

Around Sydney



Sydney's suburbs spread over a broad coastal plain like spilt honey, hemmed in by rugged country on three sides and the Pacific Ocean on the other. The area sustains Australia's largest concentration of people, the urban melange thinning as the kilometres stretch inland. Beyond the city, bushwalking tracks, cycling paths, scenic train routes and roads connect a small-town smorgasbord, interspersed with gorgeous waterways, uncrowded beaches and magical national parks.

The proximity of these delights to Sydney means that public transport is often a viable option – you can cover a lot of ground on day trips, with or without your own wheels. To the west, the wooded foothills of the Great Dividing Range rise to the lofty Blue Mountains, with their heaven-sent scenery and quirky villages. To the south, Royal National Park harbours lost-to-the-world beaches, rainforest pockets and precipitous cliff-scapes. Inland, fertile soils support the rural settlements of Macarthur Country and historic Macquarie towns, extending south to the dignified Southern Highlands.

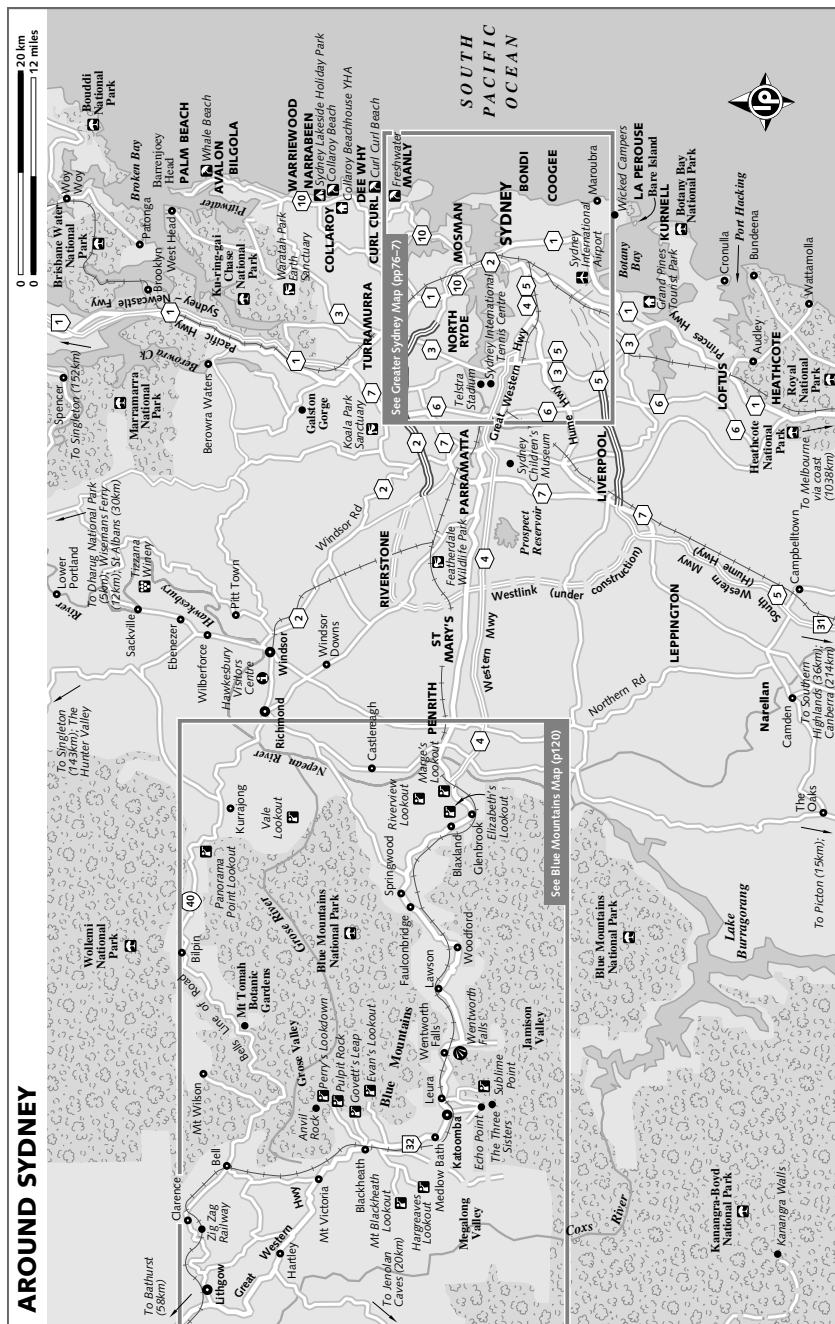
Occupying a hefty chunk of Sydney's north, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park's dense bushland and sandstone outcrops are cut by shimmering inlets. Further north, the landscape is defined by the meandering brown snake of the Hawkesbury River, with its ferry crossings, oyster farms and sleepy towns. Beyond here are the inland lakes and surf-centric communities of the Central Coast.

AROUND SYDNEY

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hole up in a **Blue Mountains** (p119) pub or Art Deco café as ethereal mists descend
- Stumble across isolated coves, empty beaches and thick native bush in **Royal National Park** (p109)
- Traverse the rippling reaches of the **Hawkesbury River** (p114) on a houseboat
- Look for lyrebirds and Aboriginal rock engravings in **Ku-ring-gai Chase** (p112) and **Brisbane Water National Parks** (p136)
- Soak up the colonial history with some tea and cake in the **Southern Highlands** (p131)
- Ride a RiverCat along the length of Sydney Harbour to historic **Parramatta** (p111)
- Fall off the edge of the Southern Highlands into the quintessentially Australian **Kangaroo Valley** (p135)
- Carve up the surf at the beaches along the **Central Coast** (p136)





GREATER SYDNEY

The teeming, smoggy metropolis of Sydney is tempered by natural beauty on its fringes. Heading west, the Great Western Hwy (M4) leaves a trail of development in its wake, but the expansive Ku-ring-gai Chase and Royal National Parks stem suburban proliferation along the coast. The scattering of small towns and wide-open spaces following the Hume Hwy south are devoid of frenetic activity but rich in history.

BOTANY BAY

Perpetuated by sea shanties, it's a common misconception among Sydney first-timers that the city is built on Botany Bay. It's true that Captain James Cook's Australian landfall was here (his naturalist Joseph Banks named it Botany Bay after the many botanical specimens he found), but Sydney grew around Port Jackson's more reliable water source 15km to the north. The white beaches, craggy landscape and native bush that confronted Cook when he stepped ashore still dominate Botany Bay's coastal verges, but digging deeper exposes south Sydney's smoke-stacked industrial heartland. Despite the refineries, Botany Bay has scenic stretches and holds a special, endearing place in Australian history.

Beyond the oil tankers, industrial subdivisions and business parks, **Botany Bay National Park** (cars \$7, pedestrians & cyclists free; ☎ 7am-7.30pm, to 5.30pm Jun-Aug) occupies both headlands of the bay – 458 hectares of bushland and coastal walking tracks, picnic areas and an 8km cycle track. Cook's monument-marked landing place is on the southern side of the park in trailer-trashy Kurnell. The **Discovery Centre** (☎ 02-9668 9111; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Cape Solander Dr, Kurnell; admission free; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun) conveys the impact of European arrival and has information on the surrounding wetlands. There's also material exploring Cook's life and expeditions. The entry fee for cars applies only on the southern headland – pedestrian access is free. Most of the walking tracks begin close to the park entrance, so you might as well park outside. To get here via public transport, catch the train to Cronulla (p111) then **Crowthers Buslink** (☎ 02-9523 4047; www.buslink.net.au) bus 987 from Cronulla train station 10km away (one-way adult/child \$4/2, 20 minutes, hourly 8am to 5pm).

La Perouse is on Botany Bay's northern headland, at the spot where the French explorer of the same name arrived in 1788. He turned up just six days after Cook's First Fleet arrived (much sooner than expected) and gave Mother England a decent scare. Anglo-Franco relations were apparently conducted without the usual disdain, La Perouse and his men camping at Botany Bay for a few weeks before sailing off into the Pacific, never to be seen again. It wasn't until 1826 that the wrecks of their ships were discovered on a reef near Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands. There's a monument at La Perouse, built in 1828 by French sailors, to commemorate the explorer. You can also visit the fabulous **La Perouse Museum & Visitors Centre** (☎ 02-9311 3379; www.environment.nsw.gov.au; Cable Station, Anzac Pde, La Perouse; adult/child/family \$6/3/13; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun) housed inside the old cable station (1882). The centre has relics from La Perouse's many expeditions, plus changing exhibitions on local history and environment.

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

Getting There & Away

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

ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

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

The national park begins at Port Hacking, 30km south of Sydney, and stretches 20km further south. The park's main road detours to **Bundeena**, a small town on Port Hacking – a world away from Sydney's clash and throb. There's not a lot to do here beyond swimming at Horderns Beach and walking the **Bundeena-Maianbar Heritage Walk** (coastal views and Aboriginal sites).



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

Further into the park is **Wattamolla Beach** and lagoon, which is great for a swim, and **Garie Beach**, great for a surf. **Era**, **South Era** and **Burning Palms** Beaches also have good surf, but **Marley Beach** can be risky (Little Marley is safer). You can also swim in the upper

reaches of Kangaroo Creek but not the Hacking River.

There are some super picnic sites, walks and cycling tracks in the park. A walking and cycling track follows the Hacking River south from Audley; others pass tranquil, freshwater swimming holes. If you have time, the spectacular two-day, 28km **coastal walking trail** skirts the park's eastern boundary and is highly recommended.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 02-9542 0648; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Farnell Rd, Audley; ☎ 9am-4pm) can assist with camping permits, maps and bushwalking details. You can hire exercise accoutrements at the **Audley Boat Shed** (☎ 02-528 9867; Farnell Rd, Audley; ☎ 9am-5pm), including rowboats, canoes and kayaks (\$16/30 per

hour/day), aqua bikes (\$12 per 30 minutes) and bicycles (\$14/30 per hour/day).

Sleeping & Eating

Garie Beach YHA (☎ 02-9261 1111; Garie Beach, Royal National Park; dm \$14) There's no phone or electricity at this mega-basic, 12-bunk hostel and you have to lug in your food, but it's close to one of the best surf beaches in NSW and is utterly secluded. Book via the **YHA Membership & Travel Centre** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 02-9261 1111; www.yha.com.au; 422 Kent St, Sydney; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) or the Cronulla Beach YHA, both of which have the key. It's a 15-minute walk from Garie Beach car park, 3½ hours from Otford train station, or 6½ hours from Bundeena.

Cronulla Beach YHA (☎ 02-9527 7772; www.cronulla-beachyha.com; L1, 40 Kingsway, Cronulla; dm/d/f \$28/75/95; ☎) The two gregarious brothers who run this comfy hostel know Cronulla intimately. Their cheerful vibe rubs off on guests and it's a top spot to hone your surfing skills or hook up with fellow coastal trail walkers. En suite doubles approach motel quality; there's good wheelchair access; the pool table, videos, body boards and linen are free.

Beachhaven Bed & Breakfast (☎ 02-9544 1333; www.beachhavenbnb.com.au; 13 Bundeena Dr, Bundeena; d incl breakfast \$250-275; ☎) Beachhaven B&B looks a bit naff in a faux-Tudor kind of way, but has two lavish suites right on heavenly Horderns Beach. There's a barbecue, lawns to loll around on and a beautiful beach-view deck, just begging for winter-wastage.

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

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

Café Manna (☎ 02-9523 9555; 4/22 Brighton St, Bundeena; mains \$10-15; ☎) breakfast & lunch) Unexpectedly classy Manna serves fabulous salads, gourmet kebabs and pies, toasted sandwiches and decent coffee – after several dirty days on the coastal walking track, manna from heaven indeed.

Getting There & Away

From Sydney, take the Princes Hwy south and turn off south of Loftus to the park's northern end – it's about a 45-minute drive from the city. If you're driving north from Wollongong, don't miss the famous 665m sea-bridge section of Lawrence Hargrave Dr between Clifton and Coalcliff, dangling out over the cliffs (p323).

If you're cycling, catch a **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) train to Cronulla from Central Station (one-way adult/concession \$5/3, one hour, half-hourly), then ferry across (see next). Alternatively, Loftus, Engadine, Heathcote, Waterfall and Otford train stations are on the park boundary, with trails leading into the park. Loftus is closest to the visitors centre (6km).

The most scenic route into the park is to take the train to Cronulla then the **Cronulla National Park Ferries'** (☎ 02-9523 2990; www.cronullaferrys.com.au; Cronulla Wharf) boat to Bundeena (one-way adult/concession \$5/3, 30 minutes, hourly). Cronulla Wharf is off Tonkin St just below the train station. This outfit also runs **Port Hacking Scenic Cruises** through the summer (adult/child/family \$18/13/50, three-hour cruise, 10.30am Monday to Saturday, 10.30am and 2pm Sunday) with reduced winter services.

PARRAMATTA

☎ 02 / pop 152,600

Twenty-four kilometres west of Sydney, Parramatta, a Darug Aboriginal name meaning 'the place where eels lie down', was Australia's second European settlement. Sydney's sandy soils were lousy for growing carrots – Parramatta's river plains were chosen instead.

During the 1980s, the local rugby league team, the **Parramatta Eels**, was unbeatable, its acid-wash-clad, mullet-proud fans perpetuating Sydneysiders' view of Parramatta as little more than a lowbrow shopping-mall 'burbs full of neanderthals. A rash of horrendous architectural disservices helped add to this perception, but with the '80s dead and buried, Parramatta has got on with the task of establishing itself as Sydney's second CBD, injecting a healthy dose of culture and a nascent style of its own.

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

WILDLIFE PARKS

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

Koala Park Sanctuary (Map p108; ☎ 02-9484 3141; www.koalapark.com; 84 Castle Hill Rd, West Pennant Hills; adult/child \$19/9; 🕒 9am-5pm, koala presentations 10.20am, 11.45am, 2pm & 3pm) Koala Park is a 4.5-hectare forest – as much a sanctuary for visitors as it is for the little grey tourist-magnets. Cuddle the cute critters at koala presentations while kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, dingoes and native birds watch nonplussed from the sidelines. Via public transport, take the train to Pennant Hills then catch Hills bus 631, 632 or 633 (adult/child \$3/2, 10 minutes).

Featherdale Wildlife Park (Map p108; ☎ 02-9622 1644; www.featherdale.com.au; 217 Kildare Rd, Doonside; adult/child/family \$19/10/55; 🕒 9am-5pm) Featherdale's bushy park houses 2000 native Australians, eating, sleeping, shagging, defecating and generally being beastly. Hand-feed kangaroos, wallabies and emus, slither with reptiles, stroke soporific koalas or kill some time with a Tasmanian devil (no, they don't spin around like tornados). Excellent wheelchair access. It's a 40-minute drive from the city, or take the train to Blacktown then Busways bus 725 (adult/child \$2/1, 10 minutes).

Waratah Park Earth Sanctuary (Map p108; ☎ 02-9986 1788; www.waratahpark.com.au; 13 Namba Rd, Duffys Forest; adult/child \$17/11; 🕒 10am-9pm, reduced winter hrs) This place was once the backdrop for the iconic '60s Australian TV show *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*. The new owners demolished the grim old cages and constructed this rambling free-range wildlife park. Mammals such as kangaroos, bandicoots, potoroos and wallabies come out to play on evening spotlight tours (80% of Australia's wildlife is nocturnal). Entry via bookings only. It's a 30-minute drive from the city.

Sights

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

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

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

An 1880s colonial bungalow, **Experiment Farm Cottage** (☎ 9635 5655; 9 Ruse St; adult/concession/family \$6/4/14; 🕒 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3.30pm Sat & Sun) was built by Governor Phillip in 1791 for emancipist farmer James Ruse as

an experiment to see how long it would take him to wean himself from government supplies. Ruse subsequently became Australia's first private farmer; his life is depicted in the musty cellar museum.

Getting There & Away

By car, follow Parramatta Rd west from the city and onto the tolled Western Motorway (M4; \$2) at Strathfield. It's a 45-minute drive.

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Parramatta (one-way adult/child \$4/2, 30 minutes, half-hourly). You can also get here on the **RiverCat** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) from Circular Quay (one-way adult/child \$8/4, 50 minutes, hourly) – Sydney Harbour thins into the lazy, waterlily-laden Parramatta River, which measures just 25m across.

KU-RING-GAI CHASE NATIONAL PARK

This 15,000-hectare national park (per car \$11; 🕒 sunrise-sunset), 24km north of the city centre, borders the southern edge of Broken Bay and the western shore of Pittwater. On display is that classic Sydney cocktail of bushland, sandstone outcrops and water vistas, plus walking tracks, horse-riding trails, picnic areas and Aboriginal rock engravings.

Staffed by friendly (if a little dodderly) volunteers, the **Kalkari visitors centre** (☎ 02-9472

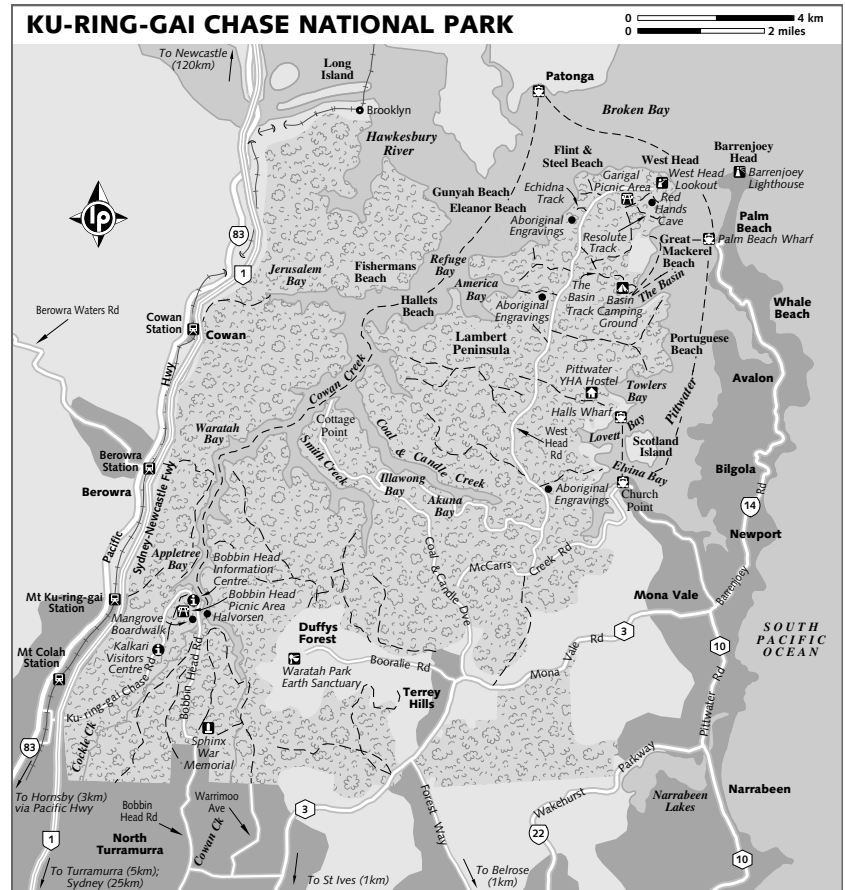
9300; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Ku-ring-gai Chase Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm) runs guided tours. It's about 2.5km into the park from the Mt Colah entrance. The road descends from Kalkari to the **Bobbin Head picnic area** and **Bobbin Head Information Centre** (☎ 02-9472 8949; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Bobbin Head Rd; 🕒 10am-4pm) at the old Bobbin Head Inn on Cowan Creek, then climbs to the Turramurra entrance.

Elevated park sections offer **glorious water views** over Cowan Creek, Broken Bay and Pittwater. The view from West Head across Pittwater to Barrenjoey Lighthouse on Barrenjoey Head (an annexe of the national park) is also a winner.

Normally elusive **lyrebirds** are conspicuous at West Head during their May-to-July mating

season; West Head Rd also offers access to **Aboriginal engravings and handprints**. From the Resolute picnic area it's 100m to some faint ochre handprints at **Red Hands Cave** (not to be confused with the Blue Mountains cave of the same name). Another 500m along Resolute Track is an engraving site. A 3km loop from here takes in Resolute Beach and another engraving site. The Basin Track makes an easy stroll to some well-preserved engravings; the Echidna Track off West Head Rd has boardwalk access to engravings. There's also a mangrove boardwalk from the Bobbin Head car park.

A sailing trip around Scotland Island, Broken Bay and Pittwater is the perfect way to see the park – contact **Halvorsen** (☎ 02-9457 9011;



www.halvorsenmarina.com.au; ☎ 8am-5pm) at Bobbin Head for information on where to charter or hire a boat. Sharks in Broken Bay make for a risky swim, but there's a netted area at The Basin if you simply *must* cool off.

Barrenjoey Head, the knobby northern end of Palm Beach, is also part of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Take a 30-minute tour of **Barrenjoey Lighthouse** (☎ 02-9472 9300; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; adult/child \$3/2; ☎ 11am-3pm Sun) for sensational views of the area.

Sleeping & Eating

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

The only place you can camp in Ku-ring-gai Chase is the **Basin Camping Ground** (☎ 02-9974 1011; www.basincampground.com.au; Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park; per night adult/child \$10/5), a 2.8km walk from West Head Rd or a ferry or water-taxi ride from Palm Beach. The site sits on an improbably scenic sandy spit jutting into Pittwater. There are basic amenities, but bring your own food and cooking equipment. Bookings essential.

Inside the park there are takeaway **cafés** (mains \$5-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) at the Bobbin Head Information Centre and Halvorsen Marina.

Getting There & Away

Ku-ring-gai Chase is about a 45-minute drive from the city, with four road entrances to the park: Mt Colah on the Pacific Hwy; Turramurra in the southwest; and Terrey Hills and Church Point in the southeast. **Shorelink Buses** (☎ 02-9457 8888; www.shorelink.com.au) bus 577 runs from Turramurra Station to the park entrance on Bobbin Head Rd (one-way adult/child \$4/2, 20 minutes, hourly). From here it's about 3km to Bobbin Head.

Another bus option is to take **Sydney Buses** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) bus 190, L90 or L88 from Wynyard Park in the city to Warringah Mall, Dee Why or Mona Vale then bus

156 to Church Point. Ask for a ticket for the entire journey (one-way adult/child \$6/3, one hour 30 minutes, hourly).

The **Palm Beach Ferry Service** (☎ 02-9974 2411; www.palmbeachferry.com.au) shunts between Palm Beach Wharf in Pittwater and The Basin (one-way adult/concession \$12/6, 15 minutes, hourly). **Palm Beach & Hawkesbury River Cruises** (☎ 02-9974 2159, 0414 466 635; www.sydney scenicruises.com) operates a there-and-back ferry from Palm Beach to Bobbin Head, via Patonga (return adult/child \$35/20, four hours 30 minutes, 11am Monday to Friday, 9am, 11am and 3.45pm Saturday and Sunday). Call for bookings. **Church Point Water Taxis** (☎ 0428 238 190) operates services on demand between Church Point Ferry Wharf and Palm Beach (\$55 for up to six people, 20 minutes).

To get to Palm Beach, take bus 190 or L90 from Wynyard Park (one-way adult/child \$6/3, one hour 30 minutes, half-hourly).

HAWKESBURY RIVER

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

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

Brooklyn & Berowra Waters

The small oyster-farming town of **Brooklyn** squats on the Hawkesbury where it departs its thickly wooded banks and swells into the open space of the estuary. Tattooed locals stomp around in gumboots and beanies, their lives settled into a measured pace revolving around boats, fishing and fishing boats. Things liven up on summer weekends.

The **Riverboat Postman** (☎ 02-9985 7566; fax 02-9985 7658; Brooklyn Wharf, Brooklyn; adult/child/family \$45/25/115; ☎ 9.30am-1.15pm Mon-Fri) is Australia's last operating mail boat and a decidedly old-school way to get a feel for the river. It chugs 40km up the Hawkesbury as far as Marlow, near Spencer, with additional 'coffee cruises' in summer. Combine the two experiences on an all-day cruise (adult/child/family \$60/40/150); call for times and bookings. The 8.16am train from Sydney's Central Station gets you to Brooklyn's Hawkesbury River Station in time to meet the morning boat. You may have to change at Hornsby.

For an authentic taste of the local preoccupation, take a **Crab 'n' Oyster Cruise** (☎ 02-9985 9237; www.crab-n-oystercruises.com.au; Brooklyn Wharf, Brooklyn; per person \$84; ☎ 11.30am-2pm) up the river – shuck some oysters, haul in crab traps then cook and eat the fruits of your labour. It also runs 1½-hour morning and afternoon tea cruises (\$66 per person) departing 9am and 3.30pm respectively. Two days advance booking required.

If you don't have time for a cruise, you can slither down some sensationally snotty local oysters at **Joshua's Seafood Bar Café** (☎ 02-9985 7877; 5 Bridge St, Brooklyn; 12 oysters \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Wed-Sun). It also has a takeaway kiosk on the wharf.

Further upstream, a narrow forested waterway diverts from the Hawkesbury and peters down to the chilled-out river town **Berowra Waters** where a handful of businesses, boatsheds and residences cluster around the free, 24-hour ferry across Berowra Creek. If you feel like exploring, rev the river in an outboard dinghy from the **Berowra Waters Marina** (☎ 02-9456 3200; fax 02-9456 4244; 199 Bay Rd, Berowra Waters; half-day \$70; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, from 7.30am Sat & Sun). In the same complex, the **Fish Café** (☎ 02-9456 4665; 199 Bay Rd, Berowra Waters; mains \$10-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sun) serves various fishy delights plus salads, steaks and burgers with a serene river outlook.

If you want to stay the night in the area, the **Hawkesbury River Accommodation Booking Service** (☎ 02-9987 7090; www.hawkesburyriverrealstate.com.au; 2/5 Bridge St, Brooklyn; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) has the lowdown on local accommodation options (excluding houseboats; see boxed text p116).

Berowra Waters is 5km west of the Sydney-Newcastle Fwy – take the Berowra turn-off. The road hairpins down to the township

through jagged sandstone terraces (lousy for caravans). The Brooklyn turn-off is further north, just before the freeway crosses the Hawkesbury. An alternative (and just as curvy) route to Berowra Waters is the road through the Galston Gorge, north of Hornsby in Sydney's northeast.

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Berowra (one-way adult/child \$6/3, 45 minutes, roughly hourly) and on to Brooklyn's Hawkesbury River Station (one-way adult/child \$7/4, one hour). Berowra Station is a solid 6km trudge from Berowra Waters. **Hawkesbury Cruises** (☎ 02-9985 9900; www.hawkesburycruises.com.au) runs water taxis on demand to anywhere along the river.

Wisemans Ferry & Around

The sedentary riverside hamlet of **Wisemans Ferry** (Map p137) spills over a bow of the Hawkesbury River where it slides east towards Brooklyn. Access from the south is via the direct Old Northern Rd. A more camera-conducive route is from the east, via Old Wisemans Ferry Rd, wedged between Dharug National Park and the river. Two free 24-hour ferries connect the Wisemans Ferry river banks. Note that swimming in the Hawkesbury between Wisemans Ferry and Windsor during summer is sometimes ill-advised due to blue-green algae. Call the **Environment Protection Authority** (EPA; ☎ 13 15 55) pollution line for updates.

The town's social hub is the historic sandstone **Wisemans Ferry Inn** (☎ 02-4566 4301;

DON'T PAY THE FERRYMAN

As the Hawkesbury River curls abstractly across the plains, roads (on far more linear trajectories) invariably bump into it. Dating back to 1827, a curious culture of free, 24-hour, winch-driven ferries has evolved to shunt vehicles across the water. Your car is guided onto the punts by burly, bearded, fluoro-clad ferrymen, who lock safety-gates into position then shunt you to the other side, sliding into the opposite riverbank with a satisfying shudder. You'll find ferries at Berowra Waters, Wisemans Ferry, Lower Portland and Sackville. Turn off your headlights if you're waiting for the ferry at night so you don't blind the approaching skipper.

fax 02-4566 4780; Old Northern Rd, Wisemans Ferry; d & tw \$66, f \$75), which has six basic pub rooms with shared bathrooms, smudged with '70s décor. The pub downstairs buzzes with country singers, smokers and lingerie barmaids; the bistro (mains \$12-25; open lunch and dinner) serves hefty country plates of steak, pasta and seafood.

If bawdy pub revelry doesn't float your boat, the exotically named **Del Rio Riverside Resort** (☎ 02-4566 4330; www.delriosort.com.au; Chaseling Rd, Webbs Creek, Wisemans Ferry; unpowered/power sites per 2 people \$30/33; cabins from \$100; ♿) is a rambling caravan park on the opposite side of the river, with loads of activities (swimming pool, nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, movie screenings, bushwalks etc), roomy sites, cabins ranging from ho-hum to home-away-from-home and a restaurant (mains \$16-27; open lunch Saturday and Sunday, dinner daily). Follow the signs 2.5km from the Webbs Creek ferry crossing at Wisemans Ferry.

Largely unsealed roads on both sides of the Macdonald River run north from Wisemans Ferry to tiny **St Albans** (Map p137) in Darkinjung tribal country. It's a photo-worthy drive, with rocky, wattle-dappled bush on one side and soft river ripples on the other.

Settlers Arms Inn (☎ 02-4568 2111; www.settlersarms.com.au; 1 Wharf St, St Albans; d from \$130; ♿) is the town's heart and soul, a noble sandstone pub dating back to 1836. If you want to stay the night, book an en-suite cabin behind the pub.

The Inn's chunky old **bar** (☎ 02-4568 2111; mains \$13-25; ☺ lunch daily, dinner Fri-Sun) feels like a bushrangers' den, with English-style ales on tap, a thigh-warming winter hearth and

fabulous pies, soups, steak sandwiches and antipastos from the kitchen. Summer day-trippers pack the beer garden and timber tables out the front.

On the hill behind the pub (behind the totem poles), **St Albans Gallery** (☎ 02-4568 2286; stalbansgallery@mysp.net.au; ☺ 11am-5pm Fri-Sun) has quirky exhibitions of local jewellery, glass, painting, sculpture and indigenous art. Have a coffee and some homemade cake on the balcony after you've had a browse.

National Parks

Before the 1789 introduction of smallpox decimated 90% of their society, **Dharug National Park** (Map p137) was home to the Dharug people (also spelled Dharug or Darug). It's a 14,000-hectare wilderness on the north bank of the Hawkesbury River, noted for its rock carvings dating back nearly 10,000 years. Forming the western boundary of the park is the dilapidated **Old Great North Rd**, built by convicts in the 1820s to link Sydney and Newcastle. There's drive-in camping in the park 8km east of Wisemans Ferry at **Mill Creek camp site** (per night adult/child \$5/3), and free walk-in camping 12km north of Wisemans Ferry at **Ten Mile Hollow camp site** on Old Great North Rd. Book through the Gosford NPWS Office (p136).

On the south side of the Hawkesbury is the 11,760-hectare **Marramorra National Park** (Map p137), with vehicle access from Old Northern Rd about 20km south of Wisemans Ferry. There's free bush-camping on the river at **Gentlemen's Halt camp site**, a 10km walk from the road, and at **Marramorra Creek camp site**, a

4km walk from the road. Contact the **NPWS Office** (☎ 02-9472 8949; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park for bookings and information.

MACQUARIE TOWNS

The river flats of the upper Hawkesbury River, in the lee of the Blue Mountains, offered the young colony of NSW rich agricultural land for much-needed food. It was here that Governor Lachlan Macquarie established the five 'Macquarie Towns' – Pitt Town, Castlereagh, Windsor, Richmond and Wilberforce. Today the latter three make an interesting triangular meander, particularly en route to the Blue Mountains on the Bells Line of Road (p130).

Windsor

☎ 02

Windsor, founded in 1810 on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, was the main Macquarie Town and retains a crop of gracefully proportioned colonial buildings. The town seems to have shrugged off rural slow-pokery and stagnation and feels surprisingly lively and artsy.

The **Hawkesbury Historical Museum** (☎ 4577 2310; www.windsor-nsw.com.au; 7 Thompson Sq; adult/child \$3/1; ☺ 11am-3pm Fri-Wed), in the 1843 Daniel O'Connell Inn, has a collection of exhibits portraying pioneering life in the region. There's also a room devoted to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and plenty of tourist paraphernalia.

If you're architecturally inclined, have a wander around the lantern-topped, convict-built **St Matthew's Church** (☎ 4577 3193; fax 4577 3193; Moses St; ☺ 10am-3pm, services 8am, 10am & 5.30pm Sun), erected in 1820 and designed by convict architect Francis Greenway. Another Greenway special is the elegant 1822 **Windsor Courthouse** (☎ 4577 5023; fax 4587 7272; cnr Court & Pitt Sts), still a functional courthouse.

The shambling **Macquarie Arms Hotel** (☎ 4577 2206; fax 4577 3465; 99 George St; ☺ 10am-midnight) proclaims itself the oldest pub in Australia (1815), though there are a few 'oldest pubs' around. History hasn't gone to its head and it's still very much a small-town pub, with a sunny beer garden, a decent bistro (mains \$13-24, open lunch and dinner) and rows of shiny Harleys parked out the front.

On Sundays you can satiate your crafty Australiana cravings, pick up a pot of homemade jam or contemplate a career in busking at the **Windsor Mall Craft Markets** (☎ 4572

7348; www.windsormallcraftmarkets.com.au; Windsor Mall, George St btw Fitzgerald & Baker Sts; ☺ 9am-4pm Sun). After the market, pluck up the courage for a lantern-lit **Windsor Ghost Tour** (☎/fax 4577 6882; per person \$25; ☺ 7-9.15pm) that night. Tours start and end at the Macquarie Arms and include a light supper. Bookings essential; no under-10s (too spooky).

The spanking new **Hawkesbury Regional Gallery** (☎ 4560 4441; www.hawkesbury.com.au; L1, Deerubbin Centre, 300 George St; admission free; ☺ 10am-4pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) has become Windsor's cultural centre, with art exhibitions, literary launches, film screenings and kids' events. It's worth a look if only for the snazzy architecture.

If you're in Windsor on a Sunday, the **Hawkesbury Paddlewheeler** (☎ 4575 1171; www.paddlewheeler.com.au; Windsor Bridge Wharf; per person \$30; ☺ 12.30-2.30pm Sun) splashes up and down the river on its octogenarian-friendly Lunch & Jazz cruise.

There are a couple of serviceable (if unspectacular) motels in town if you feel like staying the night:

Windsor Motel (☎ 4577 3626; www.windsormotorinn.com; 54 George St; d from \$90; ♿) Clean and tidy motel anonymity.

Windsor Terrace Motel (☎ 4577 5999; www.windsorterracemotel.com; 47 George St; d from \$110; ♿) Overlooking the river.

If the pub isn't your style, you can get a reliable coffee at **Simon's Coffee Lounge** (☎ 4577 2208; 1/100 George St, Windsor Mall; mains \$6-14; ☺ breakfast & lunch) or a cheerily meat-centric meal at **Cookies Bar & Grill** (☎ 4577 5422; 22 Fitzgerald St; mains \$17-25; ☺ lunch & dinner).

Driving from Sydney, the direct route to Windsor is Windsor Rd (Route 40), the northwestern continuation of Parramatta's Church St (you'll have to sidestep the Church St Mall). West of Parramatta, Northern Rd climbs north from Penrith on the Great Western Hwy. **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Windsor (one-way adult/child \$7/4, one hour 10 minutes, roughly hourly); you might need to change at Blacktown.

Wilberforce & Around

Wee Wilberforce, 6km north of Windsor, is an agricultural river-flat town without much going for it, and no-one around to tell you otherwise. If you're looking for somewhere to eat or sleep, head for Windsor.

HAWKESBURY HOUSEBOATS

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

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

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

Picnickers and taxidermists might want to swing by the **Butterfly Farm** (☎ 02-4575 1955; www.butterflyfarm.com.au; 446 Wilberforce Rd, Wilberforce; adult/child \$6/3; ☎ 10am-5pm), where you can barbecue the innards of your hamper then work it off in the swimming pool (adult/child \$4/3). The river beaches on the property draw marauding water-skiers; the museum features glass-fronted cases of wing-pinned butterflies and an interesting collation of old bottles, boots and tin cans. **Westbus** (☎ 02-9890 0000; www.westbus.com.au) buses 668 and 669 run from Windsor Station to Wilberforce (one-way adult/child \$3/2; 15 minutes, infrequently).

The immaculately restored 1809 **Ebenezer Church** (☎ 02-4579 9491; 78 Coromandel Rd, Ebenezer; ☎ 10am-3.30pm, service 8.30am Sun), 5km north of Wilberforce (turn right off Singleton Rd), is said (in hushed, reverent whispers) to be the oldest church in Australia, its Sunday pews still filling. The adjoining cemetery is littered with skewed pioneer graves gradually succumbing to gravity. Continue your reflection next door at the **Schoolmaster's House** (☎ 02-4579 9350; 78 Coromandel Rd, Ebenezer; ☎ 10am-3.30pm), another 'Australia's oldest', which has a little local history museum and serves Devonshire tea on a grapevine-shaded terrace. Still down the road from here, the **Shallow Rock Reach Walking Trail** follows the Hawkesbury riverbank for 1.2km (one hour return), passing tall remnant river forest, open woodlands, lookouts, picnic spots and guffawing kookaburras.

Established in 1887, the Tuscanesque sandstone **Tizzana Winery** (☎ 02-4579 1150; www.tizzana.com.au; 518 Tizzana Rd, near Ebenezer, r ind breakfast \$175-220; ☎ noon-6pm Sat & Sun; ☎) has cellar-door sales of its own wines and perky drops from other local vineyards. Then check in to the superb five-star accommodation upstairs (think shutters, open fires, Persian rugs, big bathrooms, bigger beds). One of the rooms here has its own veranda and courtyard, ideal for knocking off the rest of the red.

Richmond

☎ 02

Founded in 1810, Richmond is a substantial country town with some fine Georgian and Victorian buildings, but it lacks Windsor's touch of class – there are more tractor, water-tank and chainsaw vendors here than anything else.

Architectural relics of interest include the 1878 **courthouse** and **police station** (☎ 4578 0731;

fax 4578 0732; cnr Market & Windsor St) and, around the corner on Market St, the quasi-Gothic **St Andrew's Church** (☎ 4578 3820; ☎ services 8.30am, 9.45am & 6pm Sun), dating from 1845. The similarly historic **St Peter's Church** (☎ 4578 1205; www.richmondanglican.com.au; 384 Windsor St; ☎ services 8am, 10am & 7pm Sun), built in 1841, is at the western end of town. The cedar pews inside are stoically impressive; the oldest pioneer tombstone in the cemetery dates from 1809. More recent is the appealingly paint-peeling **Regent Cinema** (☎ 4578 1800; www.richmondregent.com.au; 149 Windsor St; adult/concession \$10/8; ☎ 10am-11pm), which oozes Art Deco charm and screens recent releases.

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

Richmond's most reliable sleeping option is the **Best Western Colonial Motel** (☎ 4578 1166; www.colonialmotel.com.au; 161 March St; d from \$100; ☎), offering a particularly clean version of the usual motel fare.

If you're hungry, duck into **Madisons Bar & Brasserie** (☎ 4588 5808; cnr Windsor & Paget Sts; mains \$14-20; ☎ breakfast Sun, lunch & dinner daily), a stylish mustard-and-rust-coloured Georgian house on the main street. Steaks, roasts, hearty soups and the odd seafood dish are on the menu, with outdoor summer tables and an open fire in winter.

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Richmond (one-way adult/child \$7/4, one hour 20 minutes, roughly hourly); you might need to change at Blacktown.

MACARTHUR COUNTRY

The Hume Hwy (South Western Motorway) follows a rising corridor southwest from Sydney, with the jagged Blue Mountains National Park to the west and the coastal escarpment to the east. This is cleared, rolling sheep country containing some of the state's oldest towns, though Liverpool and Campbelltown have been subsumed by Sydney's ever-expanding

suburban girth. You can still catch a rural eye-ful by dodging the motorway and taking Northern Rd between Penrith and Narellan (just north of Camden).

Camden

☎ 02

About 50km southwest of Sydney, Camden is an old-fashioned, rootsy, church-going country town with the kind of main street Bruce Springsteen likes to sing about. There's a whiff of agriculture in the air, the town's gardens and historical sites bravely holding off the encroaching big-house-on-a-small-block suburbia. In the 1830s, John and Elizabeth Macarthur ran vaguely Frankensteinian sheep-breeding experiments here, the beginnings of Australia's wool industry.

John Oxley Cottage (☎ 4658 1370; www.camden.nsw.gov.au; Camden Valley Way, Elderslie; ☎ 9.30am-4pm), 3km north of the town's centre, was built in the 1890s as a workman's cottage. Under the new roofing iron are the original roof shingles, under which the visitors centre has local information. Pick up a copy of the *Camden Heritage Walk* pamphlet documenting the town's historic sites.

Newly renovated **Camden Historical Society Museum** (☎ 4655 3400; 40 John St; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Thu-Sun) has opened its doors to reveal 'working country town' displays capturing Camden's growth and history.

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

For a bird's-eye inspection of Camden's surroundings, **Balloon Aloft** (☎ 1800 028 568; www.balloonaloft.com; 144 Wine Country Dr, North Rothbury; adult/child \$295/180) runs hour-long hot-air balloon flights, mushrooming into the dawn from Camden airport (champagne breakfast afterwards). Call for bookings and times.

Not far from John Oxley Cottage, the **Poplar Caravan Park** (☎/fax 4658 0485; 21 Macarthur Rd, Elderslie; unpowered & powered sites per 2 people \$22, cabins from \$80) has plenty of tent-pitching space and the usual cabin fodder. Whether or not the surrounding trees are poplars is debatable.

Debate it over a beer and a country-pub meal at the **Argyle Inn** (☎ 4655 8189; 75 Argyle St; mains \$18-27; ☎ lunch & dinner), a terracotta-roofed family pub on Camden's main street (look for the plough and harrow above the awning).

If you're driving to Camden, take the F5 Fwy south from Sydney and follow the signs. Alternatively, take a **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) train from Sydney's Central Station to Campbelltown (one-way adult/child \$7/4, one hour, half-hourly), then **Busways** (☎ 4368 2277; www.131500.com.au) bus 895 or 896 (one-way adult/child \$5/3, 25 minutes, half-hourly) into Camden.

Picton

☎ 02

Originally called Stonequarry, Picton – smaller, less trafficked and better looking than Camden – is entirely detour worthy. It's coal rather than stone that's mined under the hills these days, causing a subsidence problem or two for some local houses. Still standing are the National Trust-listed buildings on upper **Menangle St**.

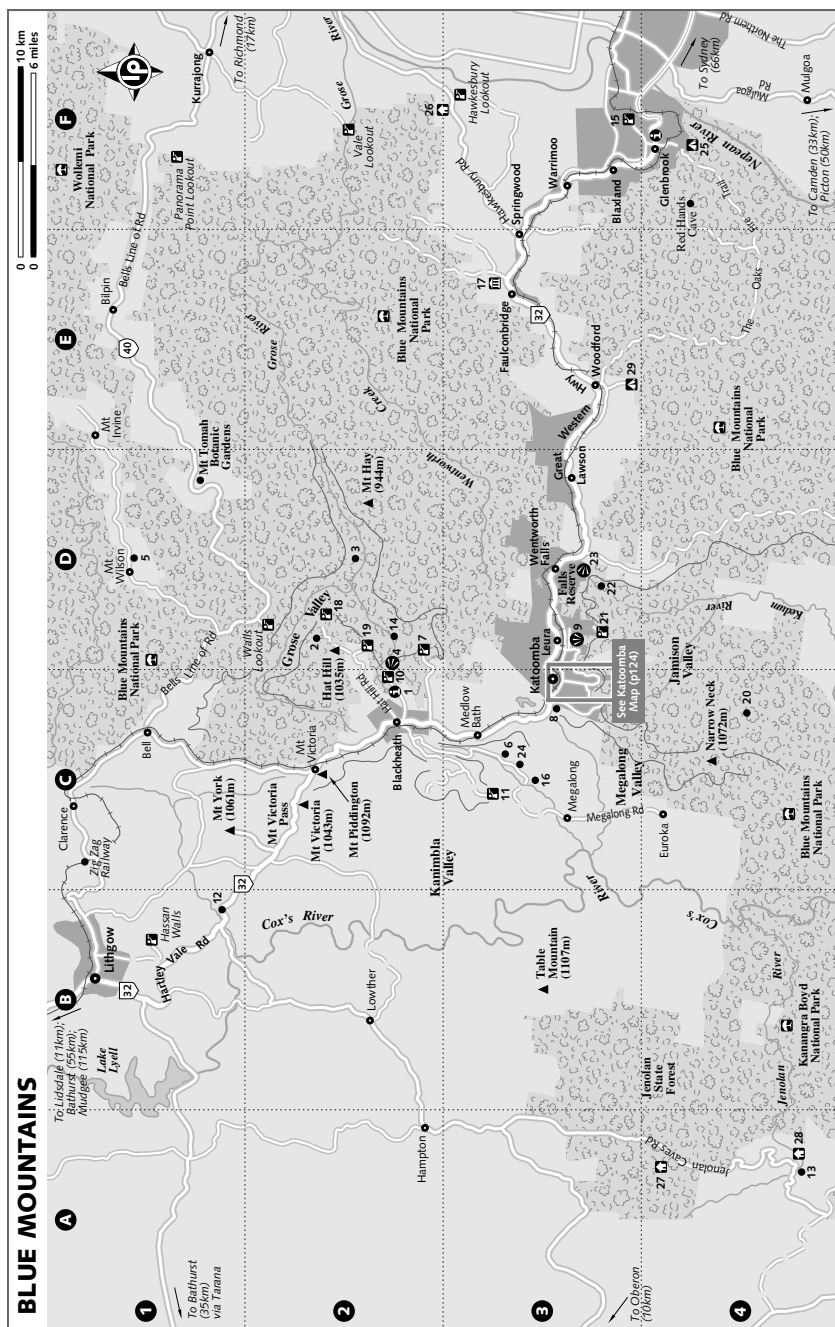
Inside the old post office, the **Wollondilly visitors centre** (☎ 4677 3962; www.stonequarry.com.au; cnr Argyle & Menangle Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) has racks of tourist brochures, including one detailing the Historic Picton Walking Tour. If you're tired after your walk, recover in a spa room at the **White Waratah Retreat** (☎ 4677 2121; www.whitewaratahretreat.com.au; 1665 Remembrance Dr; d from \$110; ☎), a motel dressed in retreat's clothing.

In the morning, the cheerily mainstream **Cutting Edge Café** (☎ 4677 0699; 3/135 Argyle St; mains \$8-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon) serves big cooked breakfasts, city-standard coffee and surprisingly worldly mains like *massaman* chicken curry and grilled Cajun barramundi fillets.

From Camden, drive about 20km south to Picton along Remembrance Dr. **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run to Picton from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$9/5, one hour 30 minutes, roughly hourly).

BLUE MOUNTAINS

For more than a century the Blue Mountains have been luring Sydneysiders up from the sweltering plains with promises of cool-climate relief and naughty fireside weekends. Sweetening the invitation are astounding scenery, fabulous bushwalks and more gorges, gumtrees and gourmet restaurants



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than seems viable. The purple haze that gives the mountains their name comes from a fine mist of oil exuded by eucalyptus trees.

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

There are three national parks in the area, the most accessible of which is the **Blue Mountains National Park**, protecting large tracts of forest north and south of the Great Western Hwy. Absorb the park's eye-popping scenery at the numerous drive-up lookouts, or get amongst the greenery on established bushwalking tracks. Southwest of here is **Kanangra Boyd National Park**, accessible from Oberon or Jenolan Caves. Launch into a bushwalk, descend into limestone caverns or check out the amazing Kanangra Walls Plateau encircled by sheer

cliffs. **Wollemi National Park**, north of Bells Line of Road, is the state's largest forested wilderness area (nearly 500,000 hectares) with rugged bushwalking and native critters aplenty.

Entry to these parks is free unless you enter the Blue Mountains National Park at Bruce Rd, Glenbrook (\$7 per car, walkers free).

GLENBROOK TO WENTWORTH FALLS

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

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

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

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

Camp sites are accessible by road at **Euroka Clearing** (vehicle/adult/child \$7/6/3) near Glenbrook, and **Murphys Glen** near Woodford. Check track/road condition updates and collect permits for Euroka Clearing at the Richmond **NPWS Office** (p118).

LEURA

☎ 02 / pop 4000

Leura is a gracious, affluent town fashioned around undulating streets, unparalleled gardens and sweeping Victorian verandas. Art Deco houses mingle with contemporary architecture and the suburban streets ooze style. The **Mall**, the tree-lined main street, offers rows of country craft stores and cafés for the daily tourist influx.

Information

Leura Visitors Gateway (☎ 4784 2881; www.bmgst.com; 121 The Mall; ☹ 9am-5pm) Run by knowledgeable, enthusiastic staff, this centre books accommodation and door-to-door Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves tours and has a local art gallery next door.

Sights & Activities

Leuralla Toy & Railway Museum (☎ 4784 1169; www.toyandrailwaymuseum.com.au; 36 Olympic Pde; adult/child \$12/6; ☹ 10am-5pm) is an Art Deco mansion set amid five misty hectares of handsome English gardens. The house is a memorial to HV 'Doc' Evatt, a former Australian Labor Party leader and the first UN president. Kids love the model-railway and toy museum (everything from Barbie to Bob the Builder).

Designed in the 1930s by famous Danish landscaper Paul Sorensen, **Everglades Gardens** (☎ 4784 1938; www.evergladesgardens.info; 37 Everglades Ave; adult/child \$6/2; ☹ 10am-5pm Oct-Mar, to 4pm Apr-Sep) is a National Trust property and Leura's horticultural heartland. Fountains, waterfalls, terraced lawns, freestone walls, a museum, art gallery and tearooms – a must for green thumbs.

Sublime Point is a dramatic clifftop lookout south of Leura. On sunny days the clouds shadow-dance across the vast blue valley below. Further north is **Gordon Falls Reserve**, an idyllic picnic spot. From here you can trek the Prince Henry Cliff Track, or take the Cliff Drive 4km west past Leura Cascades to Katoomba's Echo Point.

Festivals

Finding it easy being green, the **Leura Gardens Festival** (☎ 4757 2539; www.leuragardensfestival.com.au) happens in the first week of October.

Sleeping & Eating

Woodford of Leura (☎ 4784 2240; www.leura.com; 48 Woodford St; d from \$185) From the Hobbitesque

Gothic entrance to the fittings in the pristine bathrooms, this stylish B&B is genteel all over. Beyond the stunning garden (another Paul Sorensen extravaganza), period furniture jostles around a log fire. Standard rooms, stylish suites and long-stay discounts are available. It's about 1km from the town centre.

Post Office Restaurant (☎ 4784 3976; 148 The Mall; mains \$28-30; ☹ lunch & dinner) You guessed it, it's an old post office. By day the ambient eatery serves fresh café fare; by night the cuisine is positively cultivated – even fussy palates swoon over fresh pastas and smoked, braised meat and fish dishes. Shimmying, black-clad service and moody music top it all off.

Other recommendations:

Leura House (☎ 4784 2035; www.leurahouse.com.au; 7 Britain St; s/d from \$129/158) A grand Victorian home on Leura's highest point (room 11 has views to Sydney). Indulgent rooms, spacious common areas and balconies.

Loaves and the Dishes (☎ 4784 3600; 180a The Mall; mains \$10-15; ☹ breakfast & lunch) Wholesome, hearty deli goodies in a curvy corner Deco café.

Getting There & Around

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

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) runs from Sydney's Central Station to Leura (adult/child \$12/6, two hours, hourly). The **Blue Mountains Bus Co** (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) runs from Valley Heights (near Springwood) to Mt Victoria, stopping pretty much everywhere in between, including Leura (one-way adult/child \$8/4, 45 minutes, five daily Monday to Friday, three Saturday).

You can hire a car in Valley Heights from **RediCAR** (☎ 4751 8920; www.redicar.com.au; 42 Great

CLIMATIC CONFUSION

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

Western Hwy, Valley Heights; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) from \$69 per day.

KATOOMBA

☎ 02 / pop 18,000

Swirling otherworldly mists, steep streets lined with Art Deco buildings, astonishing valley views and a quirky miscellany of brilliant restaurants, buskers, artists, galleries, homeless people, bawdy pubs and classy hotels – Katoomba manages to be bohemian and bourgeois, embracing and menacing, all at once. Locals are beautifully dissolute – lots of people seem to be smoking, wearing a beanie or growing a beard. A vague sniff of 'herb' wafts between cafés and camping supply shops.

Orientation

Katoomba's grid layout hurdles the Great Western Hwy. Almost everything visitors will need or want lies south of the highway – the main drag is Katoomba St, running south from the train station. Echo Point and the Three Sisters are at the southern end of town, where the Jamison Valley's dramatic plunge truncates the soft urban sprawl.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Katoomba Book Exchange (☎ 4782 9997; katbookexchange@telstra.com; 32 Katoomba St; per 30min/1hr \$4/7; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun & Mon) The first 15 minutes are free if you order a coffee.

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

Katoomba Medical Centre (☎ 4782 2222; fax 4782 3635; 143 Katoomba St; ☹ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Doctors by appointment.

MONEY & POST

There are numerous banks and ATMs on Katoomba St. The post office is behind the shopping centre, between Katoomba and Park Sts.

TOURIST INFORMATION

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

Echo Point visitors centre (☎ 4782 9865, 1300 653 408; www.australiabluemountains.com.au; Echo Point; ☹ 9am-5pm) Sizable centre with can-do staff.

Sights

At the southern end of town (about 2km from the train station), Katoomba's big-ticket drawcard is **Echo Point**. A series of sensational viewing platforms transports your gaze out over the Jamison Valley, white-winged cockatoos squabbling below you in the forest canopy. The impressive **Three Sisters** rock formation towers over the scene. The story goes that the Three Sisters were turned to stone by a sorcerer to protect them from the unwanted advances of three young men, but the sorcerer died before he could turn them back into humans. Bummer... Warning: Echo Point draws vast, serenity-spoiling tourist gaggles, their idling buses farting fumes into the mountain air – arrive early before they do.

To the west of town is **Scenic World** (☎ 4782 2699; www.scenicworld.com.au; cnr Cliff Dr & Violet St; \$16/8 return; ☹ 9am-5pm). If you can stomach the megaplex vibe and blaring *Raiders of the Lost Ark* theme, ride the 1880s railway down the 52-degree incline to the valley floor. Wander the 2.5km forest boardwalk or the 12km-return track to the **Ruined Castle** rock formation (Map p120), then catch the cablecar back up the slope. It also has a glass-floored **Scenic Skyway** cablecar floating out across the valley.

Just west of Katoomba, intrepid trio Wentworth, Blaxland and Lawson notched the **Explorers' Tree** to mark their trail. This sad, bushfire-ravaged stump has been amputated, gored by termites and filled with concrete, earning it the title *Eucalyptus concretus*.

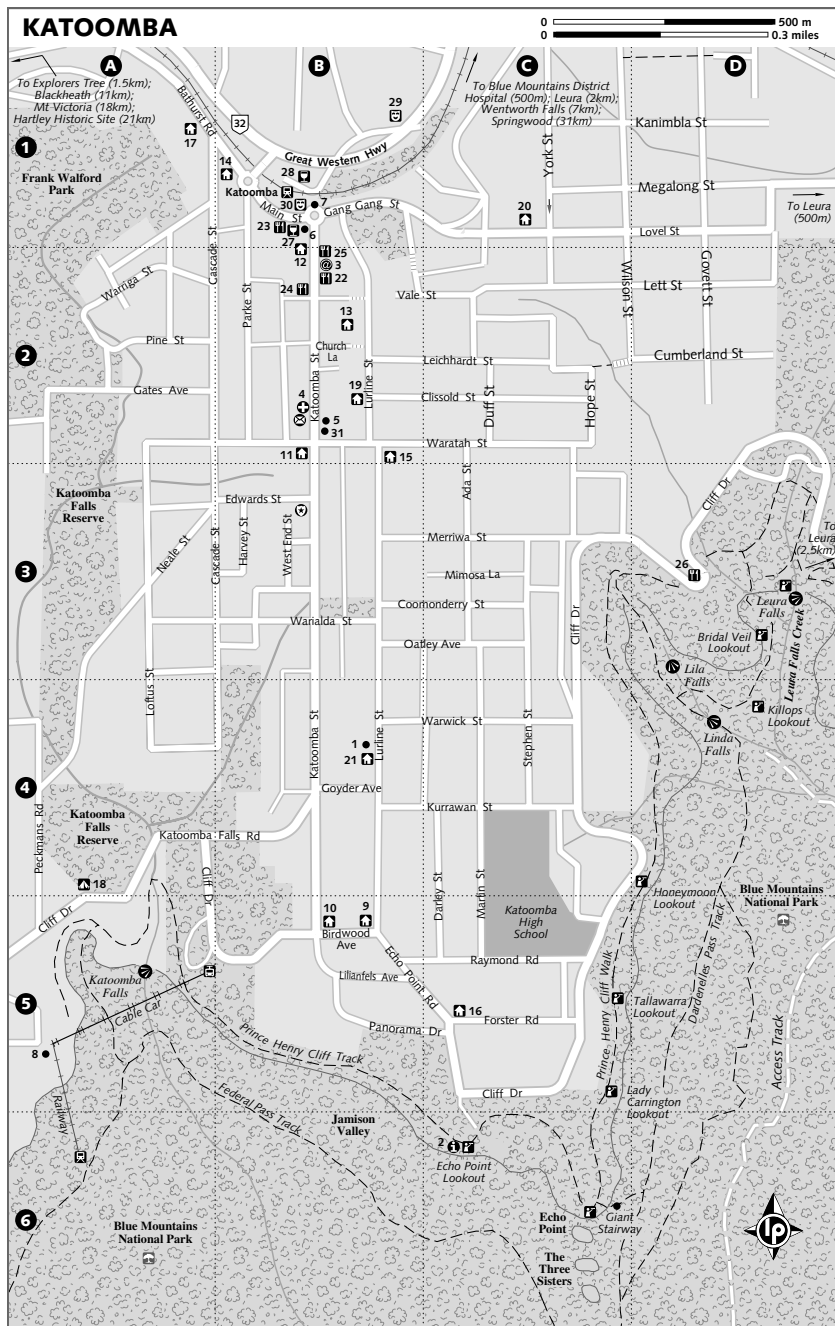
Activities

ABSEILING, CANYONING & ROCK CLIMBING The Blue Mountains seems custom-made for climbing, hiking and cycling; several companies offer all of the above. Prices below indicate easy or beginner grades; more advanced equals more dollars.

Australian School of Mountaineering (☎ 4782 2014; www.asmguides.com; 166 Katoomba St; ☹ 9am-4.30pm) Full-day abseiling or canyoning (\$145), rock climbing (\$165), and two-day bush survival courses (\$325). YHA member discount.

Blue Mountains Adventure Company (☎ 4782 1271; www.bmac.com.au; L1, 84a Bathurst Rd; ☹ 9am-5pm) Abseiling (from \$135), canyoning (from \$155) and rock climbing (from \$165) adventures.

Explore The Blue Mountains (☎ 4780 0000; www.explorethebluemountains.com; 1 Katoomba St; ☹ 9am-5pm) Half-day abseiling (\$135 including lunch), canyoning (\$169 including lunch) and two-hour horse-riding trips



INFORMATION		EATING	
Blue Mountains Accommodation	1 B4	IsoBar Café	22 B2
Booking Service	1 B4	Niagara	23 B1
Echo Point Visitors Centre	2 C6	Paragon Café	24 B2
Katoomba Book Exchange	3 B2	Savoy	25 B2
Katoomba Medical Centre	4 B2	Solitary	26 D3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		DRINKING	
Australian School of Mountaineering	5 B2	Carrington Bar	27 B1
Blue Mountains Adventure Company	6 B1	Hotel Gearin	28 B1
Blue Mountains Explorer Bus	(see 7)	ENTERTAINMENT	
Explore The Blue Mountains	(see 6)	Clarendon Band Room	(see 15)
Fantastic Aussie Tours	7 B1	Edge Cinema	29 B1
High'n'Wild Mountain Adventures	(see 6)	TrisElies	30 B1
Scenic Skyway	(see 8)	TRANSPORT	
Scenic World	8 A5	Velo Nova	31 B2
Trolley Tours	(see 7)		
SLEEPING			
3 Explorers Motel	9 B5		
3 Sisters Motel	10 B5		
Blue Mountains YHA	11 B2		
Carrington Hotel	12 B2		
Cecil Guesthouse	13 B2		
Central Blue Mountains Backpackers	14 B1		
Clarendon Guesthouse	15 B2		
Echo Point Motor Inn	16 C5		
Flying Fox	17 A1		
Katoomba Falls Caravan Park	18 A4		
Katoomba Mountain Lodge	19 B2		
No 14	20 C1		
Shelton-Lea	21 B4		

(\$85), which include a 'Stockman Experience' (billy tea, damper and whip cracking).
High'n'Wild Mountain Adventures (☎ 4782 6224; www.high-n-wild.com.au; 3/5 Katoomba St; ☎: 9am-5pm) Half-/full-day abseiling (from \$90/135), climbing (\$109/169) and full-day canyoning (\$150). YHA member discount.

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

The Echo Point visitors centre (p123) has information on short and day walks; the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre in Blackheath (p128) supplies longer walk details. It's rough, broken country and even experienced walkers get lost – get reliable information, walk with a friend and tell someone where you're headed. Take plenty of water or boil/treat what you collect (many local waterways are polluted). Mountain weather changes quickly, so bring warm clothes in all seasons.

Guided bushwalking or bushcraft tours can be arranged through several of the activity companies listed. Rates range from \$45 to \$150 per day, depending on the difficulty.

Tours
 Departing Sydney, the reader-recommended **Oztrails** (☎ 9387 8390, 0411 288 805; www.oztrails.com.au; day tours \$85) wheels small groups around the Blue Mountains sights, finishing with a ferry ride back to Circular Quay on the Parramatta River. **HQ Tours** (☎ 9666 8433; www.hqtours.com.au) runs backpacker-friendly Blue Mountains tours, also departing Sydney. Its Eco-scenic day trip (per person \$79) includes three hours of guided bushwalking around the main sights.

Overnight tours (per person \$239) visit the Jenolan Caves and include dorm accommodation at Katoomba YHA.

Fantastic Aussie Tours (☎ 4782 1866, 1300 300 915; www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au; 283 Main St; adult/child \$63/43; ☎: tours 11.15am-5.15pm daily, office 9am-5pm) operates coach tours to the Jenolan Caves and runs the double-decker **Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (☎ 4782 4807; www.explorerbus.com.au; 283 Main St; adult/child \$32/16; ☎: 9.45am-5.15pm), a hop-on hop-off service on an hourly Katoomba/Leura loop, stopping at 30 attractions. Tickets last all day. Another hop-on hop-off service taking in the same sights is **Trolley Tours** (☎ 4782 7999, 1800 801 577; www.trolleytours.com.au; 285 Main St; adult/child \$15/12; ☎: 9.15am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.45am-3.45pm Sat & Sun). It's a bus not so cunningly disguised as a trolley, with piped commentary. You can get a weekly ticket (adult/child \$21/18) and go on a tour to Jenolan Caves (from \$48).

Tread Lightly Eco Tours (☎ 4788 1229; www.treadlightly.com.au; 2hr/day tours \$35/185) gives you encounters with local flora and fauna in remote mountain areas on guided bushwalks and 4WD tours. The emphasis is on ecosensitive interpretation of the land. Tours run daily on demand.

Also recommended:
Blue Mountains Walkabout Tours (☎ 0408 443 822; www.bluemountainstalkabout.com; day tours per person \$95) Indigenous heritage tours with Aboriginal guides, departing Faulconbridge Station.
Cool Safaris (☎ 4735 3977, 0438 353 162; www.cool safaris.com.au; half-/full-day tours per person \$95/175) 4WD tours with a native wildlife and Aboriginal art focus.

Festivals & Events
 Every year between June and August, chilly Blue Mountains towns cheer themselves up with **Yulefest** (☎ 4782 9865, 1300 653 408; www.yulefest.com.au), an out-of-kilter Christmas celebration.

Festivities reach a pagan peak at Katoomba's **Winter Magic Festival** on 21 June, with a street parade, market stalls and general frivolity to welcome the winter solstice.

Sleeping BUDGET

Katoomba Mountain Lodge (☎ 4782 3933; www.katoombamountainlodge.com.au; 31 Lurline St; dm/s/d from \$18/42/58; 📍) This place gets a good rap from readers – hysterically uncool wallpaper and naff timber panelling are the price you'll pay for the best-value rooms in town. It's a cheerily run 90-year-old house right in the middle of town, with astounding views from some of the top floor rooms.

No 14 (☎ 4782 7104; www.bluemts.com.au/no14; 14 Lovel St; dm \$22, d without/with bathroom \$59/66) Low-key with hippy overtones, this colourful hostel feels like a cheery share-house. There are plenty of nooks and crannies to find some breathing space if you need it, and polished floorboards make a pleasant change from festering carpets. Dorms have three beds; attic-style doubles are comfy and private.

Central Blue Mountains Backpackers (☎ 4782 9630, 1800 287 370; www.centralblue.com.au; 144 Bathurst Rd; dm/s/d/f from \$22/50/65/120; 📍) Opened in 2005, this gargantuan hostel near the station has an industrial-sized kitchen, excellent security and clean rooms, but feels nondescript in a nursing home kind of way. The fact that it used to be a nursing home may explain this.

Blue Mountains YHA (☎ 4782 1416; www.yha.com.au; 207 Katoomba St; dm/d/f from \$24/73/116; 📍) The austere Art Deco exterior of this much-lauded hostel belies its cavernous, sparkling innards. Dorms and family rooms are spotlessly bright; common areas have more beanbags than bums. Highlights include a pinball machine, pool tables, open fires, a giant chess set, central heating, barbecues and curry nights. Hard to fault.

Some alternatives include:

Flying Fox (☎ 4782 4226, 1800 624 226; www.flyingfox.com.au; 190 Bathurst Rd; unpowered sites per 2 people/dm/d \$24/22/60; 📍) Small, laid-back hostel in a 105-year-old house, with upbeat staff, good security and a chilled-out vibe.

Katoomba Falls Caravan Park (☎ 4782 1835; www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au; Katoomba Falls Rd; unpowered/powered sites per 2 people \$25/32, cabins from \$75) Gets mixed reviews from travellers, but the only Katoomba camping option.

MIDRANGE

Clarendon Guesthouse (☎ 4782 1322; www.clarendonguesthouse.com.au; 68 Lurline St; s without/with bathroom from \$45/65, d from \$90/130; 📍 motel only; 📍) The rambling old Clarendon is light on ceremony and heavy on character. Original rooms (with shared bathrooms) are charmingly old-school; the newer motel extension is snazzier than its exterior suggests. Convivial vibes snake their way up the stairs from the atmospheric band room (opposite).

Cecil Guesthouse (☎ 4782 1411; www.ourquest.com.au/cecil.html; 108 Katoomba St; s without/with bathroom \$75/80, d \$84/106) Rakishly dilapidated in a Fawley Towers kind of way, old Cecil has creaky floorboards, unrenovated walls and kooky lounge rooms – put character before ritz and you won't be disappointed. The dining room does breakfast and dinner, and there's a tennis court if you're feeling Federer.

Shelton-Lea (☎ 4782 9883; www.sheltonlea.com; 159 Lurline St; r with bathroom incl breakfast \$110-170) Moss, mustard and maroon colours with a splash of Art Deco make this B&B a stylish choice. Three bedrooms each have their own sitting areas, plus classy touches like old radios and lead-lighting by the kilo. Way romantic.

There are three affordable, ship-shape motels close to Echo Point. Their décor is nothing to write home about, but who writes letters these days?

Echo Point Motor Inn (☎ 4782 2088, 1800 024 879; www.echopointmotel.com; 18 Echo Point Rd; s/d/f from \$80/90/130) Affable hosts; rooms with or without views.

3 Explorers Motel (☎ 4782 1733; fax 4782 1146; 197 Lurline St; s/d/f from \$79/90/155; 📍 📍) Floral print proliferation; NRMA, RAC and AAA member discounts.

3 Sisters Motel (☎ 4782 2911; www.threesistersmotel.com.au; 348 Katoomba St; s \$65-95, d \$90-120; 📍) Funky retro neon sign; serviceable rooms with less funk.

TOP END

Carrington Hotel (☎ 4782 1111; www.thecarrington.com.au; 15-47 Katoomba St; d incl breakfast \$190-485) Katoomba's social and architectural high-water mark, the Carrington has been accommodating road-weary travellers since 1880. Every inch has been refurbished, but its historical character remains intact. The rooms are truly indulgent; the dining room and ballroom are utterly opulent.

Eating

Paragon Café (☎ 4782 2928; 65 Katoomba St; mains \$10-20; 📍 breakfast & lunch) The heritage-listed 1916

Paragon is Katoomba's undisputed Art Deco masterpiece. Sampling coffee and chocolates in the salubrious surrounds is a compulsory Blue Mountains experience.

Savoy (☎ 4782 3845; 26-28 Katoomba St; mains \$11-19; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Savoy has booths (we love booths), and is perfect for day-time pastas, burgers, focaccias and salads. At night the lights lower and the menu lifts – progressive dishes like pan-seared barramundi with lime and chilli, and kangaroo sirloin with roast zucchini, garlic and red wine jus bring smiles to faces.

Niagara (☎ 4782 4001; 92 Bathurst Rd; mains \$13-26; 📍 lunch & dinner) High ceilings with ornate cornices, oversized tiles underfoot and large wooden booths embellish this gay-/family-/vegetarian-friendly diner. The food is fab too: gourmet burgers, pastas and salads with a twist during the day, scrumptious steaks and fish at night. Monthly dinner-and-show Cabaret Nights (\$55) are sequin-soaked spectaculars.

IsoBar Café (☎ 4782 4063; 40 Katoomba St; mains \$17-23; 📍 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Despite the hackneyed IsoBar name, this café hums with chilled vibes, ambient tunes and moody lighting – as funky as Katoomba gets. Tasty staples include Turkish toasties, burgers, stir-fries and salads.

Solitary (☎ 4782 1164; 90 Cliff Dr; mains \$26-33; 📍 lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) To-die-for views, sublime food and inescapable romance are Solitary's stock in trade – not the place for solitary dining. Mains like venison and juniper sausages, and scallop and Moreton Bay bug ravioli are inventive; desserts are downright sexy. Excellent service; reservations are essential.

Entertainment

Clarendon Band Room (☎ 4782 1322; www.clarendonguesthouse.com.au; 68 Lurline St; admission \$15-50; 📍 live music Thu-Sun nights) When Australia's finest musicians are in town (which is often enough), they usually strut their stuff at the Clarendon Guesthouse band room. Dinner-and-show tickets cost \$30 extra.

Hotel Gearin (☎ 4782 4395; www.gearinhotel.com; 273 Great Western Hwy; admission free; 📍 7am-2am Mon-Thu, to 3am Sat & Sun, 10am-10pm Sun) Gear up for a night at the Gearin, Katoomba's best watering hole. It's owned by actor Jack Thompson – a good enough excuse for a beer, a \$5 steak or a game of pool.

Carrington Bar (☎ 4782 1111; www.thecarrington.com.au; 10-16 Katoomba St; admission free; 📍 9.30am-1.30am Mon-Thu, to 4.30am Fri & Sat, to 11pm Sun) The lowbrow wing of the upper-crust hotel, this is the place for shooters, schooners, pool tables and Guns 'N' Roses ricocheting off the jukebox. There's a nightclub upstairs on Saturday nights (admission \$5).

TrisElies (☎ 4782 4026; www.triselines.com.au; 287 Bathurst Rd; admission free or \$15 depending; 📍 8pm-3am Thu-Sun) Jazz, reggae, DJs and ska in a blood-red-painted bunker at the top of the town.

Edge Cinema (☎ 4782 8900; www.edgecinema.com.au; 225 Great Western Hwy; adult/child \$13/9; 📍 10am-late) The Edge screens current mainstream flicks plus a 40-minute Blue Mountains documentary called *The Edge* on a giant screen (adult/child \$15/10). Tuesday is discount day (aka Cheap-ass Tuesday) – \$9 for most films.

Getting There & Around

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) runs to Katoomba from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$12/6, two hours, hourly).

The **Blue Mountains Bus Co** (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) services Katoomba en route from Mt Victoria to the north (one-way adult/child \$7/4, 40 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday) and Springwood to the east (one-way adult/child \$9/5, one hour, seven daily Monday to Saturday). The **Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (p125) and **Trolley Tours** (p125) trace circuitous routes through Katoomba and Leura.

Velo Nova (☎ 4782 2800; www.velonova.com.au; 182 Katoomba St; half-/full-day \$28/50; 📍 9am-5pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-4.30pm Sun) rents out hi-tech, 24-speed, all-terrain mountain bikes. Saturday morning group rides run along Cliff Drive, finishing up with a café coffee.

If it's late and you've got a few beer-soaked notes left, call **Katoomba-Leura-Wentworth Falls Taxis** (☎ 4783 1311).

BLACKHEATH & AROUND

The crowds and commercial frenzy fizzle considerably 10km north of Katoomba in neat, petite Blackheath (Map p120). The town still measures up in the accommodation, food and scenery stakes, though, and it's an excellent base for visiting the Grose and Megalong Valleys.

East of town are lookouts at **Govett's Leap**, **Bridal Veil Falls** (the highest in the Blue Mountains) and **Evans Lookout**. To the northeast, via Hat Hill Rd, are **Pulpit Rock**, **Perry's Lookdown**

and **Anvil Rock**. There are steep walks into the Grose Valley from Govett's Leap; Perry's Lookdown is the start of the shortest route (five hours one-way) to the magical **Blue Gum Forest**. From Evans Lookout there are tracks to Govett's leap (1½ hours one-way) and to Junction Rock continuing to the Blue Gum Forest (six hours one-way).

To the west and southwest lie the Kanimbla and Megalong Valleys, with spectacular views from **Hargrave's Lookout**. Register your walk and get trail condition updates from the **Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (☎ 02-4787 8877; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Govett's Leap Rd; ☹ 9am-4.30pm).

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) runs to Blackheath from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$13/7, two hours 15 minutes, hourly).

The **Blue Mountains Bus Co** (☎ 02-4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) services Blackheath, Govett's Leap Rd, Evans Lookout Rd and Hat Hill Rd en route from Mt Victoria to the north (one-way adult/child \$6/3, 15 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday) and Katoomba to the south (one-way adult/child \$7/4, 25 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Friday, four Saturday, two Sunday). Buses take you to within 1km of Govett's Leap, but Perry's Lookdown and Evans Lookout are 6km and 4km walks, respectively, from the bus stops.

Sleeping & Eating

Gardners Inn (☎ 02-4787 8347; www.gardnersinn.com; 255 Great Western Hwy; s/d incl breakfast \$45/80) Across from Blackheath Station, this is the oldest hotel (1832) in the Blue Mountains; the basic pub rooms upstairs hark back to days of yore. Downstairs the swishy bistro (mains \$16-20, lunch and dinner) serves pub nosh on the gourmet side of the tracks. Wine tastings 6pm to 8pm Friday nights.

Jemby-Rinjah Eco Lodge (☎ 02-4787 7622; www.jembyrinjahlodge.com.au; 336 Evans Lookout Rd; standard/deluxe cabins from \$150/199) In a sequestered bush setting, these ecocabins are lodged so deeply in the bottlebrush you'll have to bump into one to find it. One- and two-bedroom vertical-weatherboard cabins are jauntily designed; the deluxe models have Japanese plunge-style spas.

Blackheath Caravan Park (☎/fax 02-4787 8101; Prince Edward St; unpowered/powerful sites per 2 people \$23/28, cabins from \$45) This small park does the simple things well without setting the mountains ablaze with personality: decent

camp sites, serviceable facilities, good-value cabins.

There are free camp sites at Perry's Lookdown, which has a car park and is a convenient base for walks into the Grose Valley, and at Acacia Flat, near the Blue Gum Forest in the Grose Valley. It's a steep descent from Govett's Leap or Perry's Lookdown (pack lightly).

Café Memento (☎ 02-4787 5123; cnr Wentworth & Govett's Leap Rd; mains \$5-15; ☹ breakfast & lunch Thu-Tue) Injecting Blackheath with a world view and a social conscience, colourful Café Memento serves organic breakfasts, wraps, soups, cakes and burgers. Political inclinations aside, the food is great and there's a sunny patio.

Vulcan's (☎ 02-4787 6899; 33 Govett's Leap Rd; mains \$32; ☹ lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) Arguably the Blue Mountains' best restaurant, this cosmopolitan, urbane eatery serves food erupting with flavour in a lava-coloured room. The kitchen takes centre stage. Bookings are essential.

Other recommendations:

Altitude Delicatessen (☎ 02-4787 6199; 20 Govett's Leap Rd; mains \$5-12; ☹ breakfast & lunch) Zingy deli sandwiches, fillos, antipastos, coffee and window seats.

Blackheath Motor Inn (☎ 02-4787 8788; www.blackheathmotorinn.com.au; 281 Great Western Hwy; d from \$80; ☹) Clean, snug motel rooms with funky '60s chalet style. Where's Britt Eckland when you need her?

MEGALONG VALLEY

Unless you walk in or take Katoomba's Scenic Railway, the only way you'll see a Blue Mountains gorge from the inside is in the Megalong Valley. This is straw-coloured rural Australia, a real departure from the quasi-suburbs strung along the ridgeline. An amazingly well-surfaced road snakes down from Blackheath through pockets of rainforest. The 600m **Coachwood Glen Nature Trail**, 2km before Werribee, features dripping fern dells, stands of mountain ash and sun-stained sandstone cliffs.

The **Megalong Australian Heritage Centre** (☎ 02-4787 8188; www.megalong.cc; Megalong Rd; admission adult/child/family \$8/5/20; ☹ 9am-5pm) is a display farm agri-heaven for little tackers – visitors can feed and pat sheep, ducks, ponies and alpacas. There's guided horseriding (one/two hours per person \$45/85), plus farm shows and activities during school holidays.

The **Farm Accommodation** (unpowered sites per 2 people/dm \$24/20, d incl breakfast \$85, 4-bed cottages from \$195) comprises basic dorm beds, B&B guesthouse rooms and two self-contained cottages.

Werribee Trail Rides (☎ 02-4787 9171; www.austrianbluehorserides.com.au; Megalong Rd; 30min/2hr rides \$30/78; ☹ 10am-5pm) offers horse-riding packages to suit everyone. See the area pioneer-style by adding your weight to a two-day/one-night 'Pub Crawl' ride!

MT VICTORIA

☎ 02 / pop 870

With its remote, unadulterated village vibe, National Trust-classified Mt Victoria was once more influential than Katoomba. At 1043m, it's the highest town in the mountains – crisp air, solitude, towering foliage and historic buildings are what you're here for.

Nothing is far from the train station, where the **Mt Victoria Museum** (☎ 4787 1210; Mt Victoria Railway Station; adult/child \$3/50; ☹ 2-5pm Sat & Sun) is chock-full of quirky Australian. Gawk at convict relics, old farm equipment, maps, photos, portraits, taxidermy and Ned Kelly's sister's bed. Other interesting buildings include the 1914 **Victoria & Albert Guesthouse**, the 1849 **Toll Bar Cottage** and the 1874 **St Peters Church**.

Inside an old public hall, **Mount Vic Flicks** (☎ 4787 1577; www.bluemts.com.au/mountvic; Hartley Ave; adult/child \$9/7; ☹ noon-10.30pm Fri-Sun, from 10am Thu) is cinema 'the way it used to be', with ushers, a piano player and door prizes. Mainstream and art-house releases shimmer across the screen; Thursday morning tickets are \$6!

Off the highway at **Mt York** is a surreal gathering of monuments, plaques and structures commemorating Wentworth, Blaxland and Lawson's 1813 mountain crossing.

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) runs to Mt Victoria from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$14/7, two hours 30 minutes, hourly). The **Blue Mountains Bus Co** (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) runs to Mt Victoria from Katoomba (one-way adult/child \$6/3, 15 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Imperial (☎ 4787 1878; www.hotelimperial.com.au; 1 Station St; dm \$25, d without/with bathroom incl breakfast from \$129/139) This grand, castelled old dame is the best pub in the area, by a mountain mile. Downstairs rooms are budget and basic; upstairs they're grand and gracious. The bar has live music and log fires, there's a stellar beer garden, and the kitchen (mains \$16-24; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) cooks solid pub grub.

Manor House (☎ 4787 1369; www.themanorhouse.com.au; Montgomery St; d incl breakfast \$155-230) Each of the 13 en-suite rooms in this vintage guesthouse has a dash of heritage; perhaps a Victorian wardrobe, Art Deco fittings, or a veranda. The restaurant (mains \$24; open lunch and dinner by arrangement; bookings essential) has a small but inventive menu; try the pesto and artichoke lasagne.

HARTLEY HISTORIC SITE

In the 1830s the Victoria Pass route (through Mt Victoria) made travelling inland from the coast a helluva lot easier. However, the moral and physical discomforts associated with being bailed up by bushrangers soon became an issue. To counter the problem, a police post was established at Hartley, 11km northwest of Mt Victoria, the village flourishing until the railway bypassed it in 1887. Now deserted, this tiny, sandstone ghost town still has a curious crop of historic buildings.

The **NPWS Information Centre** (☎ 02-6355 2117; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; ☹ 10am-1pm & 2-4.20pm) is in the old **Farmer's Inn** (1845) near **St Bernards Church** (1848). You can explore Hartley for free or take a guided tour of the 1837 **Greek Revival Courthouse** (tours per person \$6; ☹ hourly 10am-3pm).

Collits Inn (☎ 02-6355 2072; www.collitsinn.com.au; Hartley Vale Rd; tw/d from \$155/185, cottage from \$260) is a sumptuously renovated 1823 inn with elegant guestrooms and a self-contained cottage.

Even if you're not stopping overnight call into the Inn's **restaurant** (☎ 02-6355 2072; 2-/3-course meal \$65/75; ☹ lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) because the munificent French-influenced cooking is worth the detour. Reservations essential. Follow the signs off the Great Western Hwy 5km east of Hartley.

JENOLAN CAVES

Southwest of Katoomba on the western fringe of Kanangra Boyd National Park, the troglodytic **Jenolan Caves** (☎ 02-6359 3911; www.jenolancaves.org.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; admission with tour adult/child/family from \$17/12/44; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm; Ⓟ \$5) is one of the most extensive and complex limestone cave systems in the world. Named **Binooema**, or 'Dark Places', by the Gundungurra tribe, the caves took shape 400 million years ago.

You must take a tour to see them, various tour packages traversing a surreal 10-cave warren. More comprehensive tours include the 2½-hour ghost (\$32, 8pm Saturday) and adventure (\$58, 1.15pm daily) tours.

DETOUR: BELLS LINE OF ROAD

The Great Western Hwy barrels straight through the Blue Mountains, but if you have time the spectacular 90km **Bells Line of Road** is far more rewarding. Named after Archibald Bell Jnr, the 19-year-old who discovered the route in 1823, the road was constructed by convicts in 1841, navigating a pass between Richmond and Lithgow. It's far quieter than the highway and offers bountiful views from the mountains' eastern slopes, orchards and roadside apple carts around Bilpin, and lofty scenery all the way to Lithgow.

To get here, head northwest from Sydney on Windsor Rd then take Richmond Rd west, which becomes Bells Line of Road beyond Richmond.

Between Bilpin and Bell, **Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens** (☎ 02-4567 2154; www.rbgnsyd.nsw.gov.au; Bells Line of Road, Bilpin; adult/child/family \$4/2/9; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) is the cool-climate annexe of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. Native plants cuddle up to exotic species including magnificent rhododendron displays. Many areas are wheelchair accessible; a people-mover circles on the hour.

Mt Wilson (www.mountwilson.info) is 8km north of Bells Line of Road. Like Katoomba, this town was settled by Anglophiles, but unlike Katoomba with its guesthouses and cool cafés, Mt Wilson is all hedgerows, European trees and mansions with big gates and driveways. About 1km from the village is the **Cathedral of Ferns**, a wet rainforest remnant with tree ferns and native doves exploding from the foliage – an almost unbearably serene 10-minute stroll.

One for the trainspotters, the **Zig Zag Railway** (☎ 02-6355 2955; www.zigzagrailway.com.au; Clarence Station, Bells Line of Road; adult/child/family \$20/10/50; ☎ 11am, 1pm & 3pm daily), 10km east of Lithgow, was designed to bring the Great Western Railway tracks down from the mountains to Lithgow, gently zigzagging down the precipice. It's a 1½-hour return train ride.

Classical concerts (☎ 1300 763 311; www.georgcello.com; adult/child \$38/20; ☎ 4pm Sat twice monthly) in the caves are a sonic revelation. Book ahead for all tours, as they sell-out quickly. See p125 for tour details from Sydney and Katoomba.

The caves are 30km from the Great Western Hwy. The narrow Jenolan Caves Rd becomes a one-way system between 11.45am and 1.15pm daily, running clockwise from the caves out through Oberon.

The 42km **Six Foot Track** from Katoomba to the Jenolan Caves is a fairly challenging three-day hike (two days if you're hyperactive or unencumbered). Built as a bridle track to compete with the railways, 'Six Foot' refers to its width – wide enough for two horses to pass. Consult the Echo Point visitors centre in Katoomba (p123) before you attempt anything.

Most local accommodation is affiliated with caves management, including **Jenolan Caves Cottages** (☎ 02-6359 3911; www.jenolancaves.org.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; cottages sleeping 6-8 people \$90-125, Bellbird Cottage \$145-180) about 8km north of the caves – four comfortable, self-contained cottages and the beautifully renovated 1930s Bellbird Cottage, all with bushy views.

Looking like something Jack Nicholson might take a Shining to, the fabulously eerie **Jenolan Caves House** (☎ 02-6359 3322; www.jeno-

lancaves.house.com.au; Jenolan Caves Rd; dm \$25, motel d \$95-185, guestroom d \$65-295) caters to all wallets and tastes. Gatehouse dorms sleep six, Mountain Lodge motel doubles are modern, Caves House guestrooms range from traditional to opulent. The **restaurant** (mains \$25-28; ☎ breakfast & dinner) serves trad English fare.

LITHGOW

☎ 02 / pop 21,000

In the western foothills of the Blue Mountains, Lithgow is famous for producing a whole lot of coal and Marjorie Jackson – aka 'The Lithgow Flash' – the 100m and 200m gold medallist at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. It's a sombre, agrarian working town with as many pubs as employment offices (a lot of both), but makes a handy base for mountain biking or fishing in the surrounding hills. The mega-helpful lantern-shaped **visitors centre** (☎ 6353 1859; www.tourism.lithgow.com; cnr Cooverwull Rd & Great Western Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) books accommodation and has free **Mountain Bike Riding in Lithgow** and **Lithgow Region Fishing Guide** pamphlets.

Sleeping & Eating

Lithgow Valley Motel (☎ 6351 2334; www.lithgowvalley.com.au; 45 Cooverwull Rd; s/d from \$55/66) About 3km from the town centre; the bedspreads

here are the brightest things in Lithgow, filling great-value, clean, old-style motel rooms with splendour.

Lithgow Tourist & Van Park (☎ 6351 4350; www.lithgowcaravanpark.com.au; 58 Cooverwull Rd; unpowered/power sites per 2 people \$16/21, cabins from \$50) Across the road from the Lithgow Valley Motel, the main selling points here are loads of open space, effervescent birdlife and the odd sheep prom-enading around the adjoining paddocks.

Papadino's Pizzeria (☎ 6353 1455; 65 Main St; mains \$12-22; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) Papadino's is a humble, main-street trattoria with homemade timber tables topped with floral decoupage cut from magazines. It bakes the kind of two-inch-thick, lead-weight pizzas the Italians never made and Australians haven't made since the '70s. One feed will last you a week.

Getting There & Away

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run to Lithgow from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$18/9, three hours, hourly).

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

The Southern Highlands was one of the first inland areas settled by Europeans, who promptly levelled the scruffy native foliage to make way for agriculture and English-style villages. Their arrival was early enough in Australia's history for the settlers to regard themselves as English landed gentry rather than Australian farmers, their affinity with the old world manifesting itself in a landscape of grassy slopes, brooding pines, distinct seasons and stone architecture.

Modern Australia has crept in the back door, but the Highlands towns coiling away from the Hume Hwy retain a gentrified air, accented by beautiful English gardens, antique shops and historic buildings.

MITTAGONG & BOWRAL AREA

☎ 02 / pop 17,000

Mittagong and Bowral form the Southern Highlands' municipal epicentre, a status cemented by their steady bleed into one another. Mittagong is a broad, functional town with rural sensibilities; Bowral plays at being an English hamlet, with teahouses, a village green and lofty self-esteem. Both towns pride themselves on their chattering main streets,

and mature deciduous trees that erupt into autumnal russet reds.

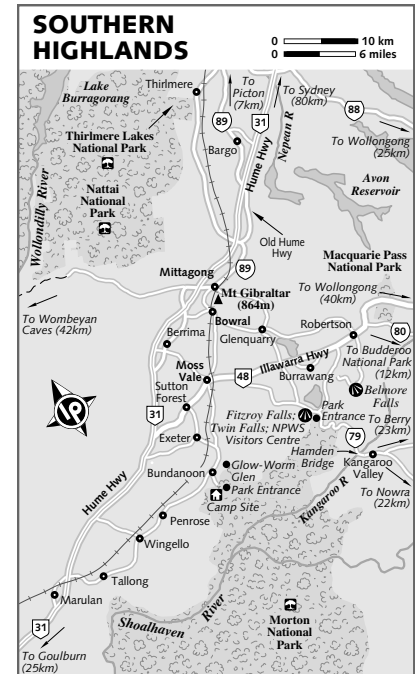
If you're driving between Bowral and Mittagong, take the scenic route via the **Mt Gibraltar lookouts** for excellent valley views.

Information

The **Southern Highlands visitors centre** (☎ 4871 2888; 1300 657 559; www.southern-highlands.com.au; 62-70 Main St, Mittagong; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) is a capacious information centre with serious staff and free accommodation booking. Pick up a copy of *Craigie's Visitors Map of the Southern Highlands* (\$8) which covers the area in detail.

Sights

Legendary, to the threshold of sainthood, Sir Donald Bradman (aka 'The Don') started cracking cover drives and grafting centuries in Bowral. Fans pay homage at the **Bradman Museum of Cricket** (☎ 4862 1247; www.bradman.com.au; St Jude St, Bowral; adult/child/family \$9/4/22; ☎ 10am-5pm), which has an engrossing collection of Ashes and Don-centric memorabilia that even cricket-loathers admit is worthwhile.



The museum is a couple of blocks east of Bowral's main street, next to the white-picketed Bradman Oval.

Festivals

For two weeks over September and October, Bowral bursts into vivid hues during the **Bowral Tulip Time Festival** (☎ 1300 657 559; www.tuliptime.net.au). Rich soil and a cool climate ensure this floral extravaganza is always a success, attendees tiptoeing through Corbett Gardens, off Merrigang St. Jazz, folk dancing, cultural activities and plenty of fine regional food and wine enhance the mood.

Sleeping

Moss Vale Village Caravan Park (☎ 4868 1099; www.mossvalevillagecaravanpark.com.au; Willow Dr, Moss Vale; unpowered/power sites per 2 people \$18/24, caravans/cabins from \$47/77) At Moss Vale, 11km south of Bowral, this spacey caravan park has plenty of foliage and spots to park a tent. Spotless cabins offer the usual linoleum bedazzlements; facilities include barbecues, golf practice net and playground.

Mittagong Hotel (☎ 4872 2255; fax 4872 2242; 89 Old Hume Hwy, Mittagong; s/d from \$40/60) Roomy, beery and megalithic (the biggest thing in Mittagong), this old boozier seems to be in a

constant state of renovation. Pub meals, pool table and country music downstairs; fluttering NSW flag and tidy, good-value rooms (most with en suite) upstairs.

Ranelagh House (☎ 4885 1111; www.ranelagh-house.com.au; Illawarra Hwy, Robertson; r incl breakfast \$55-150) This commanding English manor (1924) in wee Robertson manages to be simultaneously creepy and distinguished, with lavish rooms, mournfully wandering peacocks, wind in the pines and any number of windows from which unseen faces might peer... Devonshire teas and whodunnit weekends are a speciality.

PortOCall Motor Inn (☎ 4861 1779; fax 4861 1063; cnr Bundaroo & Bong Bong Sts, Bowral; r \$69-115) Functional, central and immaculate, the PortOCall is festooned with the kind of abstract art that mums used to buy in 1985 when they wanted to be cool. Fear not – PortOCall is a quality motel with a capital O. Good disabled access.

Other recommendations:

Bong Bong Motel (☎ 4868 1033; fax 4869 2393; 238 Argyle St, Moss Vale; s/d from \$75/95) How can you pass up a name like this? A clean, affordable, bong-water-coloured motel with an 'Everyone knows me!' manager.

Best Western Grand Country Lodge Motel (☎ 4871 3277, 1800 815 923; www.highlandsnsw.com.au; Old Hume Hwy, Mittagong; r \$105-185; ♿) A solid overnight option next to the Southern Highlands

visitors centre. The virginal water nymph fountain is a nice touch.

Eating

Ouddy Thai House (☎ 4861 5554; 238 Bong Bong St, Bowral; mains \$11-19; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) A pocket of spicy Southeast Asian adventure amongst Bowral's tea-and-cake conservatism, Ouddy serves simmering soups, tasty curries, stir-fries and noodle dishes, with chilli customised to suit your level of tolerance. Try the whisky prawns.

Mittagong Hotel (☎ 4872 2255; 89 Old Hume Hwy, Mittagong; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) If you're hungry in Mittagong, go no further than the local pub bistro. Plates piled high with chips, schnitzels, pasta and steak fly through the kitchen doors and satisfy hungry hordes of local farmers, truckers and passers-through like you.

Getting There & Away

A short detour from the Hume Hwy deposits you in Mittagong, 1½ hours from Sydney. Bowral is 10 minutes' drive south of Mittagong. The Illawarra Hwy links the area with the coast, running through Moss Vale and Robertson. Long-distance Hume Hwy buses stop at the Southern Highlands visitors centre in Mittagong. Companies operating from Sydney are **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au), with a once-daily service (adult/child \$21/17, 2½ hours), and **Firefly** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au) with a twice-daily service (adult and child \$40, 2½ hours).

Berrima Coaches (☎ 4871 3211; www.berrimabuslines.com.au) has a service from Mittagong to Moss Vale via Bowral (one-way adult/child \$4/2, 15 minutes, frequently weekdays, four Saturday and Sunday). **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) runs buses between Wollongong and Moss Vale (one-way adult/child \$9/6, one hour 30 minutes, three daily), some running via Bundanoon. **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Mittagong and Bowral (one-way adult/child \$14/7, two hours, roughly hourly).

WOMBAYAN CAVES

The convoluted limestone **Wombeyan Caves** (☎ 02-4843 5976; www.npws.nsw.gov.au; Wombeyan Caves Rd; admission adult/child/family \$13/8/30, with tour \$16/10/39; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) are at the end of an equally convoluted mountain road 65km northwest of Mittagong. The sur-

rounding bushland is part of a national park with walking tracks and plenty of wildlife; the caves themselves are in a shady valley with mown lawns, poplars and pines.

The **guided tour** is usually at 1pm and 2.30pm on weekdays, with an extra 10.30am tour on weekends. If you're resolutely independent, you can take a self-guided roam of the cave system (pre-empting the argument: stalactites descend, stalagmites ascend). Cool off afterwards in the swimming hole at **Limestone Canyon**.

You can pitch your tent nearby at the **Wombeyan Camping Reserve** (☎ 02-4843 5976; unpowered sites per 2 people \$15, cabins \$68-90), where there's also a kiosk and a well-equipped communal kitchen.

From either Canberra or Melbourne, the Goulburn-Taralga route is quickest and involves only 4km of narrow, winding road. From Sydney, the road winding west from Mittagong has a narrow, precipitous 45km stretch – very scenic but *really* slow (two hours from Mittagong). Watch out for oncoming cars, especially on weekends.

BERRIMA

☎ 02 / pop 880

Founded in 1829, Berrima blossomed as a stopover en route to the wide brown lands west of the Blue Mountains. Unfortunately this route soon became infested with bush-rangers and eventually the railway bypassed the town.

These days Berrima is heritage-classified, the town's plaid-clad country gents shuffling between historic buildings and tourist-trap stores, nodding salutations beneath towering pines. If you're after more than just lunch, there are some first-rate food and wine offerings here – make it an overnight indulgence.

The pick of Berrima's buildings is the 1838 neoclassical **Berrima Courthouse**, next to the still-functioning Berrima Gaol. Inside the courthouse is an excellent **Museum & Information Centre** (☎ 4877 1505; www.berrimacourthouse.org.au; cnr Wilshire & Argyle Sts; adult/child/family \$6/4/15; ☎ 10am-4pm), which screens a 15-minute slide show about harsh early-19th-century justice. There's also information on prison history, early settlers, bushrangers, and a mock-up of the courthouse's first trial (complete with 30 wax mannequins and soundtrack).

Near the banks of the Wingecarribee River, the **Berrima District Museum** (☎ 4877 1130; cnr Market

THE DON

Sir Donald Bradman was the greatest batsman cricket has ever seen. Born in Cootamundra (p280) in NSW's Central West in 1908, young Donald tuned his eye-hand coordination by spanking a golf ball against a corrugated metal water tank using a cricket stump as a bat. After many hours by the tank, the mature Don dazzled the world with his balletic footwork and devilishly good eye.

Bradman crashed world cricket's party, humbling England with his withering batting during the 1930 Test series. Shell-shocked English captain Douglas Jardine devised a cunning plan known as 'Bodyline', specifically to plug Bradman's run-scoring volcano. Bodyline involved crowding fielders around the legside of the wicket, then delivering fast, head-high 'bouncers' at the helmetless opposition. The Australians would be faced with a terrible choice: collect a cricket ball in the temple, or defend with the bat and spoon a catch to the vulture-like legside fielders.

Bodyline was viciously effective, several Australian batsmen receiving serious injuries during the 1932-33 Ashes Test series. After Australian captain Bill Woodford was struck on the chest, he uttered his famous words, 'There are two sides out there. One is trying to play cricket, the other is not.' Bradman's batting average fell to 56.57, a massive slide from his domestic average of 150. England won the Ashes but lost a legion of fans – Bodyline was eventually outlawed.

Bradman's vengeance was sweet and merciless: 19 Test centuries against England between 1928 and 1948. Affectionately known as 'Our Don Bradman' or simply 'The Don', he lifted the spirit of an entire nation after WWII. Captain of the 1948 Test team, still regarded as Australia's best-ever side, Sir Donald retired the same year with a Test batting average of 99.94! His average would have been 100-plus had he not been dismissed for a duck (0) in his last innings. It's a measure of the man's character that he didn't play another match to boost his average. Cricket is, after all, a team game.

Pl & Bryan St; adult/child \$4/free; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat & Sun, school & public holidays) houses a local history collection, the highlight of which is a tree-trunk canoe hacked out by some of Berrima's 320 WWI German internees. Nearby the **Surveyor General Inn** claims to be Australia's oldest continuously operating hotel (aren't they all...).

Three kilometres north of Berrima, **Berkeley's Book Barn & Café** (☎ 4877 1370; www.berkelouow.com.au; Old Hume Hwy; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun), a branch of the famous Sydney bookshops, stocks enough secondhand and antiquated tomes to give the biggest of bookworms their fill. Absorb your selection (everything from pug dogs to politics) with a couch-bound coffee by the wood fire.

Sleeping & Eating

Surveyor General Inn (☎ 4877 1226; www.highlandsnsw.com.au/surveyorgeneral; Old Hume Hwy; r without bathroom \$60-80) There's a real sense of authenticity at this friendly local; you might feel like you've just stepped off the Cobb & Co.

The Inn's **bistro** (mains \$16-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) is definitely 21st century, dishing up modern, inventive pub fare (great Thai fish cakes). There's also a fancy barbecue (the kind you can just about drive) on which your sirloin or kangaroo rump is grilled to perfection.

White Horse Inn (☎ 4877 1204; www.whitehorseinn.com.au; Market Pl; s \$70-135, d \$80-150) This gorgeous old sandstone pub has four tasteful en-suite B&B rooms (cushions, dressers, fluffy towels etc), but most people are here for the restaurant (mains \$17-24; open breakfast, lunch and dinner). French and Asian overtones inform the cooking, served in private dining rooms, each with a magnificent table, open fireplace, fine china and restored antique furniture. Great coffee too.

Getting There & Away

Berrima Coaches (☎ 4871 3211; www.berrimabuslines.com.au) buses run between Bowral and Berrima (one-way adult/child \$8/4, 15 minutes, four daily).

BUNDANOON & AROUND

☎ 02 / pop 1965

Bundanoon's main appeal is its proximity to the northern escarpments of **Morton National Park** – gorge yourself on lookouts or bicycle and walking tracks starting just 1km from the town. Once the Southern Highlands' undisputed guesthouse capital, though the trees now

outnumber the bipeds, the village is arguably the region's prettiest and most secluded.

Sleeping & Eating

Bundanoon YHA (☎ 4883 6010; www.yha.com.au; 115 Railway Ave; unpowered site per 2 people \$31, dm/d/f \$28/64/96) Bundanoon's YHA occupies a fastidiously restored Edwardian guesthouse (officially called 'Lynbrook'), complete with deep, shady veranda, commodious country kitchen and gallons of gingham. The family rooms are family-sized and there's oodles of room outside for the kids to get into trouble.

Treetops Country Guesthouse (☎ 4883 6372; www.treetopsguesthouse.com.au; 101 Railway Ave; d incl breakfast & dinner \$150-350) A dinner, bed and breakfast extravaganza, Treetops features stained-glass windows, four-poster beds, open fireplaces, a sunny games room and spiffy dining room. The snooker table is big enough to graze sheep on.

Ye Olde Bicycle Shoppe (☎ 4883 6043; 9 Church St; mains \$10-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Next to the post office, this bike shop (sorry, shoppe) and café regulates the town's caffeine supply while renting out bicycles (half-/full-day \$19/30). The banana bread is a heavyweight contender.

Getting There & Away

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) trains link Sydney's Central Station and Bundanoon (one-way adult/child \$21/15, two hours, twice daily). Trains also arrive here from Wollongong (one-way adult/child \$12/8, two hours, twice daily); the earlier service is via Moss Vale. **CityRail** (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station (one-way adult/child \$16/8, two hours 30 minutes, six daily); you may need to change at Macarthur.

NATIONAL PARKS

Morton National Park is a vast, unruly wilderness area in the Budawang Range, covering 162,386 hectares. Vertigo-inducing sandstone cliffs launch waterfalls over their edges, torrents of droplets dappling down onto forest canopies in the valleys below. It's a geographically chaotic area – before you go, record your proposed walk and have a chat with the friendly **NPWS visitors centre** (☎ 02-4887 7270; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Nowra Rd, Fitzroy Falls; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) near Fitzroy Falls themselves at the park entrance. The car park here costs \$3 per vehicle (technically your national park entry fee).

Camping fees for the **camp site** (adult/child \$5/3 per night) near the Bundanoon entrance can be paid here and there's also guides to walking in the park (\$2 to \$7). For longer bushwalks you'll need dedicated topographic maps.

The closest roads that access the park are at Bundanoon, at Fitzroy Falls and via the Tallowa Dam Rd from Kangaroo Valley. There's also the road running to Sassafras (surrounded by the park) from both Nowra or Braidwood.

Beyond spectacular, the wheelchair accessible **Fitzroy Falls** plunge a staggering 82m, the liberated waters smashing into a rabble of boulders below. The less well-known **Twin Falls** are 1km from here along the eastern track. The **Glow-Worm Glen** (at its most glowing-est after dark) is a half-hour walk from the end of William St in Bundanoon. In the park's south is the nipple-shaped **Pigeon House Mountain**; see p331 for walking details.

On the northeast edge of Morton National Park is the smaller **Budderoo National Park** offering yet more waterfalls, lookouts and walking tracks. On the west side of the park is the **Minnamurra Rainforest Centre** (p325). Access to both is from Robertson to the north or from Jamberoo near Kiama.

To get to Morton National Park take bus 813 from Moss Vale to Bundanoon (one-way adult/child \$5/3, 20 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday). **Kennedy's Bus Service** (☎ 02-4421 7596, 0403 040 029; 7 Flinders Rd, Nowra) runs from Moss Vale to Fitzroy Falls (one-way adult/child \$4/2, 30 minutes, 9.30am Monday to Friday), continuing to Nowra.

KANGAROO VALLEY

☎ 02 / pop 350

Heading south from Fitzroy Falls, the world disappears over the edge of a steep escarpment, the road descending alarmingly to deposit you in the unbelievably picturesque Kangaroo Valley. Pegged in by a fortress of rainforest-steeped cliffs, the valley floor is carpeted by cow-dotted pasturelands, river gums and gurgling creeks. In perfect harmony with its surroundings, the slow country town of Kangaroo Valley itself, with its old pub, bakery and general store, feels lost somewhere between 1920 and 1980. Even the coaches belching through from the coast fail to ruin the atmosphere.

The formal entry to the valley is the unexpected **Hamden Bridge** (1898), a few kilometres

north of the town. It's a castellated sandstone-and-iron suspension structure, with a one-way lane, 17m above the riverbed. Next to the bridge is the **Pioneer Museum Park** (☎ 4465 1306; elaineaa@bigpond.net.au; Hampden Bridge, Moss Vale Rd; adult/child/family \$4/3/10; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Oct-Easter, 11am-3pm Fri-Mon Easter-Sep). This walkabout museum provides a visual encounter with rural life in the late 19th century. A collection of historical buildings includes an 1860s homestead, blacksmiths forge and reconstructed dairy.

If the scenery is boring you to tears, get active with **canoeing**, **mountain biking** and **bushwalking** in and around the Shoalhaven and Kangaroo Rivers. **Kangaroo Valley Escapes** (☎ 0404 807 991; www.kangaroovalleyescapes.com.au; Moss Vale Rd; tours half-day \$30-80, overnight \$65-75) offers environmentally conscious guided tours, which you design yourself combining various rigorous activities. It also hires out canoes (half-/full-day \$25/50) and mountain bikes (\$30/50).

Kangaroo Valley Safaris (☎ 4465 1502; www.kangaroovalleycanoes.com.au; 2210 Moss Vale Rd; full day \$35-60) rents out one- to three-person canoes and provides transport to/from specified points on the Shoalhaven River. It also runs overnight canoe camping trips (two-/three-day trips \$75/105 per person).

Sleeping & Eating

Glenmack Park (☎ 4465 1372; www.glenmack.com.au; 215 Moss Vale Rd; unpowered/powerd sites per 2 people \$16/20, cabins without/with bathroom \$50/70) Sprawling Glenmack has 26 cabins, all with kitchenettes, TVs and aging lino, plus lush river-flat lawns for tents. Trees and ducks proliferate, enhancing the impression of camping out in the wild. You can light a campfire here too (a rarity!), but there's an undercover barbecue if things get too rough.

Friendly Inn Hotel (☎ 4465 1355; 159 Moss Vale Rd; mains \$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Kangaroo Valley's nocturnal life revolves around this classic country boozier, ever-so-subtly renovated to retain its local character. The original drinking nooks are intact and there's an exquisite dearth of plastic furniture (shame about the pokies in the corner). Styled-up pub nosh includes steaks of monstrous proportions and a slew of veggie, fish and chicken dishes.

Old Store (☎ 4465 1360; 2167 Moss Vale Rd; pies around \$6; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Leading a clandestine double life as the valley post office, this roadside

store sells what are allegedly the 'world's best pies'. Lavish with the filling in deliciously flaky butter-crust, its steak and red wine creation is indeed a world beater.

Getting There & Away

Kennedy's Bus Service (☎ 4421 7596, 0403 040 029; 7 Flinders Rd, Nowra) runs from Moss Vale to Kangaroo Valley (one-way adult/child \$6/3, 45 minutes, 9.30am Monday to Friday) continuing to Nowra.

CENTRAL COAST

The sun-stroked Central Coast, corralled by the Pacific Hwy to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east, is a distillation of all that's good about coastal Australia. Heading north from Gosford, a series of small towns is connected by scenic roads swerving through national parks, around saltwater lakes and alongside first-rate surf beaches.

Central Coasters live the definitive beach lifestyle – sun, sand and surf – amid beachy suburbs that thin to skeletal populations during winter. During summer, city-slickers converge in their 4WDs and at times Terrigal looks more like Tamarama. Don't worry – there's plenty of space to evade the crowds, and the local pelicans make for unpretentious company. Looking about as gainily as jumbo jets, these huge pin-eyed birds paddle around in search of food and glide silently overhead.

GOSFORD & AROUND

At the base of a steep incline below the Pacific Hwy, Gosford (population 154,000) is the Central Coast's largest town. It's a pretty place, with suburbia kept at bay by waves of dense bush curling over the hills, but a down-trodden, redneck vibe conspires to keep things as unremarkable as possible. For banks and supermarkets it's fine, but for a meal or a bed you'll be better off in Terrigal (p138).

Orientation & Information

Gosford's main strip is Mann St, an extension of the Pacific Hwy, which hosts the post office, banks, hospital and police station. Next to the train station, the **visitors centre** (☎ 02-4323 2353, 1300 132 975; www.cctourism.com.au; 200 Mann St; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat) is staffed by volunteers who seem to mostly enjoy their own company, but they do have overflowing

brochure racks. The **NPWS Office** (☎ 02-4320 4200; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Suite 36, 207 Albany St North; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) provides permits for local national parks.

Sights & Activities

Thirteen kilometres west of Gosford, you can get acquainted with cold-blooded locals at the **Australian Reptile Park** (☎ 02-4340 1022; www.reptilepark.com.au; Pacific Hwy, Somersby; adult/child/family \$20/10/52; ☎ 9am-5pm). A bush oasis, the park specialises in lizards, snakes and crocodiles of all magnitude, and less toothy beasts like koalas, platypuses and kangaroos. Conservation-impassioned staff conduct regular feeding sessions and talks throughout the day.

There are more cuties and furries at the **Australian Rainforest Sanctuary** (☎ 02-4362 1855; www.australianrainforest.com.au; Ourimbah Creek Rd, Ourimbah; adult/child/concession/family \$12/6/10/30; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun, also 6-9.30pm Wed-Sun Nov-Jan), a private rainforest reserve full of wallabies, wallaroos and 100 nattering bird species. The bushwalking isn't too strenuous, and there are grassy picnic and barbecue areas.

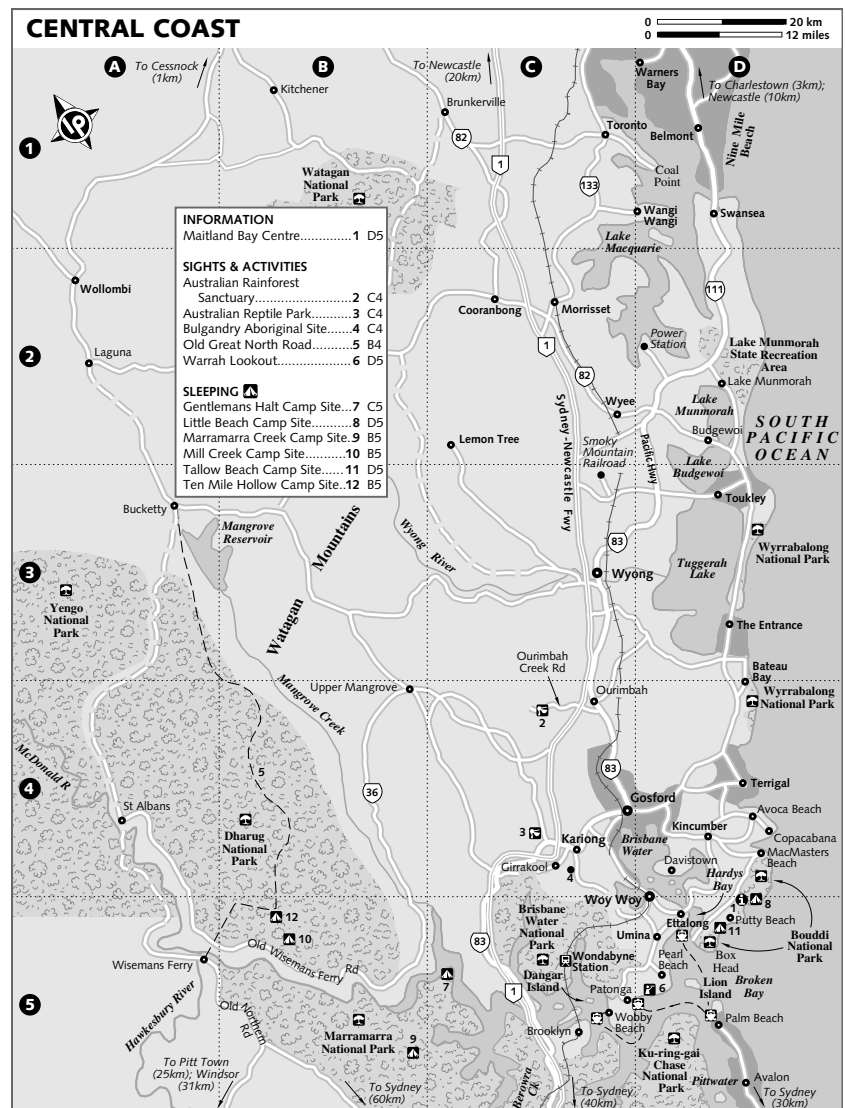
South of Brisbane Water National Park, there are silvery Broken Bay views from **Warrah Lookout**. Not far away, but screened from the Umina and Woy Woy housing estates by the steep Mt Ettalong road, is **Pearl Beach**, a National Trust-listed hamlet on the national park's eastern edge.

BRISBANE WATER NATIONAL PARK

On the north side of the Hawkesbury River, 9km southwest of Gosford, **Brisbane Water National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) extends eastwards from the Pacific Hwy to Brisbane Water itself. Despite its name, the park is mostly sandstone outcrops and forest with only a short Brisbane Water frontage. This park is famed for its explosions of spring wildflowers and Guringai stone engravings, the most impressive gallery of which is the **Bulgandry Aboriginal Engraving Site**, 3km south of the Pacific Hwy on Woy Woy Rd.

Rock climbing, bushwalking and abseiling courses are provided by **Central Coast Bushworks** (☎ 02-4363 2028; www.bushworks.info; 2hr abseiling per person \$66, half-day bushwalking \$75). There's generally a minimum requirement of 10 people – the larger the group, the lower the rate.

The main national park road access is at Girrakool; travel west from Gosford or exit the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy at the Calga in-



terchange. Wondabyne train station, on the Sydney–Newcastle line, is inside the park near several walking tracks (including part of the Great North Walk). Tell the guard if you want to get off at Wondabyne and you need to travel in the rear carriage. **Palm Beach & Hawkesbury River Cruises** (p114) run from Palm Beach to Patonga in the park. **Dangar Island Ferry Service** (☎ 02-9985

7566, 0415 274 020) operates ferries (adult/child \$10/5, 15 minutes, 12 daily) from Brooklyn to Wobby Beach on a peninsula south of the park near some walking tracks.

BOUDDI NATIONAL PARK

Bouddi National Park, 19km southeast of Gosford, extends south from MacMasters Beach

GREAT NORTH WALK

Ever considered walking from Sydney to Newcastle? The Great North Walk awaits! This 250km trail begins in central Sydney and, after a short ferry ride, follows natural bushland the entire way to Newcastle. While not strictly a wilderness walk, there's adequate greenery along the way and it can be tramped in any season.

The best track reference, *The Great North Walk* by walk originators Garry McDougall and Leigh Shearer-Heriot, is out of print, but libraries stock copies. The **Department of Lands** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 02-9236 7720; www.lands.nsw.gov.au; 1 Prince Albert Rd, Sydney; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) produces maps of the route in 'Discovery Kit' form (\$12).

to Box Head, Broken Bay's northern entrance. Also included is a marine reserve; fishing is prohibited in much of the park. Vehicle access is limited but there are walking tracks leading to the various beaches. The park comprises two sections on either side of Putty Beach, which has vehicular access. The **Maitland Bay Centre** (☎ 02-4360 2833; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; cnr Maitland Bay Dr & The Scenic Rd; ☎ 11am-3pm Sat & Sun) has park information and there's camping at **Little Beach camp site** (adult/child \$8/4), **Putty Beach camp site** (\$5/3) and **Tallow Beach camp site** (\$8/4) – book through the Gosford NPWS Office (p136).

Tours

The historic **MV Lady Kendall** (☎ 02-4323 1655; www.starshipcruises.com.au; Gosford Public Wharf, Dane Dr; adult/child/concession \$25/12/19; ☎ 10.15am Sat-Wed, leaves Woy Woy Public Wharf 10.40am) has 2½-hour Brisbane Water cruises. Ask about their less frequent Wine-tasting and Four Island cruises (Dangar, Milson, Scotland and Lion Islands).

Getting There & Away

Gosford is easily accessible from the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy. Rent a car here from **Budget** (☎ 02-4325 0636; www.budget.com.au; cnr York & Melbourne Sts; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat & Sun) or **Hertz** (☎ 02-4324 9859; www.hertz.com.au; 346 Mann St; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) from \$69 per day.

CityRail (☎ 13 15 00; www.131500.com.au) trains run from Sydney's Central Station to Gosford (adult/child \$10/5, 1½ hours, at least hourly).

TERRIGAL

☎ 02

Clinging to the slopes of a rocky coastal gulch, Terrigal is a sometimes hectic social omelette of beach culture, alternative lifestyle and cosmopolitan café hobnobbery. It manages to be trendy without too much pretentiousness, a constant mingled buzz of locals and visitors exploiting the tasty views and chilled atmosphere. The **visitors centre** (☎ 4385 4430, 1300 132 975; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; Rotary Park, Terrigal Dr; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has local information and professional staff.

Sleeping & Eating

Terrigal Beach Backpackers (☎ 4385 3330; www.yha.com.au; 12 Campbell Cres; 4-/8-bed dm \$30/25, d/f \$65/99; ☎) This roomy, slate-floored hostel is close enough to Terrigal's main strip to smell the cappuccino. Highlights include a spacey couch-littered lounge, stainless-steel kitchen, spick-and-span dorms, barbecue area and lazy thatched balcony. Staff are downright gracious.

Chalet Terrigal (☎ 4733 4924, 0407 434 969; www.chaleterrigal.com.au; 84 Riviera Ave; 3-bedroom lodge \$95-180) Perfect for groups, this self-contained timber lodge on a lofty backstreet is a real find. Drink in the views (or something more traditionally intoxicating) from the barbecue deck atop a steep native garden. Inside it's a stylish, modern, fully gadgeted affair. It's a steep climb from the beach if you don't have a car.

Supermex (☎ 4384 6289; L1, cnr Church St & Campbell Cres; mains \$17-29; ☎ dinner) Infusing Terrigal's fish-and-chip morass with red-hot chilli pepper flavours, Supermex serves up volcanic enchiladas, tacos, burritos and quesadillas. The chilli selection is fully itemised, ranging from manageable jalapeños to face-melting habañeros (Johnny Cash's favourite chilli).

Getting There & Away

Busways (☎ 4368 2277; www.131500.com.au) buses run between Gosford Station and Terrigal (one-way adult/child \$5/3, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

THE ENTRANCE

☎ 02

Civilisation spreads decorously up the coast before turning abruptly into urban jungle at The Entrance, a dense cluster of cream brick, palm trees, plastic chairs and beer-bellied summer tourists with their inexhaustible kids. The

WATERTAINMENT

The Central Coast's inland lakes and surf surplus generates plenty of aquatic activity.

Central Coast Charters (☎ 0427 665 544; www.centralcoastcharters.net; Terrigal & Ettalong; morning/afternoon charters per person \$110/88) offers year-round morning fishing charters and afternoon charters between October and April. Ask about seasonal whale-watching cruises. **Hardys Bay Yacht Charters** (☎ 02-4360 1442; www.hbyc.com.au; Hardys Bay; 3hr twilight cruise per person \$60, half-/full-day charter per boat \$500/700) offers twilight cruises and yacht charters including a skipper. **Wandering The Lake Cruises** (☎ 1300 737 453; www.wanderingcruises.com.au; The Entrance; 2-3hr cruises adult/child/family from \$23/10/61) runs cruises on the Wyong River and Tuggerah Lake, including lunch, wildlife spotting and morning tea, pelican feeding and twilight dinner cruises.

If you want to get more intimate with the water, **Ocean Planet** (☎ 02-4342 2222; www.oceanplanet.com.au; 25 Broken Bay Rd, Ettalong, tours adult/child from \$95/50) has a range of sea- and river-kayaking day trips for all-comers. **Terry McDermott Surf Coaching** (☎ 02-4399 3388; www.surfcoaching.com.au; 2hr lesson incl equipment \$45) provides expert surfing tutelage for novices and wannabes anywhere along the coast. **Central Coast Surf School** (☎ 0417 673 277; ccsurfschool@hotmail.com; Terrigal, Avoca & Umina beaches; 1hr lesson incl equipment \$40) runs small-group surf lessons. For an even closer encounter, **Pro Dive** (☎ 02-4334 1559; www.prodiventralcoast.com.au; 96 The Entrance Rd, The Entrance; 4-day course \$375) provides learn-to-dive PADI courses and escorted dives for experienced submariners.

Entrance is the 'pelican capital of Australia', but everyone's really here for beautiful Tuggerah Lake and the grinding surf beach.

The volunteers at the **visitors centre** (☎ 4385 4430, 1300 132 975; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; Marine Pde; ☎ 9am-5pm) swing between competent and confused, but have a wealth of information at their disposal. **The Entrance Bike Hire** (☎ 4333 3900; www.bikehiretours.com.au; bike hire per half-/full-day \$15/35; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the same building. It also runs four-hour local tours (\$55 per person). On the beachfront nearby, the (voracious!) resident pelicans are fed daily at 3.30pm. Beside the bridge, **The Entrance Boatshed** (☎ 02-4332 2652; The Entrance Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat & Sun, daily Dec-Feb) rents out aqua-bikes (\$20 per hour), canoes (\$15 per hour), rowboats (\$20 per hour) and motorboats (from \$30 per hour).

Entrance Hotel (☎ 4332 2001; www.entrancehotel.com.au; 87 The Entrance Rd; s/d incl breakfast \$50/100) is a

genuine old-timer pub sitting defiantly unrenovated at the end of the patioed, tarted-up foreshore. Most rooms have bathrooms and views, but they're popular so book ahead.

The Hotel's **bistro** (mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) has a sizable courtyard and serves steaks, seafood and the odd curry (sometimes very odd).

If you're tent-bound, **Paradise Park** (☎ 4334 5555, 1300 658 865; www.paradisepark.com.au; cnr Pacific St & Tuggerah Pde; unpowered sites per 2 people \$30, cabins \$55-160) has timber cabins and villas with polished interiors and mod cons (some with spas). It's a tranquil spot facing Tuggerah Lake, with a fishing jetty and shoreline walking track just across the road.

Red Bus Services (☎ 4332 8655; www.131500.com.au) runs from Gosford Station to The Entrance (one-way adult/child \$7/4, 45 minutes, roughly hourly).

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