is all food, plant material and animal products. On arrival, declare all goods of animal or plant origin (wooden spoons, straw hats, the lot). Australia takes quarantine very seriously as authorities are keen to protect Australia's unique environment and agricultural industries by preventing weeds, pests or diseases getting into the country. Luggage is screened or X-rayed – if you fail to declare quarantine items on arrival and are caught, you risk an on-the-spot fine of over \$200 and an exceptionally condescending lecture, or even prosecution and imprisonment. For more information on quarantine regulations contact the **Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service** (AQIS; ☎ 1800 020 504, 02 6272 3933; www.aqis.gov.au).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES Animal Hazards

Australia is home to some seriously dangerous creatures and critters. On land there are poisonous snakes and spiders, while in the sea the deadly box jellyfish awaits and the theme tune from *Jaws* plays constantly as white pointer sharks cruise up and down the coast. Just so you're not safe anywhere, the saltwater crocodile spans both. However, in reality you're unlikely to see many of these creatures in the wild, much less be attacked by one – you're far more likely to suffer the consequences of downing too many beers, getting seriously sunburnt or trying not to hit that kangaroo in your headlights at dusk.

BOX JELLYFISH

There have been numerous fatal encounters between swimmers and these large jellyfish on the northern coast. Also known as the sea wasp or 'stinger', their venomous tentacles can grow up to 3m long. You can be stung anytime, but November to March is when you should stay out of the water unless you're wearing a 'stinger suit', available from sporting shops in the stinger zone.

For information on treating box jellyfish stings, see p278.

CROCODILES

Up in the northwest of WA, saltwater crocodiles can be a real danger. As well as living around the coast they are found in estuaries, creeks and rivers, sometimes a long way inland. Observe safety signs or ask locals whether an inviting waterhole or river is croc-free before plunging in – these precautions have been fatally ignored in the past, with the last fatality in 1987 and an attack in 2006.

INSECTS

For four to six months of the year you'll have to cope with those two banes of the Australian outdoors: the fly and the mosquito (or 'mozzie'). Flies are more prevalent in the outback and to counter them the humble fly net is effective, though never glamorous. Repellents such as Aerogard and Rid may also help to deter the little bastards, but don't count on it.

Mozzies are a problem in summer, especially near wetlands in tropical areas, and some species are carriers of viral infections (see p279). Try to keep your arms and legs covered after sunset and slap on that repellent.

One favourite little pest in the northern coastal areas is the biting midge (often called a sandfly). These cheeky little bloodsuckers can make a meal of you without you noticing for several hours – when you start itching. While locals can infuriatingly appear immune, it's almost a rite of passage for those heading North to be covered in bites – until you learn to cover up at dusk.

Ticks and leeches are also common. See p279 for advice on how to avoid their wrath.

SHARKS

There has been two fatal shark attacks in the last few years in WA – both at reasonably popular surfing and swimming spots. Be

aware that when you are in the water you are in the shark's domain and while this isn't great comfort, statistically you have a far greater chance of being struck by lightning.

SNAKES

There are many venomous snakes in the Australian bush, the most common being the brown and tiger snakes. Unless you're interfering with one, or have the misfortune to stand on one, it's extremely unlikely that you'll be bitten. The golden rule if you see a snake is to do as the Beatles do and 'let it be'.

For information on treating snake bites, see p278.

SPIDERS

The redback is the most common poisonous spider in WA. It's small and black with a distinctive red stripe on its body; for bites, apply ice and seek medical attention. The white tail is a long, thin black spider with a white tail, and has a fierce bite that can lead to local inflammation and ulceration. Hospitals have antivenin on hand for all common snake and spider bites, but it helps to know what it was that bit you.

Bushfires

Bushfires are a regular occurrence in WA and in hot, dry and windy weather, be extremely careful with any naked flame – cigarette butts thrown out of car windows have started many a fire. On a total fire ban day it's forbidden even to use a camping stove in the open.

Bushwalkers should seek local advice before setting out. When a total fire ban is in place, delay your trip until the weather improves. If you're out in the bush and you see smoke, even a long distance away, take heed – bushfires move fast and change direction with the wind. Go to the nearest open space, downhill if possible. A forested ridge, on the other hand, is the most dangerous place to be.

Crime

WA is a relatively safe place to visit but you should still take reasonable precautions. Don't leave hotel rooms or cars unlocked, and don't leave your valuables unattended or visible through a car window.

In recent years, there have been several reports of drugged drinks in Perth pubs and clubs. Authorities advise women to refuse drinks offered by strangers in bars and to

drink bottled alcohol rather than that from a glass. See p259 for more precautions.

Hypothermia

More bushwalkers actually die of cold than in bushfires. Even in summer, temperatures can drop below freezing at night and the weather can change very quickly. Exposure in even moderately cool temperatures can sometimes result in hypothermia. For more information on hypothermia and how to minimise its risk, see p279.

On the Road

Australian drivers are generally a courteous bunch, but rural 'petrolheads', inner-city speedsters and drink drivers can pose risks. Potential dangers on the open road include wildlife, such as kangaroos (mainly at dusk and dawn); fatigue, caused by travelling long distances without the necessary breaks; and excessive speed. Driving on dirt roads can also be tricky for the uninitiated. For more information on these and other potential dangers, see p272).

Outback Travel

If you're keen to explore outback WA, it's important not to embark on your trip without careful planning and preparation. Travellers regularly encounter difficulties in the harsh outback conditions, and trips occasionally prove fatal. For tips and advice on travelling in the outback, see p271.

Swimming

Popular beaches are patrolled by surf life-savers and flags mark off patrolled areas. Even so, WA's surf beaches can be dangerous places to swim if you aren't used to the often-heavy surf. Undertows (or 'rips') are the main problem. If you find yourself being carried out by a rip, just keep afloat; don't panic or try to swim against the rip, which will exhaust you. In most cases the current will stop within a couple of hundred metres of the shore and you can then swim parallel to the shore for a short way to get out of the rip and swim back to land.

On the south coast, freak 'king waves' from the Southern Ocean can sometimes break on the shore with little or no warning, dragging people out to sea. In populated areas there are warning signs; in other areas be extremely careful.

A number of people are paralysed every year by diving into waves in shallow water and hitting a sand bar; check the depth of the water before you leap.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Carrying a student card entitles you to a wide variety of discounts throughout WA. The most common card is the **International Student Identity Card** (ISIC; www.isic.org), which is issued to full-time students aged 12 years and over, and gives the bearer discounts on accommodation, transport and admission to some attractions. It's available from student unions, hostelling organisations and some travel agencies; for more information, see the website of the **International Student Travel Confederation** (ISTC; www.istc.org).

The ISTC is also the body behind the **International Youth Travel Card** (IYTC or Go25), which is issued to people who are between 12 and 26 years of age and not fulltime students, and gives equivalent benefits to the ISIC. A similar ISTC brainchild is the **International Teacher Identity Card** (ITIC), available to teaching professionals.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES
Australian Embassies & Consulates

The website of the **Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade** (www.dfat.gov.au) provides a full listing of all Australian diplomatic missions overseas. They include:

Canada (☎ 613-236 0841; www.canada.embassy.gov.au; Suite 710, 50 O'Connor St, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L2) Also in Vancouver and Toronto.

France (☎ 01-40 59 33 00; www.france.embassy.gov.au; 4 Rue Jean Rey, 75724 Cedex 15, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-880 0880; www.germany.embassy.gov.au; Wallstrasse 76-79, Berlin 10179) Also in Frankfurt.

Indonesia (☎ 021-2550 5555; www.indonesia.embassy.gov.au; Jalan HR Rasuna Said Kav C15-16, Kuningan, Jakarta Selatan 12940) Also in Medan (Sumatra) and Denpasar (Bali).

Ireland (☎ 01-664 5300; www.australianembassy.ie; 2nd fl, Fitzwilton House, Wilton Terrace, Dublin 2)

Japan (☎ 03-5232 4111; www.australia.or.jp; 2-1-14 Mita, Minato-Ku, Tokyo 108-8361) Also in Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka City.

Netherlands (☎ 070-310 82 00; www.netherlands.embassy.gov.au; Carnegielaan 4, The Hague 2517 KH)

New Zealand Wellington (☎ 04-473 6411; www.newzealand.embassy.gov.au; 72-78 Hobson St, Thorndon, Wellington); Auckland (☎ 09-921 8800; Level 7, Price Waterhouse Coopers Bldg, 186-194 Quay St, Auckland)

Singapore (☎ 6836 4100; www.singapore.embassy.gov.au; 25 Napier Rd, Singapore 258507)

UK (☎ 020-7379 4334; www.uk.embassy.gov.au; Australia House, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA) Also in Edinburgh and Manchester.

USA (☎ 202-797 3000; www.usa.embassy.gov.au; 1601 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC NW 20036-2273) Also in Los Angeles, New York and other major cities.

Embassies & Consulates in Australia

The principal diplomatic representations to Australia are in Canberra, but about 30 countries are represented in Perth by consular staff or trade representatives. Look in the *Yellow Pages* directory for a more complete listing.

Canada (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9322 7930; http://geo.international.gc.ca/asia/australia/menu-en.asp; 3rd fl, 267 St Georges Terrace, Perth 6000)

France (Map pp54-5; ☎ 6389 2230; www.ambafrance-au.org; 10 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands 6009)

Germany (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9325 8851; www.german.embassy.org.au; 8th fl, 16 St Georges Terrace, Perth 6000)

Japan (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9321 7816; www.japan.org.au; 21st fl, Forrest Centre, 221 St Georges Terrace, Perth 6000)

Netherlands (Map p61; ☎ 9486 1579; www.netherlands.org.au; Unit 1, 88 Thomas St, West Perth 6005)

UK (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9224 4700; www.britaus.net; Level 26, Allendale Square, 77 St Georges Terrace, Perth 6000)

USA (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9202 1224; http://perth.usconsulate.gov; 16 St Georges Terrace, Perth 6000)

It's important to realise what your own embassy – the embassy of the country of which you are a citizen – can and can't do to help you if you get into trouble. Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies if the trouble you're in is even remotely your own fault. Remember that while in Australia you are bound by Australian laws. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

January

Perth Cup (www.perthtracing.org.au) New Year's Day sees Perth's biggest day at the races, with the party people heading to 'Tentland' for DJs and daiquiris.

Lancelin Ocean Classic In early January tiny Lancelin's renowned blustery conditions attract thousands for its world-famous windsurfing event, with wave, slalom and the popular marathon event.

Fremantle Sardine Festival This one-day food festival includes street parades and stalls on Fremantle's Esplanade.

February

Perth International Arts Festival (www.perthfestival.com.au) Several weeks of multiarts entertainment, including theatre, dance, music, film and visual arts.

Leeuwin Concert Series (www.leeuwinestate.com.au) The fabulous Leeuwin Estate winery in Margaret River hosts world-class performers from popular music, opera and stage during its annual event in mid-February, with other concerts running from January to April.

March

Margaret River Pro (www.margaretriverpro.com) This World Qualifying Series (WQS) event sees the world's best up-and-coming surfers battle it out in the epic surf at Margaret River from late March to early April.

April

Broome Arts & Music Festival (www.bamf.org.au) Running through to June, this festival showcases the Kimberley's wealth of talented musicians, artists and dancers with the Gekko Lounge performances being a standout.

May

Ord Valley Muster (www.ordvalleymuster.com) A two-week annual community event in the East Kimberley featuring a grand opening concert on the banks of the Ord River, a dam-to-dam boat race and a rodeo.

June

Port Hedland Black Rock Stakes (www.blackrockstakes.pilbara.net.au) A hard-core annual race for charity, where teams push 'wheelbarrows' weighted with iron ore over a 120km course.

Broome Fringe Arts Festival Local artists highlight 'fringe arts' during this festival, which features markets, art installations, workshops and Aboriginal art exhibitions.

July

National Aboriginal & Islander Day Observance Committee (Naidoc) week Indigenous art exhibitions and performances take place throughout WA during Naidoc week.

August

Avon Descent (www.avondescent.com.au) In the 'world's greatest whitewater event', powerboats, kayaks and canoes race 133km down the Avon River from Northam.

Shinju Matsuri (Festival of the Pearl; www.shinjumatsuri.com) Broome commemorates its early pearling years and the town's multicultural heritage.

Broome Opera Under the Stars (www.operaunderthestars.com.au) World-class opera performers sing under clear Kimberley night skies.

September

York Jazz Festival In late September jazz aficionados flock to the historic Avon Valley town of York for concerts, busking and jamming.

Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Round The 'round' sees lots of betting and boozing during this week of horse racing.

Perth Wildflower Festival (www.bgpa.wa.gov.au) In late September to early October, Kings Park and the Botanic Garden host displays, workshops and guided walks in this annual event celebrating WA's unique and spectacular wildflowers.

Sunshine Festival (www.sunshinefestival.com.au) Geraldton and Greenough celebrate with dragon boat races, parades and parties. Sunshine guaranteed.

October

Blessing of the Fleet Popular historic festival introduced to Fremantle by young Italian fishermen in 1948 and celebrated in mid-October.

Royal Perth Show (www.perthroyalshow.com.au) The west's biggest agriculture, food and wine show – with sideshow rides and showbags for the kids.

November

Awesome Arts Festival (www.awesomearts.com) There's plenty of activities during this contemporary arts festival for kids.

Fremantle Festival (www.fremantlefestivals.com) A week or so of performances, music, dance, comedy, visual arts, street theatre and workshops.

Broome Mango Festival Broome celebrates the mango harvest with mango-themed everything and a Great Chefs of Broome Cook-Off.

Margaret River Wine Region Festival (www.mrwinefest.org.au) This four-day festival titillates the tastebuds with the best of the southwest's wine, food, art, music and outdoor adventures.

December

Gravity Games H2O (www.gravitygamesh2o.com) Early December sees Perth's version of the Gravity Games featuring plenty of wakeboarding action on the Swan River as well as demos of skate, BMX, In-line, and FMX along with live music.

FOOD

WA serves up everything from inventive cuisine in its modern cafés and restaurants in the more popular tourist destinations to mind-numbingly monotonous menus just about everywhere else. This isn't to say that the food isn't any good once you're off the beaten tourist trail – the quality is usually very good – it's just that there is only so many ways that you can say surf 'n' turf!

When you're in the bigger cities, the best value is the modern cafés, where a good meal in casual surroundings costs under \$25 and a full cooked breakfast around \$15. Some inner-city pubs offer upmarket restaurant-style fare, but most pubs serve standard (often huge) bistro meals, usually in the \$12 to \$20 range – however this can rise to around \$30 when you're in more remote areas. Bar (or counter) meals, which are eaten in the public bar, usually cost between \$10 and \$20. For general opening hours, consider that breakfast is normally served between 6am and 11am, lunch starts around noon until about 3pm and dinner usually starts after 6pm and last service is around 9pm to 10pm, however in country areas the cook may have shut off the deep fryer by 8pm. It's customary to tip in restaurants and upmarket cafés if the service warrants it – a gratuity of between 5% to 10% of the bill is the norm.

For more detailed information, see the Food & Drink chapter (p43).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Though quite small by Sydney standards, the gay and lesbian communities of WA are active and proud, with strong communities based in Perth (particularly Northbridge) and Fremantle. In general Australians are open-minded about homosexuality, but the further into the country you go, the more likely you are to run into overt homophobia. The tide is gradually turning (at least legally), with the state government introducing anti-discrimination legislation in 2002 that equalised the legal age of consent for homosexual sex (from 21 years to 16), and gave legitimacy to de facto relationships.

The biggest event on the gay and lesbian calendar is **Perth Pride** (www.pride.wa.asn.au), a monthlong arts and culture festival beginning with the Pride fair day in late September and culminating with the Pride Parade through the streets of Northbridge and an annual Pride dance party.

The best way to tune in to the queer news, views and events in Perth is through the free **OUTinPerth** (www.outinperth.com) newspaper, available in various outlets on the first day of the month. There's also the monthly lesbian magazine, **Women Out West** (www.womenoutwest.com.au), and the following helpful organisations: **Gay & Lesbian Business Directory of WA** (www.qpages.com.au)

Gay & Lesbian Community Service of WA (☎ 1800 184 527, counselling line 9420 7201; www.glcs.org.au; 2 Delhi Street, West Perth, 6005)

Gay & Lesbian Tourism Australia (GALTA; www.galta.com.au)

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

New Year's Day 1 January

Australia Day 26 January

Labour Day First Monday in March

Easter (Good Friday to Easter Monday inclusive) March/April

Anzac Day 25 April

Foundation Day First Monday in June

Queen's Birthday Last Monday in September

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

School Holidays

The Christmas holiday season (mid-December to late January) is part of the summer school holidays, when transport and accommodation is often booked out, and there are long, restless queues at tourist attractions. There are three shorter school holiday periods during the year that alternate slightly from year to year. Generally, they fall in mid-April, mid-July, and late September to mid-October.

INSURANCE

Don't underestimate the importance of a good travel-insurance policy that covers theft, loss and medical problems – nothing will ruin your holiday plans quicker than an accident or having that brand new digital camera stolen.

Some policies specifically exclude designated 'dangerous activities' such as scuba diving, parasailing, bungee jumping, motorcycling, skiing and even bushwalking. If you plan on doing any of these things, make sure the policy you choose fully covers you for your activity of choice. Check that the policy covers ambulances and emergency medical evacuations by air.

See also p275. For information on insurance matters relating to cars that are bought or rented, see p270.

INTERNET ACCESS

You'll find internet cafés in cities, sizable towns and pretty much anywhere else that travellers congregate across WA. In addition you'll find that many backpacker hostels offer good rates and in smaller towns telecentres offer internet access. The cost ranges from

under \$4 an hour in the William St strip in Perth to \$10 an hour in more remote locations. The average is about \$6 an hour, usually with a minimum of 10 minutes' access.

If you're travelling with your own laptop, the easiest way to get online is to head to the local internet café and plug in via ethernet. Increasingly, the larger tourist centres have wi-fi hotspots that are either free or where you can purchase time via credit card.

If you want to connect to a local internet service provider (ISP) there are plenty of options, though some ISPs limit their dial-up areas to major cities or particular regions. Make sure the ISP has local dial-up numbers for the places where you intend to use it – timed long distance calls on top of internet charges will be expensive. Telstra (BigPond) uses a nationwide dial-up number at local call rates. Some major ISPs:

America Online (AOL; ☎ 1800 265 265; www.aol.com.au) Also has login numbers in all capitals and many provincial cities.

Australia On Line (☎ 1300 650 661; www.ozonline.com.au)

iPrimus (☎ 1300 850 000; www.iprimus.com.au)

OzEmail (☎ 13 28 84; www.ozemail.com.au)

Telstra BigPond (☎ 13 12 82; www.bigpond.com)

Australia uses RJ-45 telephone plugs and Telstra EXI-160 four-pin plugs, but neither are universal – electronics shops such as Tandy and Dick Smith should be able to help. If you wish to use a modem in Australia, you should check the above ISPs to see if your modem will be compatible.

For a list of useful websites, see p13.

LEGAL MATTERS

Most travellers will have no contact with the police or legal system, unless they break the rules of the road while driving. There is a significant police presence around most population centres and they have the power to stop your car and see your licence (you're

LEGAL AGE

Note the following for the record:

- You can drive when you're 17.
- The legal age for voting is 18.
- The age of consent for sex is 16.
- The legal drinking age is 18.

required to carry it), check your vehicle for road-worthiness and insist that you take a breath test for alcohol.

First offenders caught with small amounts of illegal drugs are likely to receive a fine rather than go to jail, but a conviction may affect your visa status. Note that if you remain in Australia after your visa expires, you will officially be an 'overstayer' and could face detention and expulsion, and be prevented from returning to Australia for up to three years.

MAPS

When you arrive in a new town, the local tourist information office will probably have a serviceable street map. For more detailed maps, try the **Royal Automobile Club of WA** (RACWA; www.rac.com.au), which has a stack of road maps available (including free downloadable route maps).

Gregory's and UBD both produce Perth street directories (around \$30) that are useful for a long stay that involves plenty of city driving. *Roads & Tracks WA* is an excellent reference if you're travelling extensively through the state – especially off the beaten track.

The **WA Department of Land Information** (www.dola.wa.gov.au) produces a variety of mapping products that cover the whole state, including a range of topographical maps that are good for bushwalking.

MONEY

In this book, unless otherwise stated, all prices given in dollars refer to Australian dollars. For an idea of the money required to travel down-under, see p11.

GST

The Goods and Services Tax (GST), introduced federally in 2000, is a flat 10% tax on all goods and services – accommodation, eating out, transport, electrical goods, books, furniture, clothing and so on, with the exception of basic food items (milk, bread, fruits and vegetables etc). By law the tax is included in the quoted or shelf prices, so all prices in this book are GST-inclusive. International air and sea travel to/from Australia is GST-free, as is domestic air travel when purchased outside Australia by non-residents.

If you purchase new or second-hand goods with a total minimum value of \$300 from any one supplier no more than 30 days before you leave Australia, you are entitled under the Tourist Refund Scheme (TRS) to a refund of any GST paid. The scheme only applies to goods you take with you as hand luggage or wear onto the plane or ship. Also note that the refund is valid for goods bought from more than one supplier, but only if at least \$300 is spent in each. For more information, contact the **Australian Customs Service** (☎ 1300 363 263; www.customs.gov.au).

ATMs

Australian bank branches are found throughout the state, most with 24-hour ATMs attached. Today, even in the smallest town you'll find an ATM – probably tucked away in the local pub. Most ATMs accept cards from other banks and are linked to international networks.

Cash

Australia's currency is the Australian dollar, made up of 100 cents. There are 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1 and \$2 coins, and \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 notes. Although the smallest coin in circulation is 5c, prices are often still marked in single cents and then rounded to the nearest 5c when you come to pay.

There are no notable restrictions on importing or exporting travellers cheques. Cash amounts equal to or in excess of the equivalent of A\$10,000 (in any currency) must be declared on arrival or departure.

Changing foreign currency or travellers cheques is usually no problem at banks throughout WA or at licensed moneychangers such as Thomas Cook or Amex in the major cities.

Credit & Debit Cards

The best way to carry your money in Australia is by plastic. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted for everything from a hostel bed or a restaurant meal to an adventure tour, and a credit card is pretty much essential (in lieu of a large deposit) for car hire. With debit cards, any card connected to the international banking network (Cirrus, Maestro, Plus and Euro-card) will work. Charge cards such as Diners Club and Amex are not as widely accepted.

Eftpos is a convenient service that many Australian businesses have embraced, even in the most remote parts of the state. It means you can use your plastic (credit or debit) to pay direct for services or purchases, and often withdraw cash as well.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are safe and generally enjoy a better exchange rate than foreign cash in Australia. Also, if they are stolen (or you lose them), they can readily be replaced. Amex, Thomas Cook and other well-known international brands are easily exchanged and are commission-free when exchanged at their bureaux, however local banks charge hefty fees (around \$7) for the same service.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Australians are keen adopters of technology and all your requirements for digital photography and video can be met in WA. However, if you need memory cards, batteries or DV tapes, purchase them in the larger cities and towns as they're cheaper and more readily available than in the remote areas. Most photo labs have self-service machines that allow you to make your own prints and burn CDs and DVDs of your images and of course, they still stock and develop film for those keeping it old-skool.

POST Letters

Australia's postal services are efficient and reasonably cheap. It costs 50c to send a standard letter or postcard within the country. **Australia Post** (www.auspost.com.au) has divided international destinations into two regions: Asia-Pacific and Rest of the World; airmail letters up to 50g cost \$1.20/1.80, respectively. The cost of a postcard (up to 20g) is \$1.10 and an aerogram to any country is 95c.

Parcels

There are four international parcel zones. You can send parcels by seamount to anywhere in the world except countries in the Asia/Pacific region (including New Zealand). A 1/1.5/2kg parcel costs \$16.50/23.50/30.50. Each 500g over 2kg costs \$3.50 extra.

Economy airmail rates for a 1/1.5/2kg parcel to Zone A (New Zealand) are \$16/22.50/29; to Zone B (Asia/Pacific) costs \$20/28.50/37; to Zone C (USA/Canada/Middle East) costs

\$24/34.50/45; and to Zone D (Rest of World) costs \$30/43.50/57.

Sending & Receiving Mail

All post offices will hold mail for visitors, and some city GPOs (main or general post offices) have very busy poste restante sections. You need to provide some form of identification (such as a passport) to collect mail. You can also have mail sent to you at city Amex offices if you have an Amex card or travellers cheques.

See p248 for post office opening times.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

People travelling alone in WA will sometimes be left well alone, but generally you'll be greeted as a long lost relative. In fact, ending a conversation here is much harder than starting one!

Solo travellers are a common sight throughout the state and there is certainly no stigma attached to lone visitors. However, women travelling alone should exercise caution when in less-populated areas, and may find some menfolk annoyingly attentive in drinking establishments (with mining town pubs arguably the nadir); see also p259.

TELEPHONE

The two main telecommunications companies are the 51% government-owned **Telstra** (www.telstra.com.au) and the private **Optus** (www.optus.com.au). Both are also major players in the mobile (cell) market, along with **Vodafone** (www.vodafone.com.au) – other mobile operators include **AAPT** (www.aapt.com.au) and **Orange** (www.orange.net.au).

Domestic & International Calls INFORMATION & TOLL-FREE CALLS

Numbers starting with ☎ 190 are usually recorded information services, charged at anything from 35c to \$5 or more per minute (more from mobiles and payphones). To make a reverse-charge (collect) call from any public or private phone, simply dial ☎ 1800-REVERSE (738 3773) or ☎ 12 550.

Toll-free numbers (with a prefix ☎ 1800) can be called free of charge from anywhere in the country, though they may not be accessible from certain areas or from mobile phones. Calls to numbers beginning with ☎ 13 or ☎ 1300 are charged at the rate of a local call – the numbers can usually be dialled Australia-wide, but may be applica-

ble only to a specific state or STD (no, not something you need to see a doctor about, it stands for Subscriber Trunk Dialling – a long-distance call within Australia) district. Note that telephone numbers beginning with ☎ 1800, ☎ 13 or ☎ 1300 cannot be dialled from outside Australia.

INTERNATIONAL CALLS

Most payphones allow ISD (International Subscriber Dialling) calls. The cost and international dialling code of the call will vary depending on which provider you are using.

When calling overseas you need to dial the international access code from Australia (☎ 0011 or ☎ 0018), the country code and the area code (without the initial 0). So for a London number you'd dial ☎ 0011-44-20, then the number. Also, certain operators will have you dial a special code to access their service.

If dialling WA from overseas, the country code is ☎ 61 and you need to drop the 0 (zero) in the 08 area code.

LOCAL CALLS

Calls from private phones cost 15c to 25c while local calls from public phones cost 40c; both allow for unlimited talk time. Calls to mobile phones attract higher rates and are timed. Blue phones or gold phones that you sometimes find in hotel lobbies or other businesses usually cost a minimum of 50c for a local call.

LONG-DISTANCE CALLS

Although the whole of WA shares a single area code (08), once you call outside of the immediate area or town, it is likely you are making a long-distance (STD) call. STD calls can be made from virtually any public phone and are cheaper during off-peak hours, generally between 7pm and 7am. There are a handful of main area codes for Australia:

State/Territory	Area Code
Australian Capital Territory	☎ 02
New South Wales	☎ 02
Northern Territory	☎ 08
Queensland	☎ 07
South Australia	☎ 08
Tasmania	☎ 03
Victoria	☎ 03

Mobile Phones

Local numbers with the prefixes ☎ 04xx or ☎ 04xxx belong to mobile phones. Australia's two mobile networks – digital GSM and digital CDMA – currently service more than 90% of the population but leave vast tracts of the country uncovered, including much of inland WA. Perth and the larger centres get good reception, but outside these centres it's haphazard or nonexistent, especially in the north. If you're going bush, CDMA was the service of choice (next to forking out for a satellite phone), however at the time of writing it was being replaced by Telstra's Next G service (www.nextg.com.au) that so far is not increasing the coverage of CDMA. Note that no matter which mobile service you choose (Telstra, Optus or Vodafone), coverage between outback towns in the north is currently non-existent.

Australia's digital network is compatible with GSM 900 and 1800 (used in Europe), but is generally not compatible with the USA or Japanese systems. It's easy to get connected short-term, though, as the main service providers (Telstra, Optus and Vodafone) all have prepaid mobile systems. Just buy a starter kit, which may include a phone or, if you have your own phone, a SIM card (around \$15) and a prepaid charge card. The calls are a lot more expensive than with standard contracts, but there are no connection fees or line-rental charges and you can buy the recharge cards at convenience stores and newsagents. Don't forget that it's a good idea to shop around between the three carriers as their products differ.

Phonecards

A wide range of phonecards is available in WA. Phonecards can be purchased at newsagents and post offices for a fixed dollar value (usually \$10, \$20, \$30 etc) and can be used with any public or private phone by dialling a toll-free access number and then the PIN number on the card. Call rates vary, so shop around. Some public phones also accept credit cards.

TIME

Australia is divided up into three time zones: the Western Standard Time zone (GMT/UTC plus eight hours) covers most of WA; Central Standard Time (plus 9½ hours) covers the Northern Territory, South Australia and

parts of WA's Central Desert and Nullarbor regions near the border; and Eastern Standard Time (plus 10 hours) covers Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland. So when it's noon in Perth, it's 1.30 in the afternoon in Darwin and Adelaide, and 2pm in Sydney or Melbourne.

'Daylight saving' – for which clocks are put forward an hour – operates in most states during the warmer months (October to March), and now includes WA on a trial basis for a few years.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local Tourist Offices

For general statewide information, try the **Western Australian Visitors Centre** (☎ 1300 361 351; www.westernaustralia.com; Forrest Pl, Perth 6000), which will quickly bury you knee-deep in brochures, booklets, maps and leaflets on places all over the state.

Elsewhere, information is available from regional and local tourist offices (listed throughout the book); in many cases they are excellent, with friendly staff (often volunteers) providing invaluable local knowledge such as local road and weather conditions. However, many are woefully underfunded – so don't expect miracles.

Tourist Offices Abroad

Germany (☎ 89 2366 21 811, fax 89 2366 2199; Sonnenstrasse 9, Munich, 80331)

Japan (☎ 3 5214 0797; fax 3 5214 0799; New Otani Garden Court Bldg, Level 28F, 4-1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094)

Singapore (☎ 6255 4098; fax 6255 4093; #08-02A United Square, 101 Thomson Rd, Singapore, 307591)

UK (☎ 207 438 4647; fax 207 240 6690; Australia House, 6th fl, Australia Centre, The Strand, London UK, WC2B 4LG)

TOURS

If you don't feel like travelling solo or you crave a hassle-free holiday where everything is organised for you, there are dozens of tours throughout WA to suit all tastes and budgets. The hop-on hop-off bus options are a particularly popular way for travellers to get around in a fun, relaxed atmosphere. Some 'adventure' tours include serious 4WD safaris, taking travellers to places that they simply couldn't get to on their own without large amounts of expensive equipment.

The Western Australian Visitors Centre has a wide selection of brochures and suggestions for tours all over the state.

The tours listed here are only a selection of what is available (also see Tour sections in regional chapters for more extensive lists of local tours). Prices given are rates per person in twin share; there's usually an extra supplement for single accommodation. Students and YHA members often get 5% or 10% discounts. This is just a tiny taste of what's on offer:

AAT Kings Australian Tours (☎ 1300 556 100; www.aatkings.com) A long-established and professional outfit offering a wide range of fully escorted bus trips and 4WD adventures for those who prefer more luxurious accommodation than most offer. A 12-day 4WD trip from Broome covering highlights such as Geikie Gorge, the Bungle Bungles, El Questro and Windjana Gorge costs \$4695.

Active Safaris (☎ 1800 222 848; www.activesafaris.com.au) Small adventure tour company running budget 4WD safaris such as a four-day Monkey Mia safari that includes the Pinnacles Desert, Geraldton and Kalbarri (from \$525) and a five-day Ningaloo Reef trip from Perth to Exmouth (one way \$550, return \$750).

Australian Adventure Travel (☎ 1800 621 625; www.safaris.net.au) Offers numerous tours from Perth, Broome, Kununurra, Exmouth and Darwin. Includes everything from five-day trips along the Gibb River Rd (from \$895) to a 12-day Kimberley discovery (\$2490) featuring Windjana Gorge, Mitchell Falls, El Questro and the Bungle Bungle Range.

Dr Marion Hercoc's Explorer Tours (☎ 9361 0940; www.explorertours.com.au) Intimate tours following the footsteps of early explorers. Tours tackle some serious 4WD tracks along the routes of 19th-century explorers, immersing travellers in the history of the time. A nine-day trip through the outback southeast costs \$2390 and include meals, as well as guidance by experts in outback history, environment, flora and fauna.

Easyrider Backpacker Tours (☎ 9226 0307; www.easyridertours.com.au; 144 William St) Social hop-on hop-off bus service, including several different routes across WA. For example, the 'Southern Curl' tour (\$249, valid for three months), departs several times a week from Perth and stops at Bunbury, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Augusta, Nannup, Pemberton, Walpole, Denmark and Albany. The 'Broometime' tour (\$689, valid for six months) is perennially popular.

Planet Perth Tours (☎ 9225 6622; www.planettours.com.au) Busy budget tour operators running round trip mini-bus tours from Perth to destinations such as Broome (10 days \$1490, 13 days return trip \$1760) and Exmouth (5 days \$660, 7 days return trip \$800), with the option of returning or staying on at each destination.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Disability awareness in WA is pretty high and getting higher. Legislation requires that new accommodation meets accessibility standards, and discrimination by tourism operators is illegal. Many of the state's key attractions provide access for those with limited mobility and a number of sites have also begun addressing the needs of visitors with visual or aural impairments; contact attractions in advance to confirm the facilities.

Reliable information is the key ingredient for travellers with a disability and the best source is the **National Information Communication & Awareness Network** (Nican; ☎ TTY 02 6241 1220, TTY 1800 806 769; www.nican.com.au). It's an Australia-wide directory providing information on access issues, accessible accommodation, sporting and recreational activities, transport and specialist tour operators.

People with Disabilities WA (PWDWA; ☎ 1800 193 331, 9386 6477, TTY 9386 6451; www.pwdwa.org; 37 Hampden Rd, Nedlands 6009) is another good source – its excellent website has extensive information on WA's major disability service providers.

Other useful organisations in WA include the **Association for the Blind of WA** (☎ 9311 8202; www.abwa.asn.au; 16 Sunbury Rd, Victoria Park 6100) and the **WA Deaf Society** (☎ 9441 2677, TTY 9441 2655; www.wadeaf.org.au; 46/5 Aberdeen Street, East Perth, 6004).

VISAS

All visitors to Australia need a visa – only New Zealand nationals are exempt, and even they receive a 'special category' visa on arrival. Visa application forms are available from Australian diplomatic missions overseas, travel agents or the website of the **Department of Immigration & Citizenship** (☎ 13 18 81; www.immi.gov.au).

Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)

Many visitors can get an ETA through any International Air Transport Association (IATA)-registered travel agent or overseas airline. They make the application direct when you buy a ticket and issue the ETA, which replaces the usual visa stamped in your passport – it's common practice for travel agents to charge a fee for issuing an ETA (usually US\$15). This system is available to passport holders of some 32 countries, including the UK, the USA and Canada, most European and Scandinavian countries, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and Korea. You can also make

an online ETA application at www.eta.immi.gov.au, where an A\$20 fee applies.

Tourist Visas

Short-term tourist visas have largely been replaced by the Electronic Travel Authority (ETA). However, if you are from a country not covered by the ETA, or you want to stay longer than three months, you'll need to apply for a visa. Standard visas (which cost A\$70) allow one (in some cases multiple) entry, stays of up to three months, and are valid for use within 12 months of issue. A long-stay tourist visa (also A\$70) can allow a visit of up to a year.

Visa Extensions

Visitors are allowed a maximum stay of 12 months, including extensions. Visa extensions are made through the Department of Immigration & Citizenship and it's best to apply at least two or three weeks before your visa expires. The application fee is A\$205 – it's non-refundable, even if your application is rejected.

Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Visas

Young visitors (between 18 and 30 years without dependents) from Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan and the UK are eligible for a WHM visa (subclass 417), which allows you to visit for up to 12 months and gain casual employment. Tertiary educated visitors from Chile, Iran and Thailand can also apply (subclass 462). As the countries listed are updated on an ongoing basis, check the website (www.immi.gov.au) for the latest listings.

Once accepted, you can undergo training for up to 4 months and work up to six months with one employer. If you want an encore, note that for your second visa you must have completed three months seasonal work in regional Australia while on your first WHM visa – no problem given the amount of work around. The application costs \$185/175 for subclasses 417/462 (generally non-refundable) and you can apply online.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

WA is generally a safe place for women travellers, although the usual sensible precautions apply here. It's best to avoid walking alone

late at night in any of the major cities and towns. Three assaults on female tourists in Broome in 2006 underscores the seriousness of this warning. If you're out on the town, keep enough money aside for a taxi home. The same applies to outback and rural towns with unlit, semi-deserted streets between you and your temporary home. Lone women should also be wary of staying in basic pub accommodation unless it appears safe and well managed.

Lone female hitchhikers are really tempting fate – hitching with a male companion is still silly, but safer.

WORK

A wealth of opportunities exists for travellers (both Australian and foreign) to work as volunteers or do paid seasonal work in WA all year round.

Seasonal Work

In Perth, plenty of temporary work is available in tourism and hospitality, administration, IT, nursing, childcare, factories and labouring. Outside of Perth, travellers can easily get jobs in tourism and hospitality; in agriculture and horticulture, working on enormous outback stations (properties), country farms, and at produce distribution points, doing everything from mustering sheep on motorbikes and feeding baby animals, to working as a cook or labourer and fruit picking and packing. Some places have specialised needs, such as Broome where there is lucrative work in pearling, on farms and boats.

You can line up work before you leave home or wait until you arrive. The YHA helps travellers find jobs, as do many backpacker hostels. When you hit the road, check out noticeboards at hostels, in internet cafés, supermarkets, and telecentres. The **Travel Recruitment Centre** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 9322 1406; www.trsaust.co.au; Traveller's Club, 137A William St) in Perth hooks travellers up with all manner of work, pretty much year-round, from fruit-picking and pruning to long-term jobs in the (coveted) outback. The service is free; just walk in, but be prepared to wait. The **Job Centre** (Map pp58-9; ☎ 6267 0700; www.travelforever.com.au; Travel Forever, 123-125 William St), a few doors down, offers a similar service. The following websites are also helpful:

Australian Jobsearch (www.jobsearch.gov.au) Offers a comprehensive job database.

Centrelink (www.centrelink.gov.au) The Australian Government employment service has information and advice on looking for work, training and assistance.

Grunt Labour Services (www.gruntlabour.com) A recruitment agency specialising in northern Australia, north WA, the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland.

Harvest Trail (http://jobsearch.gov.au/HarvestTrail) Specialised recruitment search for the agricultural industry, including a 'crop list' detailing what you can pick and pack when and where!

Job Shop (www.thejobshop.com.au) This WA-based recruitment agency specialising in jobs for WA as well as the Northern Territory.

West Australian (www.thewest.com.au) WA's main newspaper advertises jobs online.

Volunteering

Year-round opportunities exist for travellers to do volunteer work across WA. Overseas travellers can organise a volunteer arrangement but should first apply for a Visitor/Tourist Visa. See the **Department of Immigration** (www.immi.gov.au) website for more information.

Volunteers can work in the areas of environment and conservation; humanitarian aid; animal welfare; home help for the aged, frail, and disabled; youth and families; arts, culture and heritage; tourism; sport and recreation; and marketing and fundraising.

Information and registration for volunteering positions is available online at **Australian Volunteer Search** (www.volunteerssearch.gov.au), the Australian Government volunteer recruitment service, and **Volunteering Australia** (www.govolunteer.com.au), a national organization promoting volunteering opportunities.

For a wide variety of environment and conservation opportunities, see **Conservation Volunteers Australia** (www.conservationvolunteers.com.au). Meals, accommodation and transport are often provided in return for volunteering. Training opportunities are also sometimes available.

You can volunteer for similar opportunities, with the addition of community education and scientific research projects, directly through the WA state government's **Department of Environment & Conservation** (www.dec.wa.gov.au). You'll find current and future opportunities at national parks all over WA listed at www.naturebase.net/vacancies/volunteer_programs.html. Opportunities vary enormously, from turtle tagging at Ningaloo Marine Park to feral animal control at Shark Bay. Travellers rave about their experience

working with the dolphins at Monkey Mia, a program that always needs volunteer assistance (contact: alison.true@dec.wa.gov.au).

Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF; www.wwoof.com.au) place people on organic farms and provide other alternative lifestyle opportunities in return for bed and board.

You can read first hand accounts of other travellers' volunteer experiences at www.transitionsabroad.com.

Australian citizens who are unemployed may be eligible to receive Centrelink payments for volunteering. Check out their website: www.centrelink.gov.au.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

For most visitors to Australia, getting here is probably going to involve a flight so long that it will allow you to watch the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and still have time for a decent nap. It doesn't change once you hit Western Australia (WA) either – this is a huge state that requires pre-planning to get the most out of your visit.

Note that flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Disembarkation in Australia is generally a very straightforward affair, with only the usual customs declarations (p249) and the fight to be first to arrive at the luggage carousel to endure.

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended.

Airlines and governments seem to take a perverse pleasure in making price structures and regulations as complicated as possible. You should check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works. In addition, the travel industry is highly competitive and there are many lurks and perks.

The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

However, recent global instability has resulted in conspicuously increased security in Australian airports, both in domestic and international terminals, and you may find that customs procedures are now a little more time-consuming.

AIR – INTERNATIONAL Airports & Airlines

The east coast of Australia is the most common gateway for international travellers, however there are some airlines that fly direct into **Perth Airport** (code PER; ☎ 08-9478 8888; www.perthairport.com). If you do choose to fly to the east coast first, it's usually possible to book a same-day domestic flight that will wing you across the country to Perth.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM AUSTRALIA
Airlines that visit Australia include the following (note all phone numbers mentioned here are for dialling from within Australia).

Air Canada (airline code AC; ☎ 1300 655 757; www.aircanada.ca) Flies to Sydney.

Air New Zealand (airline code NZ; ☎ 13 24 76; www.airnz.com.au) Flies to Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast, Perth, Melbourne, Sydney.

British Airways (airline code BA; ☎ 08-9425 5333; www.britishairways.com.au) Flies to Sydney.

Cathay Pacific (airline code CX; ☎ 13 17 47; www.cathaypacific.com) Flies to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns.

Emirates (airline code EK; ☎ 1300 303 777; www.emirates.com) Flies to Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane.

Garuda Indonesia (airline code GA; ☎ 08-9214 5101; www.garuda-indonesia.com) Flies to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane.

Gulf Air (airline code GF; ☎ 08-9229 9211; www.gulfairco.com) Flies to Sydney.

Japan Airlines (airline code JL; ☎ 02-9272 1111; www.jal.com) Flies to Cairns, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney.

KLM (airline code KL; ☎ 1300 392 192; www.klm.com) Flies to Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney.

Malaysia Airlines (airline code MH; ☎ 13 26 27, 08-9263 7043; www.malaysiaairlines.com) Flies to Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Sydney.

Qantas (airline code QF; ☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) Flies to Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane.

Royal Brunei Airlines (airline code BI; ☎ 08-9321 8757; www.bruneiair.com) Flies to Perth, Brisbane, Darwin, Sydney.

Singapore Airlines (airline code SQ; ☎ 13 10 11, 1300 880 833; www.singaporeair.com.au) Flies to Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney.

South African Airways (airline code SA; ☎ 08-9216 2200; www.flysaa.com) Flies to Perth, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne.

Thai Airways International (airline code TG; ☎ 1300 651 960; www.thaiairways.com) Flies to Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney.

United Airlines (airline code UA; ☎ 13 17 77; www.unitedairlines.com.au) Flies to Melbourne, Sydney.

Tickets

Research the options carefully to make sure you get the best deal. The internet is the best resource for checking the latest airline prices.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Paying by credit card offers some protection if you end up dealing with a rogue fly-by-night agency in your search for the cheapest fare, as most card issuers provide refunds if you can prove you didn't get what you paid for. Alternatively, buy a ticket from a bonded agent, such as one covered by the **Air Travel Organiser's Licence** (ATOL; www.atol.org.uk) scheme in the UK. If you have doubts about the service provider, at the very least call the airline and confirm that your booking has been made.

Round-the-world tickets can be a good option for getting to Australia, and Perth is an easy inclusion on your ticket.

For online bookings, start with the following websites.

Airbrokers (www.airbrokers.com) This US company specialises in cheap tickets, especially round-the-world tickets and for the Pacific.

Cheapest Flights (www.cheapestflights.co.uk) Cheap worldwide flights from the UK.

Expedia (www.expedia.msn.com) Microsoft's travel site; mainly US-related.

Flight Centre International (www.flightcentre.com) Respected operator handling direct flights, with sites for Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and Canada.

Flights.com (www.flights.com) Truly international site for flight-only tickets; cheap fares and an easy-to-search database.

Roundtheworld.com (www.roundtheworldflights.com)

This excellent site allows you to build your own trips from the UK with up to six stops.

STA (www.statravel.com) Prominent in international student travel but you don't have to be a student; site linked to worldwide STA sites.

Travel Online (www.travelonline.co.nz) Good place to check worldwide flights from New Zealand.

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com) US site that allows you to search fares (in US\$) to/from practically anywhere.

Asia

Most Asian countries offer fairly competitive airfare deals, with Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong being the best places to shop around for discount tickets.

Flights between Hong Kong and Australia are notoriously heavily booked. Flights to/from Bangkok and Singapore are often part of the longer Europe-to-Australia route so they are also sometimes full. The motto of the story is to plan your preferred itinerary well in advance.

You can get cheap short-hop flights between Perth and Denpasar in Bali, a route serviced by several airlines including Garuda Indonesia and Qantas. Some Asian agents:

STA Travel Bangkok (☎ 02 236 0262; www.statravel.co.th); Singapore (☎ 65 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg) Tokyo (☎ 03 5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp)

Canada

The air routes from Canada are similar to those from mainland USA, with most Toronto and Vancouver flights stopping in one US city such as Los Angeles or Honolulu before heading on to Australia. Air Canada flies from Vancouver to Sydney via Honolulu and from Toronto to Melbourne via Honolulu.

Canadian discount air-ticket sellers (known as consolidators) and their airfares tend to be about 10% higher than those sold in the USA. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 1866 246 9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency and has offices in all major cities.

Continental Europe

From the major destinations in Europe, most flights travel via one of the Asian capitals. Some flights are also routed through London before arriving in Australia via Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong or Kuala Lumpur.

A good option in the Dutch travel industry is **Holland International** (☎ 070-307 6307; www.hollandinternational.nl).

In Germany, good travel agencies include the Berlin branch of **STA Travel** (☎ 069-743 032 92; www.statravel.de).

Some agents in Paris:

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) Also has branches outside of Paris.

OTU Voyages (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; www.otu.fr) Student/youth oriented, with offices in many cities.

New Zealand

Air New Zealand and Qantas operate a network of flights linking Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch in New Zealand with Perth and other Australian gateway cities.

Other trans-Tasman options:

Flight Centre (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) Has a large central office in Auckland and many branches throughout the country.

House of Travel (www.houseoftravel.co.nz) Handles flight bookings for scores of airlines. Visit the website for the office phone numbers across both islands.

STA Travel (☎ 09-309 0458; www.statravel.co.nz) Has offices in numerous cities.

From the UK & Ireland

There are two routes from the UK: the western route via the USA and the Pacific, and the eastern route via the Middle East and Asia. Flights are usually cheaper and more frequent on the latter. Some of the best deals are with Emirates, Gulf Air, Malaysia Airlines, Japan Airlines and Thai Airways International. Unless there are special deals on offer, British Airways, Singapore Airlines and Qantas generally have higher fares but may offer a more direct route. For agents try:

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 163 0026; www.statravel.co.uk)

USA

Most of the flights between the North American mainland and Australia travel to/from the USA's west coast. San Francisco is the ticket consolidator (discounter) capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

STA Travel (☎ 800 781 4040; www.statravel.com) has offices around the country, and can assist with tickets.

AIR – DOMESTIC

While the major carrier in Australia is the formerly monopolistic **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), Richard Branson's highly com-

petitive **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) thankfully also flies all over Australia. Routes to/from Perth include Broome, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane. In order to compete with Virgin Blue, Qantas introduced low-cost **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) in 2004, however domestic flights out of Perth only travel to Melbourne at present. Qantas flies direct to most Australian capital cities as well as flying or code-sharing to several destinations in WA. See p266 for WA's regional airlines.

Fares

Few people pay full fare on domestic travel, as the airlines offer a wide range of discounts. These come and go and there are regular special fares, so keep your eyes open. Regular one-way and return domestic fares are similar on Jetstar and Virgin Blue.

Advance-purchase deals provide the cheapest airfares. Some advance-purchase fares offer up to 33% discount off one-way fares and up to 50% or more off return fares. You have to book one to four weeks ahead, and you often have to stay away for at least one Saturday night. There are restrictions on changing flights and you can lose up to 100% of the ticket price if you cancel, although you can buy health-related cancellation insurance.

LAND

The southwest of WA is isolated from the rest of Australia, and interstate travel entails a major sojourn. The nearest state capital to Perth is Adelaide, 2650km away by the shortest road route. To Melbourne it's at least 3384km, Darwin is around 4020km and Sydney 3900km. In spite of the vast distances, you can still drive across the Nullarbor Plain from the eastern states to Perth and then up the Indian Ocean coast and through the Kimberley to Darwin on sealed roads – if you dare.

Border Crossings

The two most commonly used entry points into WA from the eastern states are at Kununurra (p241), via the Victoria Hwy, near the Northern Territory (NT) border; and Eucla (p168), via the Eyre Hwy, close to the border with South Australia (SA). Hardier types can head inland for more rugged crossings into the NT near Halls Creek; and on the Great Central Rd to Yulara, near Giles. See Outback Travel (p271) for more information.

Bus

Greyhound (☎ 1300 473 946 863; www.greyhound.com.au) runs services to Darwin via Broome (A\$690, taking a day and a half). Greyhound's travel to the eastern states (with its various passes) uses the *Indian Pacific* (below) service to cross from Perth to Adelaide.

See p267 for more information on Greyhound bus passes and deals.

Car, Motorcycle & Bicycle

No matter which way you look at it and where you're coming from, driving to Perth from any other state is a *very* long journey. But if you've got your own wheels and companions to share the driving and the fuel costs, it's still a cheap way of getting to Perth... and it's certainly the best way to see the country. Be aware that there are strict quarantine restrictions when crossing the border, so scoff or toss your fruit and vegetables before you get there.

See p268 for details of road rules, driving conditions and information on buying and renting vehicles.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe – we don't recommend it. Hitching to or from WA across the Nullarbor is definitely not advisable, as waits of several days are not uncommon.

People looking for travelling companions for the long car journeys to WA from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Darwin frequently leave notices on boards in hostels and backpacker accommodation.

Train

There is only one interstate rail link: the famous *Indian Pacific* transcontinental train journey, run by **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47; www.gsr.com.au). Along with the *Ghan* to Alice Springs, the 4352km *Indian Pacific* run is one of Australia's great train journeys – a bum-numbing 65-hour trip between the Pacific Ocean on one side of the continent and the Indian Ocean on the other.

The *Indian Pacific* travels twice weekly each way between Sydney and Perth. From Sydney, you cross New South Wales to Broken Hill, then continue on to Adelaide and across the Nullarbor Plain. From Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the seemingly endless crossing of the virtually uninhabited centre takes well over 24 hours, including the 'long straight' on the Nullarbor – at 478km this is the longest

straight stretch of train line in the world. You can take 'whistle-stop' tours of some towns on the way. Unlike the trans-Nullarbor road, which runs south of the Nullarbor along the coast of the Great Australian Bight, the train line crosses the actual plain. From Kalgoorlie-Boulder, it's a straight run into Perth.

CLASSES & COSTS

There are three different classes of travel on the *Indian Pacific*. The economy 'daynighter' seat is basically a recliner lounge chair, with shared shower and toilet facilities. The next class is a sleeper cabin, comprising day cabins that convert to twin sleepers, with shared shower and toilet facilities. Both these configurations are part of the 'red kangaroo' service. The 'gold kangaroo' service is basically 1st class, with single, twin or deluxe day-and-night sleeper accommodation with all meals included and served in the restaurant car. These passengers also have access to a luxurious lounge car and bar (complete with piano). For daynighter and sleeper passengers, meals are not included but can be purchased onboard.

One-way fares from Adelaide to Perth for an economy 'daynighter' seat/economy sleeper/1st-class sleeper are \$395/1005/1355 (\$186/609/926 for children and pensioners), while fares from Sydney are \$680/1320/1790 (\$322/859/1293 for children and pensioners). These fares apply from April 2007 to March 2008; see the website for prices after this date.

If you want to break the journey, you have to buy 'sector' fares, which work out to be a bit more expensive than the through fare. The 1st-class berths get booked up, especially in wildflower season (September to November), so advance bookings are a good idea.

Cars can be easily transported between Perth and Sydney or Adelaide. This makes a very good option for those not wishing to drive across the Nullarbor Plain in both directions.

GETTING AROUND

Travelling widely around WA is challenging – the distances between key towns are vast (especially in the north), requiring a minimum of an hour or two of air time but up to several days of highway cruising or red-dirt revving to traverse.

AIR

WA is so vast that unless you have unlimited time and an unlimited thirst for driving, you should consider a flight at some point. **Skywest Airlines** (☎ 1300 660 088; www.skywest.com.au) is the biggest regional airline, with a comprehensive network of flights that can replace days of dusty driving with an hour or two in the air. Connections with Perth include Albany, Broome, Carnarvon, Esperance, Exmouth, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Kununurra, Monkey Mia, Port Hedland and across into Darwin in the NT.

There are several other small regional aviation companies in the state:

Airnorth (☎ 1800 627 474, 08-8920 4001; www.airnorth.com.au) Operates flights from Broome to Kununurra and Darwin.

National Jet (☎ 13 13 13; www.nationaljet.com.au)

A Qantas Airways subsidiary with flights to the Australian protectorates, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island, in the Indian Ocean.

Northwest Regional Airlines (☎ 08-9192 1369; www.northwestregional.com.au) Shuttles travellers between Port Hedland, Fitzroy Crossing, Broome, Halls Creek and Karratha as well as offering scenic flights.

Rottnest Air-Taxi (☎ 1800 500 006, 08-9292 5027; www.rottnest.de) Runs services to Rottnest Island as well as scenic flights.

BICYCLE

Whether you're hiring a bike to cycle around Rottnest Island, planning a day or two of riding around the Margaret River wineries, or attempting a trans-Nullarbor marathon, WA is a great place for cycling (also see p39).

Note that bicycle helmets are compulsory in WA (and all other states and territories of Australia), as are white front lights and red rear lights for riding at night.

If you're coming specifically to cycle, it makes sense to bring your own bike. Check with your airline for costs and the degree of dismantling/packing required. Within WA you can load your bike onto a bus to skip the boring bits of the country – and we've seen some cyclists in some very unlikely places in WA. Check with bus companies about how the bike needs to be secured, and book ahead to ensure that you and your bike can travel on the same vehicle.

Suffering dehydration is a very real risk in WA and can be life-threatening. It can get very hot in summer, and you should take things slowly until you're used to the heat.

Cycling in 35°C-plus temperatures is bearable if you wear a hat and plenty of sunscreen, and drink *lots* of water.

Outback travel needs to be planned thoroughly, with the availability of drinking water the main concern – those isolated water sources (bores, tanks, creeks and the like) shown on your map may be dry or undrinkable, so you can't always depend on them. Also make sure you've got the necessary spare parts and bike-repair knowledge. Check with locals (start at the visitors centres) if you're heading into remote areas, and always let someone know where you're headed before setting off.

For information on bicycle touring around WA, including suggested routes, road conditions and cycling maps, see the websites of the **Bicycle Transportation Alliance** (www.multiline.com.au/~bta) and the **Cycle Touring Association of Western Australia** (www.ctawa.asn.au).

BUS

If you don't have your own wheels, buses are the best way to see WA, having a very comprehensive route network compared with the limited railway system. All buses are modern and well equipped with air-con, toilets and videos.

Transwa

The largest operator in the mid-west and southwest is the government-operated **Transwa** (☎ 1300 662 205; www.transwa.wa.gov.au), with services that run in conjunction with limited rail services. Transwa destinations and fares (one way from Perth) are as follows: Albany (\$48, six hours), Augusta (\$40, eight hours), Bunbury (\$25, three hours), Busselton (\$29, 4½ hours), Dunsborough (\$31, five hours), Esperance (\$72, 10 hours), Geraldton (\$50, six hours), Hyden (\$42, five hours), Kalbarri (\$63, 7½ hours), Margaret River (\$34, 5½ hours), Pemberton (\$42, 5½ hours) and York (\$13, two hours). Reservations are necessary for all bus/train services.

Greyhound Australia

As well as travelling interstate, **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 1300 473 946 863; www.greyhound.com.au) has departures from Perth to Broome (\$351, 31 hours), Dongara-Port Denison (\$44, six hours), Exmouth (\$210, 20 hours), Geraldton (\$54, 6¼ hours), Kalbarri (\$108, via Binu), Monkey Mia (\$149, 13 hours) and Port Hedland (\$267, 26 hours). All fares listed are one way.

Students, ISIC card-holders, YHA members, VIP and Nomads card-holders get discounts of 10%. Children up to two years old get 50% off express tickets, while kids aged three to 14 get a 20% discount.

PASSES

If you're planning to travel around Australia, check out Greyhound's excellent themed bus passes. Several passes focus solely on travel in the west. The 'Pearl Diver' (\$481, valid for six months) allows you to travel along the WA coastline from Perth to Broome, with notable stops such as Monkey Mia and Exmouth; the 'Western Explorer' (\$736, valid for six months) covers the same ground, but also includes the Broome to Darwin route; and the 'Best of the West' (\$1690, valid for one year) allows you to travel from Adelaide to Perth (via the *Indian Pacific*, p265), along the coastal highway to Broome and Darwin and return to Adelaide via the red centre.

If your trip is going to be Australia-wide, the Greyhound Aussie Kilometre Pass is purchased in kilometre blocks, starting at 2000km (\$340), in 1000-kilometre blocks up to 10,000km (\$1275) and onwards to 20,000km (\$2450). You can get off at any point on the scheduled route and have unlimited stopovers within the life of the pass.

Also see Tours (p258) for information on companies that provide hop-on, hop-off bus services.

Other Bus Companies

Integrity Coach Lines (☎ 1800 226 339, 08-9226 1339; www.integritycoachlines.com.au) most useful routes for travellers are from Perth to Mt Magnet (\$88, seven hours), Cue (\$99, eight hours), Meekatharra (\$115, 10 hours), Newman (\$198, 16 hours) and Port Hedland (\$215, 22 hours). Fares listed are one way; there are various discounts for YHA/VIP card-holders. Note that this service runs in each direction only once a week.

Perth-Goldfields Express (☎ 1800 620 440; www.goldrushtours.com.au) does the Perth-Laverton run via the Great Eastern Hwy and Kalgoorlie-Boulder. One-way fares leaving from Perth include: Merredin (\$38, three hours), Kalgoorlie-Boulder (\$70, 7½ hours), Leonora (\$123, 10 hours) and Laverton (\$138, 11 hours).

South West Coach Lines (in Perth ☎ 08-9324 2333, in Bunbury ☎ 08-9791 1955, in Busselton ☎ 08-9754 1666) services the southwest pocket of the

state and runs daily services from Perth to Bunbury (\$25, three hours), Busselton (\$29, four hours), Dunsborough (\$31, 4½ hours), Margaret River (\$33, 5½ hours) and Augusta (\$40, six hours).

Backpacker Buses

While the companies offering transport options for budget travellers are pretty much organised-tour operators, they do also get you from A to B (sometimes with hop-on, hop-off services) and so can be a very cost-effective alternative to the big bus companies. The buses are usually smaller, you'll meet lots of other travellers, and the drivers often double as tour guides. See Tours (p258) for more information about backpacker buses and other tour companies.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There is no doubt that travelling by vehicle is the best option in WA, as it gives you the freedom to explore off the beaten track. With several people travelling together, costs are reasonable and, provided that you don't have any major mechanical problems, there are many benefits.

Motorcycles are another popular way of getting around. The climate is good for bikes for much of the year, and the many small trails from the road into the bush lead to perfect spots to spend the night. Bringing your own motorcycle into Australia will entail an expensive shipping exercise, valid registration in the country of origin and a *Carnet de Passages en Douanes*. This is an internationally recognised customs document that allows the holder to import their vehicle without paying customs duty or taxes. To get one, apply to a motoring organisation/association in your home country. You'll also need a rider's licence and a helmet. A fuel range of 350km will cover fuel stops up the centre and on Hwy 1 around the continent. The long, open roads are really made for large-capacity machines above 750cc, which Australians prefer once they outgrow their 250cc learner restrictions.

Automobile Associations

The **Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia** (RACWA; ☎ 13 17 03; www.rac.com.au; 228 Adelaide Terrace, Perth) has lots of useful advice on state-wide motoring, including road safety, local regulations and buying/selling a car (see Purchase, p270). It also offers car insurance to its mem-

bers, and membership can get you discounts on car rentals and some motel accommodation. Also useful are the road-travel specialists in bordering states:

Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA; ☎ 13 11 11, 08-8202 4600; www.raa.net; 55 Hindmarsh Square, Adelaide 5000)

Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT; ☎ 08-8981 3837; www.aant.com.au; 79-81 Smith St, Darwin 0800)

Driving Licence

You can generally use your own home-country's driving licence in WA for up to three months, as long as it carries your photo for identification and is in English (if it's not, you'll need a certified translation). Alternatively, it's a simple matter to arrange an International Driving Permit (IDP), which should be supported by your home licence. Just go to your home country's automobile association and it can issue one on the spot. The permits are valid for 12 months, and cost approximately \$20.

Fuel

Fuel (super, diesel and unleaded) is available from service stations sporting the well-known international brand names. LPG (gas) is not always stocked at more remote roadhouses – if your car runs on gas it's safer to have dual fuel capacity. Prices vary wildly in WA and it's not always aligned with the freight costs in getting the fuel to that isolated roadhouse. The prices for unleaded fuel at the time of writing were around \$1.15/L in Perth and up to \$1.70/L in the more remote areas of WA. Fuel prices are a major topic of discussion in WA, with the high prices having a significant effect on tourism in the outback. For up-to-date fuel prices across WA, visit the government fuel-watch website (www.fuelwatch.wa.gov.au).

Distances between fill-ups can be long in the outback but there are only a handful of tracks where you'll require a long-range fuel tank or need to use jerry cans. However, if you are doing some back-road explorations, always calculate your fuel consumption, plan accordingly and always carry a spare jerry can or two. Keep in mind that most small-town service stations are only open from 6am to 7pm and roadhouses aren't always open 24 hours. On main roads there'll be a small town or roadhouse roughly every 150km to 200km or so.

Hire

Competition between car-rental companies in Australia is pretty fierce, so rates tend to be variable and lots of special deals come and go. The main thing to remember when assessing your options is distance – if you want to travel widely, you need weigh up the price difference between an unlimited kilometres deal and one that offers a set number of kilometres free with a fee per kilometre over that set number.

As well as the big firms, there are a vast number of local firms, or firms with outlets in a limited number of locations. These are almost always cheaper than the big operators – sometimes half the price – but cheap car hire often comes with restrictions on how far you can take the vehicle away from the rental centre.

The big firms sometimes offer one-way rentals, but there are a variety of limitations, including a substantial drop-off fee. Ask plenty of questions about this before deciding on one company over another. One-way rentals into or out of the NT or WA may be subject to a hefty fee; however, there have previously been good deals for taking a car or campervan from Broome, for example, back to Perth.

You must be at least 21 years old to hire from most firms – if you're under 25 you may only be able to hire a small car or have to pay a surcharge. It's cheaper if you rent for a week or more and there are often low-season and

weekend discounts. Credit cards are the usual payment method.

Note that most car-rental companies do include insurance in the price (also see p270), but in the event of an accident the hirer is still liable for a sometimes-hefty excess. Most companies offer excess-reduction insurance on top of the rental rate.

Major companies all have offices or agents in Perth and larger centres.

Avis (☎ 13 63 33; www.avis.com.au)

Budget (☎ 1300 362 848; www.budget.com.au)

Hertz (☎ 13 30 39; www.hertz.com.au)

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

If you want short-term car hire, smaller local companies are generally the cheapest and are pretty reliable. **Bayswater Car Rental** (☎ 08-9325 1000; www.bayswatercarrental.com.au) is a good-value company with an office in Perth, or you can try **Backpacker Car Rentals** (☎ 08-9430 8869; www.backpackercarrentals.com.au) for the cheapest rentals around, starting from \$110 per week.

4WD & CAMPERVAN HIRE

Renting a 4WD enables you to safely tackle routes off the beaten track and get out to some of the natural wonders that most travellers miss in a conventional vehicle.

Always check the insurance conditions carefully, especially the excess, as they can be onerous. Even for a 4WD, the insurance

4WD DRIVING TIPS

We don't need to see more 4WDs on tow trucks; the victims of a dirt-road rollover, a poorly judged river crossing, or coming to grief when meeting the native fauna on the road. Here's some tips to help keep you from riding upfront in a tow truck:

- Before heading off-road, check the road conditions at www.mainroads.wa.gov.au.
- Recheck road conditions at each visitors centre you come across – they can change quickly.
- Let people know where you're going, what route you're taking and how long you'll be gone.
- Don't drive at night: it's safer to rise early (but not pre-dawn!) and finish in the mid-afternoon to avoid wildlife.
- Avoid sudden changes in direction – 4WDs have a much higher centre of gravity than cars.
- On sand tracks, reduce tyre pressure to 140kpa (20psi) and don't forget to reinflate your tyres once you're back on the tarmac.
- When driving on corrugated tracks, note that while there is a 'sweet spot' speed where you feel the corrugations less, it's often too fast to negotiate a corner – and rollovers often happen because of this.
- When crossing rivers and creeks, always walk across first to check the depth – unless you're in saltwater crocodile territory, of course!

offered by most companies does not cover damage caused when travelling 'off-road', which basically means anything that is not a maintained bitumen or dirt road.

Hertz, Budget and Avis have 4WD rentals. **Britz Rentals** (☎ 1800 331 454, 08-9478 3488; www.britz.com) hires fully equipped 4WDs fitted out as campervans, which are commonplace on northern Australian roads. Britz has offices in all the mainland capitals, as well as Perth and Broome, so one-way rentals are also possible.

Several other companies rent out campervans, including **Backpacker Campervans** (☎ 1800 670 232, 08-9478 3479; www.backpackercampervans.com) and **Wicked Campers** (☎ 1800 246 869; www.wickedcampers.com.au), most notable for the lurid colour schemes of their vehicles. See the boxed text, p79, for more information.

Insurance

In Australia, third-party personal injury insurance is always included in the vehicle registration cost. This ensures that every registered vehicle carries at least minimum insurance. You'd be wise to extend that minimum to at least third-party property insurance as well – minor collisions with other vehicles can be amazingly expensive.

When it comes to hire cars, it pays to know exactly what your liability is in the event of an accident. Rather than risk paying out thousands of dollars if you do have an accident, you can take out your own comprehensive insurance on the car, or (the usual option) pay an additional daily amount to the rental

company for an 'insurance excess reduction' policy. This brings the amount of excess you must pay in the event of an accident down from between \$2000 and \$5000 to a few hundred dollars.

Be aware that if you're travelling on dirt roads you will not be covered by insurance unless you have a 4WD – in other words, if you have an accident you'll be liable for all the costs involved. Also, most companies' insurance won't cover the cost of damage to glass (including the windscreen) or tyres. Always read the small print.

Purchase

If you're planning a stay of several months that involves lots of driving, buying a second-hand car will be much cheaper than renting. But remember that reliability is all-important. Breaking down in the outback is very inconvenient (and potentially dangerous) – the nearest mechanic can be a very expensive tow-truck ride away!

You'll probably get any car cheaper by buying privately through the newspaper (try Saturday's *West Australian*) rather than through a car dealer. Buying through a dealer does have the advantage of some sort of guarantee, but this is not much use if you're buying a car in Sydney for a trip to Perth.

When you come to buy or sell a car, there are usually some local regulations to be complied with. In WA a car has to have a compulsory safety check and obtain a Road Worthiness Certificate (RWC) before it can

OUTBACK TRAVEL

If you really want to explore outback Western Australia (WA), it's important not to embark on your trip without careful planning and preparation. While you may not necessarily need a 4WD or extensive expedition equipment to tackle most of the state's roads, you do need to be prepared for the isolation and lack of facilities you'll encounter. Vehicles should be in excellent working condition and have reasonable ground clearance. If you plan on taking a conventional vehicle on roads that are marked '4WD only' or even '4WD recommended', don't expect a warm welcome from the good Samaritan who comes to help you out if you get into difficulties. Locals and dedicated 4WD travellers are becoming increasingly frustrated with having to help out travellers either with the wrong kind of vehicle, a poorly prepared vehicle or just sheer inexperience on the part of the driver to handle outback conditions. Of course Aussies will always help out someone in genuine need, but don't expect to be put on their Christmas list.

When travelling to very remote areas, it's advisable to carry a high-frequency (HF) radio transceiver equipped to pick up the relevant Royal Flying Doctor Service bases. A satellite phone and Global Positioning System (GPS) are also handy. All this equipment comes at a cost, but it's wise to keep in the back of your mind the fact that plenty of travellers have perished in the Australian desert after breaking down.

It's essential to always carry plenty of water. In the warmer weather allow at least 5L of water per person per day, plus an extra amount for the radiator. It's best to carry water in several containers.

It's wise not to attempt the tougher routes during the hottest part of the year (October to April inclusive) – apart from the risk of heat exhaustion, simple mishaps can easily lead to tragedy at this time. Conversely, there's no point going anywhere on dirt roads in the outback if there has been recent flooding (this is particularly common in the north during the wet season). Your first stop in any outback town before heading off into the wilderness should be the visitors centre, where they can advise you about the current road conditions and upcoming weather. If the office is closed, road and weather conditions are generally posted on the notice board outside the centre. If a visitors centre advises you that a road is closed or a road is not suitable for your vehicle, heed their advice.

If you do run into trouble in the back of beyond, always stay with your car. It's easier to spot a car than a human being from the air, and you probably won't be able to carry the amount of water necessary for survival very far anyway. Police suggest that you carry two spare tyres (for added safety) and, if stranded, try to set fire to one of them (let the air out first) – the pall of smoke will be seen for miles.

Of course, before you set out, let your family, friends or your car-hire company know where you're going and when you intend to be back. Some of the favourite outback tracks in the west follow.

Canning Stock Route This historic 1800km cattle-droving trail runs southwest from Halls Creek to Wiluna and is one of the most remote 4WD routes in the world. It crosses the Great Sandy Desert and the Gibson Desert and, since the track is not maintained, it's a route to be taken very seriously. The drive should only be done in the cooler months, in a well-equipped 4WD convoy with experienced outback drivers.

Gibb River Rd This popular route between Derby and Kununurra cuts through the heart of the spectacular Kimberley, with numerous gorges being a highlight. The going is slow, but the surroundings are so beautiful you won't mind the leisurely pace needed to handle the often badly corrugated road. While we don't recommend it, conventional vehicles often do the trip in the dry season (May to November); however it's impassable in the wet season and can be risky in the early dry season due to still-swollen river crossings. For more information, see Gibb River Road (p235).

Tanami Track Turning off the Stuart Hwy just north of Alice Springs (NT), this 1100km route goes northwest across the Tanami Desert to Halls Creek in WA. The road is a graded dirt road and while conventional vehicles make the journey, it's really best suited to at least a mid-sized 4WD as it can be sandy in places. The Rabbit Flat roadhouse in the middle of the desert is only open for business from Friday to Monday, so if you don't have long-range fuel tanks, plan your trip accordingly. Get advice on road conditions in Alice Springs or Halls Creek.

DRIVING THROUGH ABORIGINAL LAND

If you are planning to drive on roads in the outback that pass through Aboriginal reserves, it is essential to have the required transit permits.

Permits are issued free of charge, but you must complete an official application form. In your letter of application you should indicate your intended route, the date of your journey, the make and registration number of your vehicle, and the number and names of the people travelling with you. Transit permits for straightforward travel along an established route can be processed instantly over the internet. However, permits for extended stays or more remote roads take longer.

Permits for travel through lands in WA are issued by the **Department of Indigenous Affairs** (DIA; ☎ 08-9235 8000; www.dia.wa.gov.au; 197 St Georges Tce, Perth), and applications can be approved over the Internet (just print out the approval and take it on your trip), made in person or by mail. The DIA website has plenty of useful information, including maps, road safety and conditions, and some simple dos and don'ts.

For travel in the southern and central regions of the Northern Territory (NT), apply for permits at the **Central Land Council** (☎ 08-8951 6320; fax 8953 4345; www.clc.org.au; 33 Stuart Hwy, Alice Springs, NT 0871; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri). Simply download the permit registration from the website, and fax or post it to the Permits Officer.

be registered in the new owner's name – usually the seller will indicate whether the car already has a RWC. Stamp duty has to be paid when you buy a car; as this is based on the purchase price, it's not unknown for the buyer and the seller to agree privately to understate the price.

To avoid buying a lemon, you might consider forking out some extra money for a vehicle appraisal before purchase. The **RACWA** (☎ 08-9421 4444; www.rac.com.au) offers this kind of check in Perth and other large WA centres for around \$108/140 for members/non-members; it also offers extensive advice on buying and selling cars on its website.

If you'd like to purchase your own motorcycle and are fortunate enough to have a little time on your hands, getting mobile on two wheels is quite feasible. The beginning of winter (June) is a good time to start looking. Local newspapers and the bike-related press have classified advertisement sections.

Road Conditions

This vast state is not crisscrossed by multi-lane highways; there's not enough traffic and the distances are simply too great to justify them.

On all of the main routes, roads are well surfaced and have two lanes. You don't have to get very far off the beaten track, however, to find yourself on unsealed roads, and anybody who sets out to see the state in reasonable detail will have to expect to do some dirt-road travelling. A 2WD car can cope with a limited amount of this, but if you want to do some serious exploration, then you'd better plan on having a 4WD.

Driving on unsealed roads requires special care – a car will perform differently when braking and turning on dirt. Under no circumstances should you exceed 80km/h on dirt roads; if you go faster you will not have enough time to respond to a sharp turn, stock on the road or an unmarked gate or cattle grid. So take it easy; take time to see the sights and don't try to break the land speed record!

Travelling by car within WA means sometimes having to pass road trains. These articulated trucks and their loads (consisting of two or more trailers) can be up to 53.5m long, 2.5m wide and travel at around 100km/h. Overtaking them is a tricky process; at times you will have to drive off the bitumen to get past. Exercise caution – and remember that

it is much harder for the driver of the larger road train to control their vehicle than it is for you to control your car.

Road Distances

One thing you have to adjust to in WA is the vast distances. The truth is that many places of interest are a very long drive from Perth. There are rest areas where tired drivers can revive. Ask for maps from the RACWA that indicate free coffee stops and rest areas.

See the Road Distances from Perth table (opposite) for some examples of the distances from Perth to regional centres.

Road Hazards

Contact the **RACWA** (☎ 13 17 03; www.rac.com.au) for general information and advice before embarking on any long-distance car travel.

Cattle, emus and kangaroos are common hazards on country roads, and a collision is likely to kill the animal and cause serious damage to your vehicle. Kangaroos are most active around dawn and dusk, and they travel in groups. If you see one hopping across the road in front of you, slow right down – its friends are probably just behind it. It's important to keep a safe distance behind the vehicle in front, in case it hits an animal or has to slow down suddenly.

If an animal runs out in front of you, brake if you can, but don't swerve unless it is safe to do so. You're likely to survive a collision with an emu better than a collision with a tree or if you roll your vehicle.

Driver fatigue is another hazard on the long-distance drives in WA. Some outback roads can become tedious after a few hours, so on a long haul, stop and rest every two hours or so – do some exercise, change drivers or have a coffee.

It's important to note that when it rains, some roads flood. Flooding is a real problem up north because of cyclonic storms. Exercise extreme caution at wet times, especially at the frequent yellow 'Floodway' signs. If you come to a stretch of water and you're not sure of the depth or what could lie beneath it, pull up at the side of the road and walk through it (excluding known saltwater crocodile areas, such as the Pentecost River crossing on the Gibb River Rd!). Even on major highways, if it has been raining you can sometimes be driving through 30cm or more of water for hundreds of metres at a time.

ROAD DISTANCES FROM PERTH

destination	km	destination	km
Adelaide	2650km	Kalbarri	592km
Albany	409km	Kalgoorlie-Boulder	596km
Augusta	324km	Karratha	1537km
Balladonia	911km	Kununurra	3206km
Broome	2230km	Lake Argyle	3276km
Bunbury	181km	Mandurah	74km
Busselton	232km	Manjimup	307km
Carnarvon	904km	Marble Bar	1476km
Cervantes	247km	Margaret River	278km
Coral Bay	1132km	Meekatharra	763km
Cue	651km	Monkey Mia	859km
Dampier	1557km	Mount Barker	359km
Denham	834km	Newman	1186km
Derby	2383km	Norseman	724km
Dongara-Port Denison	362km	Onslow	1389km
Esperance	721km	Pemberton	335km
Eucla	1436km	Port Hedland	1638km
Exmouth	1263km	Southern Cross	369km
Fitzroy Crossing	2558km	Tom Price	1458km
Geraldton	427km	Walpole	422km
Halls Creek	2857km	Wyndham	3216km
Hyden	339km		

For statewide road-condition reports, call ☎ 1800 800 009 and follow the prompts for information about the area in which you are driving. This information is updated daily (and more frequently if necessary).

Road Rules

Driving in WA holds few surprises, other than those that hop out in front of your vehicle. Cars are driven on the left-hand side of the road (as they are in the rest of Australia). An important road rule is 'give way to the right' – if an intersection is unmarked, you must give way to vehicles entering the intersection from your right.

The speed limit in urban areas is generally 60km/h, unless signposted otherwise. The state speed limit is 110km/h, applicable to all roads in non-built-up areas, unless otherwise indicated. The police have radar speed traps and speed cameras and are very fond of using them in carefully hidden locations.

Oncoming drivers who flash their lights at you may be giving you a friendly warning of a speed camera ahead – or they may be telling you that your headlights are not on. Whatever the circumstance, it's polite to wave back if

someone does this. Try not to get caught flashing your lights yourself, since it's illegal.

Seat belts are compulsory – you'll be fined if you don't use them. Children must be strapped into an approved safety seat. Talking on a hand-held mobile phone while driving is illegal.

Drink-driving is a serious problem in WA, especially in country areas. Random breath tests are used in an effort to reduce the road toll. If you're caught driving with a blood-alcohol level of more than 0.05%, be prepared for a hefty fine, a court appearance and the loss of your licence.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Perth has an efficient, fully integrated public transport system called **Transperth** (☎ 13 62 13; www.transperth.wa.gov.au) that covers the city's public buses, trains and ferries. There are three free Central Area Transit (CAT) bus services in Perth's city centre; using the three, you can get to most sights in the inner city. Fremantle also has a free CAT bus system that takes in all the major sights on a continuous loop. See Getting Around in Perth (p78) and Fremantle (p87) for other local transport options.

Outside Perth and Fremantle, local transport is limited; however, some of the larger country towns, such as Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Albany, have limited local bus services.

Taxis are available in most of the larger towns, where locals are reliant on them as a means of beating the booze buses and police patrols.

TRAIN

The state's internal rail network, operated by **Transwa** (☎ 1300 662 205; www.transwa.wa.gov

.au), is limited to services between Perth and Kalgoorlie-Boulder (the state-of-the-art high speed *Prospector*, departing East Perth; \$72); the *Avon Link*, departing East Perth heading to Northam (\$16) and onward to Merredin (\$37); and Perth and Bunbury in the south (the *Australind*, which departs from the Perth train station on Wellington St; \$24). There are connections with Transwa's more extensive bus service (see p267).

For information on the *Indian Pacific* transcontinental railway, see p265.

Health

Dr David Millar

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Australia is a remarkably healthy country in which to travel, considering that such a large portion of it lies in the tropics. Tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever are unknown, diseases of insanitation such as cholera and typhoid are unheard of, and, thanks to Australia's isolation and quarantine standards, even some animal diseases such as rabies and foot-and-mouth disease have yet to be recorded.

Few travellers to Australia should experience anything worse than an upset stomach or a bad hangover – and if you do fall ill, the standard of hospitals and health care is high.

BEFORE YOU GO

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow-fever vaccination upon entry (sometimes required in Australia, see following), but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic

names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance – check www.lonelyplanet.com for more information. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. See p276 for details of health care in Australia.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Proof of yellow-fever vaccination is required only from travellers entering Australia within six days of having stayed overnight or longer in a yellow-fever infected country. For a full list of these countries visit the websites of the **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith) or that of the **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (www.cdc.gov/travel).

If you're really worried about health when travelling there are a few vaccinations you could consider for Australia. The World Health Organization recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox and polio, as well as hepatitis B, regardless of their destination. Planning to travel is a great time to ensure that all routine vaccination cover is complete. The consequences of these diseases can be severe and while Australia has high levels of childhood vaccination coverage, outbreaks of these diseases do occur.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

- antibiotics
- antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- acetaminophen/paracetamol or aspirin
- anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- antibacterial ointment to care for cuts and abrasions
- steroid cream or cortisone (for poison ivy and other allergic rashes)
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls

- adhesive or paper tape
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- thermometer
- pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- sun block
- oral rehydration salts
- iodine tablets or water filter (for water purification)

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. **The World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith/) publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand & the Pacific* is a handy, pocket-sized guide packed with useful information including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information and what to do if you get sick on the road. *Travel with Children* from Lonely Planet also includes advice on travel health for younger children.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS

Blood clots may form in the legs (deep vein thrombosis) during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually – but not always – on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights, you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie flex the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is a common condition when crossing more than five time zones, resulting in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of (nonalcoholic) fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate and meclizine are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side-effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN AUSTRALIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Health insurance is essential for all travellers. While health care in Australia is of a high standard and not overly expensive by international standards, considerable costs can build up and repatriation is extremely expensive.

Australia has an excellent health-care system. It is a mixture of privately run medical clinics and hospitals alongside a government-funded system of public hospitals. The Medicare system covers Australian residents for some health-care costs. Visitors from countries with which Australia has a reciprocal health-care agreement (New Zealand, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland,

HANDY WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia www.smarttraveller.gov.au

Canada www.travelhealth.gc.ca

UK www.dh.gov.uk/policyandguidance/healthadvicefortravellers/

USA www.cdc.gov/travel/

Norway, Italy, Malta and Ireland) are eligible for benefits to the extent specified under the Medicare program. If you are from one of these countries check the details before departure. In general the agreements provide for any episode of ill-health that requires prompt medical attention. For further details visit http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/yourhealth/going_overseas/vtta.htm.

There are excellent, specialised, public health facilities for women and children in Perth.

Over-the-counter medications are widely available at privately owned pharmacies throughout Australia. These include painkillers, antihistamines for allergies and skin-care products.

You may find that medications that are readily available over the counter in some countries are only available in Australia by prescription. These include the oral contraceptive pill, most medications for asthma and all antibiotics. If you take medication on a regular basis bring an adequate supply and ensure you have details of the generic name as brand names may differ between countries.

Health Care in Remote Areas

In Australia it is possible to get into remote locations where there may well be a significant delay in emergency services reaching you in the event of serious accident or illness – do not underestimate the vastness between most major outback towns. An increased level of self-reliance and preparation is essential; consider taking a wilderness first-aid course, such as those offered at the **Wilderness Medicine Institute** (www.wmi.net.au); take a comprehensive first-aid kit that is appropriate for the activities planned; and ensure that you have adequate means of communication. Australia has extensive mobile phone coverage but additional radio communications is important for remote areas. The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides an important backup for remote communities.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Bat Lyssavirus

This disease is related to rabies and some deaths have occurred after bites. The risk is greatest for animal handlers and vets. Rabies vaccine is effective, but the risk to travellers is very low.

Dengue Fever

Also known as 'breakbone fever', because of the severe muscular pains that accompany the fever, this viral disease is spread by a species of mosquito that feeds primarily during the day. Most people recover in a few days but more severe forms of the disease can occur, particularly in residents who are exposed to another strain of the virus (there are four types) in a subsequent season.

Giardiasis

Giardiasis is widespread in the waterways around Australia. Drinking untreated water from streams and lakes is not recommended. Water filters, and boiling or treating water with iodine, are effective in preventing the disease. Symptoms consist of intermittent bad-smelling diarrhoea, abdominal bloating and wind. Effective treatment is available (tinidazole or metronidazole).

Meningococcal Disease

This disease occurs worldwide and is a risk with prolonged, dormitory-style accommodation. A vaccine exists for some types of this disease, namely meningococcal A, C, Y and W. No vaccine is presently available for the viral type of meningitis.

Ross River Fever

The Ross River virus is widespread throughout Australia and is spread by mosquitoes living in marshy areas. In addition to fever the disease causes headache, joint and muscular pains and a rash, before resolving after five to seven days.

Viral Encephalitis

Also known as Murray Valley encephalitis virus, this is spread by mosquitoes and is most common in northern Australia, especially during the wet season (November to April). This potentially serious disease is normally accompanied by headache, muscle pains and light insensitivity. Residual neurological damage can occur and no specific treatment is available. However, the risk to most travellers is low.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

STDs occur at rates similar to most other Western countries. The most common symptoms are pain while passing urine and a discharge. Infection can be present without

symptoms so seek medical screening after any unprotected sex with a new partner. Throughout the country, you'll find sexual health clinics in all of the major hospitals. Always use a condom with any new sexual partner. Condoms are readily available in chemists and through vending machines in many public places including toilets.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Tap water is universally safe in WA. Increasing numbers of streams, rivers and lakes, however, are being contaminated by bugs that cause diarrhoea, making water purification essential. The simplest way of purifying water is to boil it thoroughly. Consider purchasing a water filter; it's very important when buying a filter to read the specifications, so that you know exactly what it removes from the water and what it doesn't. Simple filtering will not remove all dangerous organisms, so if you cannot boil water it should be treated chemically. Chlorine tablets will kill many pathogens, but not some parasites like giardia and amoebic cysts. Iodine is more effective in purifying water and is available in tablet form. Follow the directions carefully and remember that too much iodine can be harmful.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Bites & Stings

MARINE ANIMALS

Marine spikes, such as those found on sea urchins, stonefish, scorpion fish, catfish and stingrays, can cause severe local pain. If this occurs, immediately immerse the affected area in hot water (as hot as can be tolerated). Keep topping up with hot water until the pain subsides and medical care can be reached. The stonefish is found only in tropical Australia, from northwestern Australia around the coast to northern Queensland; antivenin is available.

Marine stings from jellyfish such as box jellyfish also occur in Australia's tropical waters, particularly during the wet season (November to April). The box jellyfish has an incredibly potent sting and has been known to cause fatalities. Warning signs exist at affected beaches, and stinger nets are in place at the more popular beaches. Never dive into water you have not first checked is safe with local beach life-saving representatives. 'Stinger suits' (full-body Lycra swimsuits) prevent stinging, as do wetsuits. If you are stung, first

aid consists of washing the skin with vinegar to prevent further discharge of remaining stinging cells, followed by rapid transfer to a hospital; antivenin is widely available.

SHARKS & CROCODILES

Despite extensive media coverage, the risk of shark attack in Australian waters is no greater than in other countries with extensive coastlines. The risk of an attack from tropical sharks on scuba divers in northern Australian waters is low. Great white sharks are now few in number in the temperate southern waters. Check with local surf life-saving groups about local risks.

The risk of crocodile attack in tropical northern Australia is real but predictable and largely preventable. Discuss the local risk with police or tourist agencies in the area before swimming in rivers and water holes.

SNAKES

Australian snakes have a fearful reputation that is justified in terms of the potency of their venom but unjustified in terms of the actual risk to travellers and locals. Snakes are usually quite timid in nature and in most instances will move away if disturbed. They are endowed with only small fangs, making it easy to prevent bites to the lower limbs (where 80% of bites occur) by wearing protective clothing (such as gaiters) around the ankles when bushwalking. The bite marks are small and preventing the spread of toxic venom can be achieved by applying pressure to the wound and immobilising the area with a splint or sling before seeking medical attention. Application of an elastic bandage (you can improvise with a T-shirt) wrapped firmly, but not tightly enough to cut off the circulation, around the entire limb – along with immobilisation – is a life-saving first-aid measure.

SPIDERS

Australia has a number of poisonous spiders although the only one to have caused a single death in the last 50 years (the Sydney funnel-web) isn't found in WA. Redback spiders are found throughout Australia. Bites cause increasing pain at the site followed by profuse sweating and generalised symptoms. First aid includes application of ice or cold packs to the bite and transfer to hospital.

White-tailed (brown recluse) spider bites may cause an ulcer that is very difficult to

heal. Clean the wound thoroughly and seek medical assistance.

Heat Exhaustion & Heatstroke

Very hot weather is experienced year-round in northern Australia and during the summer months for most of the country. Conditions vary from tropical in the Northern Territory and Queensland, to hot desert in northwestern Australia and central Australia. When arriving from a temperate or cold climate, remember that it takes two weeks for acclimatisation to occur. Before the body is acclimatised an excessive amount of salt is lost in perspiration so increasing the salt in your diet is essential.

Heat exhaustion occurs when fluid intake does not keep up with fluid loss. Symptoms include dizziness, fainting, fatigue, nausea or vomiting. On observation the skin is usually pale, cool and clammy. Treatment consists of rest in a cool, shady place and fluid replacement with water or diluted sports drinks.

Heatstroke is a severe form of heat illness that occurs after fluid depletion or extreme heat challenge from heavy exercise. This is a true medical emergency: heating of the brain leads to disorientation, hallucinations and seizures. Prevention is by maintaining an adequate fluid intake to ensure the continued passage of clear and copious urine, especially during physical exertion.

A number of unprepared travellers die from dehydration each year in outback Australia. This can be prevented by following these simple rules:

- Carry sufficient water for any trip including extra in case of breakdown.
- Always let someone, such as the local police, know where you are going and when you expect to arrive.
- Carry communications equipment of some form.
- In nearly all cases it is better to stay with the vehicle rather than walking for help.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a significant risk especially during the winter months in southern parts of Australia. Despite the absence of high mountain ranges, strong winds produce a high chill

factor that can result in hypothermia in even moderately cool temperatures. Early signs include the inability to perform fine movements (such as doing up buttons), shivering and a bad case of the 'umbles' (fumbles, mumbles, grumbles, stumbles). The key elements of treatment include changing the environment to one where heat loss is minimised, changing out of any wet clothing, adding dry clothes with wind- and water-proof layers, adding insulation and providing fuel (water and carbohydrate) to allow shivering, which builds the internal temperature. In severe hypothermia, shivering actually stops – this is a medical emergency requiring rapid evacuation in addition to the above measures.

Insect-Borne Illnesses

Various insects can be a source of irritation and, in Australia, may be the source of specific diseases (dengue fever, Ross River fever). Protection from mosquitoes, sandflies, ticks and leeches can be achieved by a combination of the following strategies:

- Wearing loose-fitting clothing with long sleeves.
- Application of 30% DEET on all exposed skin, repeated every three to four hours.
- Impregnation of clothing with permethrin (an insecticide that kills insects but is completely safe to humans).

Surf Beaches & Drowning

Australia has exceptional surf beaches, particularly on the western, southern and eastern coasts. Beaches vary enormously in the slope of the underlying bottom, resulting in varying power of the surf. Check with local surf life-saving organisations before entering the surf, and be aware of your own limitations and expertise before entering the water.

Ultraviolet (UV) Light Exposure

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Monitor exposure to direct sunlight closely. UV exposure is greatest between 10am and 4pm so avoid skin exposure during these times. Always use 30+ sunscreen, apply 30 minutes before exposure and repeat regularly to minimise sun damage.

Glossary

arvo – afternoon
ATM – Automatic Teller Machine; public cash dispenser operated by banks
Aussie rules – Australian Rules football

back o' Bourke – back of beyond, middle of nowhere
barbie – barbecue
battler – struggler, someone who tries hard
beaut, beauty – great, fantastic
billabong – waterhole in a riverbed formed by waters receding in *the Dry*
billy – tin container used to boil water in *the bush*
bloke – man
blowies, blowflies – large flies
bludger – lazy person, one who refuses to work
blue – argument or fight ('have a blue')
bodyboard – half-sized surfboard, also known as a boogie board
bonzer – great
boomerang – a curved, flat, wooden instrument used by Aborigines for hunting
booze bus – police van used for random breath-testing for alcohol
bottle shop – liquor shop, off-licence
Buckley's – no chance at all
bull bar – oversize front bumper on vehicle
bull dust – fine and sometimes deep dust on *outback* roads
bush, the – country, anywhere away from the city
BYO – bring your own (alcohol)

catch ya later – goodbye, see you later
chook – chicken
chuck a U-ey – to make a U-turn (turn a car around within a road)
cobber – (archaic) see *mate*
counter meal – pub meal
crack the shits – to lose one's temper
crook – ill or substandard
cut lunch – sandwiches

dag – dirty lump of wool at the back end of a sheep; also an affectionate term for a socially inept person
dampier – bush loaf made from flour and water
dead set – true
DEC – Department of Environment and Conservation
didgeridoo – wind instrument made from a hollow piece of wood
digger – (archaic, from Australian and New Zealand soldiers in WWI) see *mate*
dill – idiot

dinky-di – the real thing
dob in – to inform on someone
donga – small, transportable building widely used in the *outback*
Dreamtime – complex concept that forms the basis of Aboriginal spirituality, incorporating the creation of the world and the spiritual energies operating around us
drongo – worthless or stupid person
Dry, the – dry season in northern Australia (May to October)
dunny – outdoor lavatory

eftpos – Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale
Esky – large insulated box for keeping food and drinks cold

fair dinkum – honest, genuine
freshie – freshwater crocodile
furphy – rumour or false story

galah – noisy parrot, thus noisy idiot
g'day – good day; traditional Australian greeting
grog – general term for alcoholic drinks

homestead – residence of a *station* owner or manager
hoon – idiot, hooligan

icy pole – frozen lollipop, ice lolly
iffy – dodgy, questionable
indie – independent music

jackaroo – male trainee on an *outback station*
jillaroo – female trainee on an *outback station*

karri – Australian eucalyptus tree
kick the bucket – to die
knackered – broken, tired
knock – to criticise, deride
Kombi – a classic (hippies') type of van made by Volkswagen

lamington – square of sponge cake covered in chocolate icing and desiccated coconut
larrikin – hooligan, mischievous youth
lemon – faulty product, a dud
little ripper – extremely good thing
loo – toilet

marron – large freshwater crayfish
mate – general term of familiarity, whether you know the person or not
middy – 285ml glass of beer

milk bar – small shop selling milk and other basic provisions
mobile phone – cellular phone
Mod Oz – modern Australian cuisine influenced by a wide range of foreign cuisines
mozzies – mosquitoes

never-never – remote country in the *outback*
no-hoper – hopeless case
no worries! – no problems! That's OK!
Noongar – collective term used to identify Aborigines from the southwest

ocker – uncultivated or boorish Australian
offsider – assistant, partner
outback – remote part of the *bush*, *back o' Bourke*

pavlova – traditional Australian meringue, fruit and cream dessert; named after the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova
Perthite – resident of Perth
perve – to gaze with lust
pindan – semi-arid country of southwestern Kimberley region
pissed – drunk
pissed off – annoyed
plonk – cheap wine
pokies – poker machines

quokka – small wallaby

ratbag – friendly term of abuse
reckon! – you bet! absolutely!
rip – a strong ocean current or undertow
road train – semitrailer truck towing several trailers
root – to have sexual intercourse
rooted – tired, broken
ropable – very bad-tempered or angry

saltie – saltwater crocodile
sandgroper – resident of Western Australia

sanger – sandwich
sealed road – bitumen road
session – lengthy period of heavy drinking
shark biscuit – inexperienced surfer
she'll be right – no problems, no worries
shoot through – to leave in a hurry
shout – to buy a round of drinks
skimpy – scantily clad female bar person
sparrow's fart – dawn
station – large farm
stolen generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families during the government's policy of assimilation
stropo – bad-tempered
stubby – 375ml bottle of beer

take the piss – to deliberately tell someone an untruth, often as social sport
tinny – 375ml can of beer; also a small, aluminium fishing dinghy
too right! – absolutely!
trucky – truck driver
true blue – see *dinky-di*
tucker – food
two-pot screamer – person unable to hold their drink
two-up – traditional heads-or-tails coin gambling game

unsealed road – dirt road
ute – utility; a pick-up truck

wag – to skip school or work
walkabout – lengthy walk away from it all
Wet, the – rainy season in the north (November to April)

yabbie – small freshwater crayfish
yakka – work
yobbo – uncouth, aggressive person
yonks – a long time

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