

EXCURSIONS

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Sydney might seem like it has it all, but you'll be missing out if you don't tear yourself away to visit one of the fabulous day-trip destinations just a short hop away.

Superb national parks, secluded beaches, historic towns, timeless rivers, dramatic limestone caves and sophisticated wineries are all easily accessible from the centre of the city. Regular public transport links generally exist, although some of the more isolated (and often more rewarding) pockets are harder to reach. Hiring a car (p219) or taking part in an organised tour (p225) are both good options.

A return trip within a day is feasible for each destination but you'll get more out of some areas – especially the Blue Mountains and the Hunter Valley wineries – if you stay at least one night.

NATURE

Nature-loving Sydneysiders are spoilt for choice when it comes to excursions out of their city. If time and transport options are tight, the perennial favourite for residents and visitors alike is the **Blue Mountains** (right), which has good transport connections, a wealth of tour possibilities and some of the most magnificent scenery in Australia. There are accommodation and dining options to suit any budget. A popular side trip is a visit to the awe-inspiring grottoes of **Jenolan Caves** (p207). If you prefer serene waterways, then the stunning **Hawkesbury River** (p213) offers small townships with local charm, along with the chance to sleep on a houseboat and wend your way through untamed bush on the riverbanks. To the south of Sydney, the **Royal National Park** (p211) is one of the world's oldest protected areas of natural wilderness. Ghostly eucalyptus trees, magnificent coastline and fine trekking are all part of its appeal.

DRIVING

Bells Line of Road (p206) is arguably the most delightful drive in New South Wales (NSW). It winds its way up through the charming historic township of Richmond, passing through the enchanting hamlets of Kurrajong Heights and Bilpin. The route is particularly appealing at sunset in autumn, and the boxes of orchard-fresh fruit along the road add to the appeal.

BEACHES

The **Central Coast** (p214) has sun, sand, surf and services in one glorious coastal swathe. You can reach most destinations in a day, with

good train links between Sydney and Gosford, but an overnight or weekend trip will let you squeeze the most out of the fine weather and many beaches.

To the south of Sydney, dramatic, a rugged coastline and forests are the backdrop for the unspoilt beaches of the **Royal National Park** (p211).

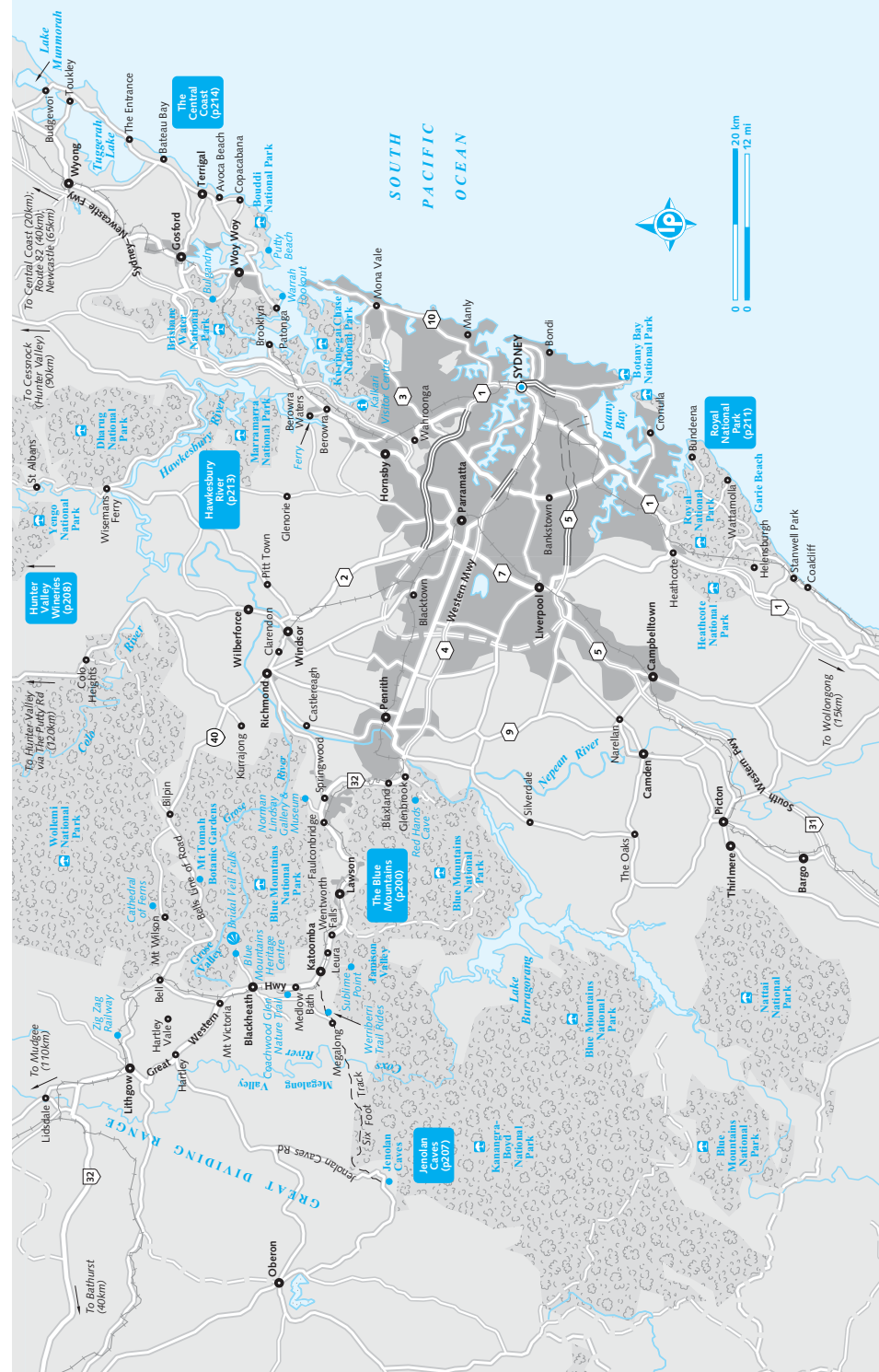
WINE

Hunter Valley reds are famous, and justifiably so. We've included the **Hunter Valley Wineries** (p208) here as a day trip, although the region is a 2½-hour drive from Sydney so staying overnight makes more sense. That way, you can really take advantage of the cellar-door tastings and charming scenery.

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

For a taste of the extraordinary raw beauty of the Australian bush, few places rival the Blue Mountains, just a couple of hours from the skyscrapers of Sydney. The area's 1001 treks and lookouts allow everyone – from pensioners with pacemakers to the downright intrepid – to explore this unspoilt natural wilderness. It is quite simply a must-do trip for anybody with more than a few days in the city. Age-old rock formations, magnificent ghostly ancient gum trees, impossibly steep gorges and majestic views every which way will haunt visitors long after they leave.

Forming part of the Great Dividing Range, the Blue Mountains begin 65km inland from Sydney and rise to more than 1200m above sea level. The formation is in fact a sandstone plateau riddled with spectacular gullies eroded by rivers over millennia. The blue haze, which gave the mountains their name, is actually a



fine mist of evaporated eucalyptus oil from the gumtrees.

Initially thought to be impenetrable, the mountains were first crossed by European explorers in 1813. In an epic journey, Gregory Blaxland, William C Wentworth and William Lawson followed the mountain ridges over the top, their route pretty much the same as that followed by today's Great Western Hwy. Gradually settlers moved into the area, and in the 20th century it developed into a popular getaway for Sydneysiders to escape the summer heat, experience a bit of a winter wonderland, and for honeymooners seeking upmarket rooms with gorgeous views. While more and more crowds flock here each year, there are still huge swathes of untamed land. As you would expect in such rugged terrain, there are hazards. Walkers sometimes get lost, bushfires can flare up in summer and poisonous snakes do bite. These are relatively rare occurrences, but be aware that the dangers exist and seek up-to-date advice from the visitor centres.

Also be prepared for a difference in climate: you can swelter in Sydney but shiver in Katoomba. Autumn mists and drizzle can make bushwalking somewhat less appealing. In winter the days are often clear, and in the valleys it can be almost warm. There is usually some snowfall between June and August, and the region has a Yulefest in July, when many restaurants and guesthouses offer 'Christmas' dinners.

The **Blue Mountains National Park** protects large areas to the north and south of the Great Western Hwy. It's the most popular and

accessible of the national parks in the area, with great bushwalking, scenic lookouts, breathtaking waterfalls and Aboriginal stencils. There are walks lasting from a few minutes to several days, and the two most popular trekking destinations are Jamison Valley, south of Katoomba, and Grose Valley, northeast of Katoomba and east of Blackheath. The area south of Glenbrook is also rewarding walking territory where you will find **Red Hands Cave**, an old Aboriginal shelter with hand stencils on the walls. It's an easy 7km return walk, southwest of the Glenbrook Visitor Centre.

The famous artist and author Norman Lindsay (1879–1969) lived 6km northeast of Springwood from 1912 until his death. His home is now the **Norman Lindsay Gallery & Museum** (☎ 4751 1067; www.normanlindsay.com.au; 14 Norman Lindsay Crescent, Faulconbridge; adult/child \$9/4; ☒ 10am–4pm). It houses many of his risqué paintings, cartoons, illustrations and sculptures. The grounds are well worth a wander.

Just south of the town of **Wentworth Falls**, there are great views of the **Jamison Valley**. You can see the spectacular 300m-high Wentworth Falls from **Falls Reserve**, also the starting point for a network of walking tracks. The tree-lined streets of Wentworth Falls are home to the **Falls Gallery** (☎ 4757 1139; www.fallsgallery.com.au; 161 Falls Rd, Wentworth Falls; admission \$2; ☒ 10am–5pm Wed–Sun), one of the Blue Mountains' best privately run galleries. The paper and ceramic collections are displayed within a lovingly restored clapboard house amid well-manicured gardens.

Leura, 3km east of Katoomba, is a quaint tree-lined town full of country stores and cafés

TRANSPORT: THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

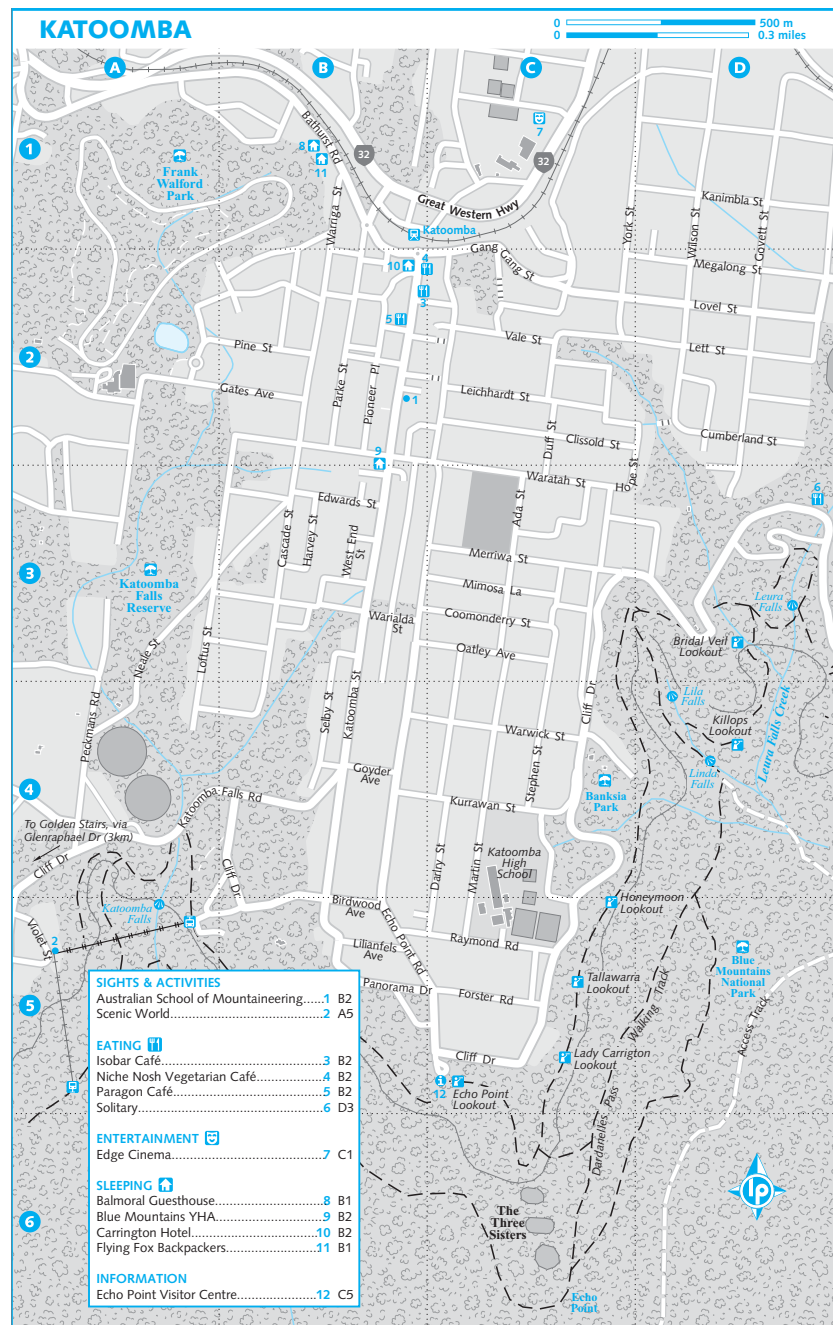
Distance from Sydney to Katoomba 109km

Direction West

Travel time Two hours

Car Take Parramatta Rd and head onto the Western Motorway tollway (M4; \$2.20) at Strathfield. West of Penrith, the motorway becomes the Great Western Hwy, and continues to Lithgow.

Train These run approximately hourly from Central Station. The trip takes two hours (peak return \$23.20) to Katoomba, and there are stops at plenty of Blue Mountains townships on the way. Services run roughly hourly between stations east of Katoomba and approximately every two hours between stations to the west. One excellent option is the ExplorerLink ticket (adult/child \$42.20/16.60) which gets you to Katoomba station and gives access to the Explorer Bus, which stops at 30 Blue Mountains attractions. A three-day ExplorerLink ticket is also available (adult/child \$57.60/24.30). See www.cityrail.info/fares/link_tickets.jsp. Sit on the left-hand side of the train going from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, as the views are better.



and home to some of Australia's most beautiful gardens. The **NSW Toy and Railway Museum & Leuralla Gardens** (☎ 4784 1169; www.toyandrailwaymuseum.com.au; 36 Olympian Pde, Leura; adult/child museum & garden \$12/6, garden only \$8/4; ☞ 10am-5pm) is an Art Deco mansion, housing a fine collection of 19th-century Australian art, as well as a toy and model-railway museum. The historic house, set in five hectares of lovely gardens, is a memorial to HV 'Doc' Evatt, a former Labor Party leader and first president of the UN. Make sure you cross the road for a stunning valley view. A lookout here includes two statues and an amphitheatre. Also in town is **Everglades Garden** (☎ 4784 1938; www.evergladesgardens.info; 37 Everglades Ave, Leura; adult/child \$7/3; ☞ 10am-5pm spring & summer, 10am-4pm autumn & winter), a magnificent 1930s garden created by Danish 'Master Gardener' Paul Sorenson, with terraces, stone walls, gnarled banksias, waterfalls, grottoes and dramatic views over Jamison Valley.

Sublime Point, south of Leura, is another great cliff-top lookout. Nearby, **Gordon Falls Reserve** is a popular picnic spot. From here you can take the cliff-top path or Cliff Dr 4km west past Leura Cascades to Katoomba's **Echo Point**, where there is a visitors centre and the Blue Mountains' most popular sight: the **Three Sisters**, a trio of rocky pinnacles that draw gasps and launch a thousand photographs. They look particularly attractive when floodlit at night. Katoomba and the adjacent centres of Wentworth Falls and Leura form the tourist centre of the Blue Mountains. **Katoomba**, which has an excellent hostel, is probably the most convenient base of all. The town itself is Art Deco central, especially at the top end, although it does feel down-at-heel in parts. A cluster of cafés compete for the tourist dollar, particularly at the top of the steep main drag, Katoomba Street. A New Age scene has developed here, mixing peacefully with a strong born-again Christian presence. Several places in town, such as the **Australian School of Mountaineering**, offer rock climbing, abseiling, canyoning and caving adventure activities.

To the west of Echo Point Lookout, at the junction of Cliff Dr and Violet St, is **Scenic World** (☎ 4782 2699; www.scenicworld.com.au; round trip on railway & cableway adult/child/family \$19/10/48; ☞ 9am-5pm). Imagine Disneyland in the bush and you've almost got it. It's the Blue Mountains, theme-park style, with attractions including a railway, Cableway and Skyway, as well as a scenic walkway. This is great if your time is limited or if the kids are in tow. All rides offer

brehtaking views from breathtaking heights. The railway runs to the bottom of the Jamison Valley, where the popular six-hour walk to the **Ruined Castle** rock formation begins. The railway was built in the 1880s to transport coal miners, and its 45-degree incline is one of the steepest in the world. The Cableway, an enclosed wheelchair-accessible cable car, also descends to the valley floor. The most recently added ride is the Skyway, a cable car that crosses Katoomba Falls gorge. Its 'electro scenic' glass floor gives passengers views of the valley canopies 200m below.

If you have your own transport, you can reach the **Golden Stairs** walk, a superb, less congested way down to the Ruined Castle. To get there head down Narrow Neck Rd, which soon becomes Cliff Dr. The unsealed Glenrappael Dr is the seventh turn-off on the right. Watch out for the signs to the Golden Stairs a couple of kilometres down on the left. It is a marvellously steep, exhilarating trail down into the canyon.

Should bad weather intervene, you can always catch the views virtually on the giant screen at the **Edge Cinema** (☎ 4782 8900; www.edgecinema.com.au; 225 Great Western Hwy, Katoomba; admission adult/child \$14.50/9.50). It is just outside the town.

Past Katoomba lies the little town of **Blackheath**, a good base for visiting the Grose and Megalong valleys. Superb lookouts east of town include **Govetts Leap** (named after a 'daring bushranger'), the adjacent **Bridal Veil Falls** (the highest in the Blue Mountains) and **Evans Lookout** (turn off the highway just south of Blackheath). Northeast of the town, via Hat Hill Rd, are **Pulpit Rock**, **Perrys Lookdown** and **Anvil Rock**. This is near the **Wind-Eroded Cave** where the setting sun can cast an amazing light show. A long cliff-edge track leads from Govetts Leap to Pulpit Rock and there are walks down into the **Grose Valley** itself. Perrys Lookdown is at the beginning of the shortest route to the beautiful **Blue Gum Forest** in the bottom of the valley – about four hours return – but you'll want to linger longer. It was damaged by fire in November 2006, but should be reopened to walkers by early 2008.

For updates, and details of other walks, make the very professional and helpful Blue Mountains Heritage Centre your first port of call. It is located on Govetts Leap Rd about 3km off the Great Western Hwy. The centre also has an interesting interpretative display on the natural environment and cultural heritage of the Blue Mountains.

Megalong Valley, south of Blackheath, is largely cleared farmland but it's still a beautiful place,

HARTLEY HISTORIC SITE

About 11km west of Mt Victoria, on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range, is the tiny, sandstone 'ghost' town of **Hartley**, which flourished from the 1830s but declined when it was bypassed by the railway in 1887. There are several buildings of historic interest, including the 1837 Greek Revival **courthouse** (adult \$5.50; ☞ tours at 10am, 11am, noon, 2pm, 3pm).

There is a **National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) Information Centre** (☎ 6355 2117; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2-4:20pm) in the 1845 Farmer's Inn. You can wander around the village for free, but to enter the courthouse you must book a tour (minimum four people); call the visitors centre for information. CountryLink buses meet trains at Mt Victoria station on Tuesday and Friday (both at 10.45am) and Sunday (4.25pm) for the run to Hartley – your own transport is a far better option.

Collits' Inn (☎ 6355 2072/0407 497623; www.collitsinn.com.au; Hartley Vale Rd, Hartley Vale; d from \$150) is a lovingly restored 1823 inn with rustic but well-appointed rooms, along with excellent French-influenced food (weekends only). Dinner is the only meal served; reservations are essential. Follow the signs off the Great Western Hwy along a rough unpaved road – or you can go the long way round down a road in better condition.

with awesome sandstone escarpments. The road down from Blackheath passes through pockets of rainforest and you can walk the beautiful 600m **Coachwood Glen Nature Trail**. A couple of kilometres further on is the small valley settlement of Werriberri, where there are several horse-riding outfits. **Werriberri Trail Rides** (☎ 4787 9171; www.bluemts.com.au/werriberri; Megalong Rd; rides per hr/4hr from \$48/125) can show you the area on a guided horseback ride and, best of all, the horses are well looked after. From Blackheath, it's a 9km winding drive into the Megalong Valley via Shipley and Megalong Rds.

Mt Victoria, the highest settled point in the mountains, is a small, sweet village with a semirural atmosphere, 16km northwest of Katoomba on the Great Western Hwy. It has the cute-as-a-button old-school **Mt Vic Flicks** (☎ 4787 1577; 2a Harley Ave; admission adult/child \$9/7) cinema, which screens interesting, mainly independent films.

At the other end of the beautiful Bells Line of Rd is the **Zig Zag Railway** (☎ 6355 2955; www.zigzagrailway.com.au; return ticket adult/child \$22/11), where you and the kids can experience a ride in an old steam locomotive along a railway trumpeted as a 19th-century engineering masterpiece.

INFORMATION

Australian School of Mountaineering (ASM; ☎ 4782 2014; www.asmguides.com; 166 Katoomba St, Katoomba)

Blue Mountains Heritage Centre (☎ 4787 8877; Govetts Leap Rd, Blackheath; ☞ 9am-4:30pm) The excellent, informative National Parks & Wildlife Services tourist information office in Blackheath. It's stuffed with maps, guides and gifts.

Echo Point Visitor Centre (☎ 1300 653 408; www.visitbluemountains.com.au; Echo Point Rd, Katoomba; ☞ 9am-5pm)

Glenbrook Visitor Centre (☎ 1300 653 408; www.visitbluemountains.com.au; Great Western Hwy at Glenbrook; ☞ 9am-4:30pm Sat & Sun)

EATING

Solitary (☎ 4782 1164; 90 Cliff Dr, Leura Falls; mains \$29-35; ☞ 6:30-9pm Wed-Sun, noon-3pm Sat & Sun) 'Views forever' its tagline goes but that doesn't say it all. Along with the supreme location, this understated yet sophisticated restaurant has a refined modern cuisine, with dishes such as Kangaroo Island chicken and roasted bar-mundi. The Solitary kiosk (open 10am to 4pm) has an informal, less-expensive menu, keeping the great views and cuisine accessible to those on a tighter budget. Book ahead for the restaurant.

Silk's Brasserie (☎ 4784 2534; www.silksleura.com; 128 The Mall, Leura; mains \$29-34; ☞ lunch & dinner) The rustic Tuscan-style interior and the Monet-esque drinks bar are lovely, but it's the cuisine that wins the plaudits here. The warm, friendly owners believe in slow food, which is sourced locally and prepared in a way that keeps the most demanding of critics happy.

Conservation Hut (☎ 4757 3827; www.conservationhut.com.au; Fletcher St, Wentworth Falls; mains \$19-24, sandwiches \$8-10; ☞ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) You have to put up with inflated prices for the cliff-edge view, but you won't get many finer panoramas with your coffee and cake. It's still a meeting place for a local conservation society and has walking maps and brochures available.

Isobar Café (☎ 4782 4063; 40 Katoomba St, Katoomba; mains \$15-22; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This low-lit

DETOUR: THE BELLS LINE OF ROAD

Quieter and much more scenic (and less congested) than the Great Western Hwy, this is a more northerly route between Sydney and the Blue Mountains. The road, constructed in 1841, runs from near Richmond across the mountains to Lithgow. This is a highly recommended journey if you have your own transport; you can cut across to join the Great Western Hwy near Mt Victoria. There are fine views towards the coast from Kurrajong Heights on the eastern slopes of the range, with orchards around Bilpin, and bush scenery all the way to Lithgow. The Bells Line of Rd is flanked by bush, small farms and apple orchards, with abundant fruit stalls.

Midway between Bilpin and Bell, the delightful **Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens** (☎ 4567 2154; www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au; adult/child & concession/family \$4.40/2.20/8.80; 🕒 10am-4pm Mar-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) is a cool-climate annexe of Sydney's **Royal Botanic Gardens** (p57). It specialises in nurturing southern hemisphere flora that might not thrive at the sea-level gardens in the city. The views from the deck of the visitors centre are fabulous; it's a great place to sip an espresso from the café. Parts of the gardens are wheelchair accessible. You can also buy your own piece of botanical history – Wollemi pine cuttings are on sale here.

North of Bells Line of Rd, near the gorgeous little town of **Mt Wilson**, is a remnant of rainforest known as the **Cathedral of Ferns**. Settled by people with a penchant for recreating England, the town itself is a tiny, beautiful village of hedgerows, large gardens and rows of European trees, and is particularly lovely in autumn. Near the Post House there's an information board with details of public gardens and some short walks in the area. The township is 8km north of Bells Line of Rd; the turn-off is 7km east of Bell.

Wollemi National Park, north of Bells Line of Rd, is the state's largest forested wilderness area (nearly 500,000 hectares). It stretches as far as Denman in the Hunter Valley, and has good rugged bushwalking and lots of wildlife. Access is limited and the park's centre is so isolated that a new species of tree, named the Wollemi pine, was discovered only in 1994. Don't expect to stumble across them yourself, however. Their location remains strictly under wraps. A more recent and equally thrilling discovery was the July 2003 find of a veritable gallery of Aboriginal rock art, dating back 4000 years.

jazzy venue (Art Deco of course) often has live music in the evenings. The staff were overstretched when we were here.

Paragon Café (☎ 4782 2928; 65 Katoomba St, Katoomba; mains \$15-22; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sun) A legendary Art Deco café and restaurant that has seen many a celebrity – from Bob Dylan to Ginger Rogers – snack at one of its dark-wood booths. There is also a fine selection of home-made chocolates for sale.

Leura Gourmet (☎ 4784 1438; 159 The Mall, Leura; mains \$15-19, cakes \$7-9; 🕒 8am-5pm) Head to the back of this bustling deli/café to nibble and sip with fine background views.

Niche Nosh Vegetarian Café (☎ 4782 1622; 10 Katoomba St, Katoomba; mains \$13.50-16; 🕒 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) The friendly owners realised their dream of setting up a vegetarian café in 2004 with this quirky, left-field and good-value place at the top of the main street. George Harrison would have felt at home with the hippy, New Age vibe. Dairy products are free-range.

SLEEPING

Note that many guesthouses (and even some hostels) require a minimum two-night stay at the weekend. During the week, places tend to be more flexible and cheaper.

Imperial Hotel (☎ 4787 1878; www.hotelimperial.com.au; 1 Station St, Mt Victoria; tw with shared bathroom \$79 Sun-Thu, \$89 Fri & Sat; d \$139-220) Creaking floorboards in the rambling corridors give away the age of this handsome old hotel on the Great Western Hwy. Bushwalkers can bag a budget room, lovers can sidle into the deluxe ensuite with four-poster bed.

Jemby Rinjah Eco Lodge (☎ 4787 7622; www.jembyrinjahlodge.com.au; 336 Evans Lookout Rd; \$170 Mon-Thu; \$219 Fri-Sun, extra adult \$30) These excellent, secluded, eco-friendly cabins (all with septic tanks, some with rainwater hot tubs) give a real sense of the dramatic bush setting. A purist might argue against the TVs, but that's a minor quibble. There's a daily bird feed at 8:30am. The cabins easily sleep two adults and two children.

Mercurie Grand Hydro Majestic (☎ 4788 1002; www.hydromajestic.com.au; Great Western Hwy, Medlow Bath; d from \$200) This huge Art Deco sprawl has some magnificent views over the Megalong Valley – although not from all the rooms. Recently it underwent a major facelift – rooms are decorated in Art Deco, Edwardian or French provincial style. Some of the heritage rooms are tight on size.

Broomelea Bed & Breakfast (☎ 4784 2910; www.broomelea.com.au; 273 Leura Mall, Leura; d from \$154 Sun-

Thu, \$200 Sat & Sun) Leafy Leura gets a bad rap for being hoity toity, but when B&Bs are this comfy, who cares? A manicured garden, cane furniture on the veranda, a cosy roaring fire and a lounge area to sink into are just a few of the charms of this well-appointed Edwardian building. Self-contained accommodation was being refurbished when we passed through.

Victoria & Albert Guesthouse (☎ 4787 1241; www.ourguest.com.au/victoria.albert.html; 19 Station St, Mt Victoria; d \$140) This guesthouse comes in the grand old style of 1914, with high wood-panelled ceilings. Classically conservative, it will appeal to the slightly older patterned-sweater brigade. Pool and spa are also available. There are also cheaper street-front heritage rooms with shared bathroom.

Balmoral Guesthouse (☎ 4782 2264; www.balmoralhouse.com.au; 196 Bathurst Rd, Katoomba; d from \$120 Sun-Thu, from \$135 Fri & Sat, plus Sun where Mon is a public holiday) This historic colonial guesthouse (the oldest in the Blue Mountains, don't you know?) has impeccable period details such as wrought-iron framed beds and classic Victorian décor. There is an outdoor spa and views over the valley out the back, as well as a rather indulgent three-course home-cooked breakfast in the morning. One for romantics.

Carrington Hotel (☎ 4782 1111; www.thecarrington.com.au; 15-47 Katoomba St, Katoomba; d/tw with breakfast and shared bath \$119 Sun-Thu, \$139 Fri & Sat) Nicknamed the 'Grand Old Lady of the Mountains', this elegant good-time girl still has a sparkle in her eye. A favoured venue for weddings, this huge heritage-listed hotel has rooms that range from affordable (if you are prepared to share a bathroom) to seriously opulent. Dig deep if you want French doors, spas and views.

Kinie-Ger Bush Cabins (☎ 4787 7182; 325 Evans Lookout Rd; cabins \$95 Sun-Thu, \$110 Sat & Sun; \$10 per extra person) These stone-wall bushland cabins, 3km from Blackheath, are more suitable for those on a tighter budget. They can comfortably sleep four and are in a lovely setting. If you are using public transport, you can call in advance to arrange a pick-up.

Blue Mountains YHA (☎ 4782 1416; www.yha.com.au; 207 Katoomba St, Katoomba; dm \$26-29, d/tw \$73-82) This YHA consistently gets voted one of the best backpacker accommodations in Australia. It's in a fully restored heritage-listed Art Deco building still gleaming from a colourful upgrade. There's a reading area, a BBQ on the

terrace, a games room, and an open fire during the winter. On long weekends there is a two-night minimum stay. The hostel's clued-up staff are usually on hand to help you get the best out of the Blue Mountains.

Flying Fox Backpackers (☎ 4782 4226; www.theflyingfox.com.au; 190 Bathurst Rd; dm including breakfast \$24, camping \$14) This brightly coloured, sunny and very laid-back hostel has Moroccan-style tapestries draping the walls and loads of information on the region. There is also a chill-out hut, outdoor seating and a BBQ area.

JENOLAN CAVES

Formed hundreds of millions of years ago, the vast, stunningly beautiful **Jenolan Caves** (☎ 1300 76 3311; www.jenolancaves.org.au; tour adult/child from \$22/\$15; two-hour 'Plughole' adventure tour \$58; 🕒 tours 9.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun, ghost tour 8pm Sat) network is still being explored to this day. Lying southwest of Katoomba on the western fringe of **Kanangra-Boyd National Park**, it is the largest publicly accessible cave system in the world. Clay-dating methods also suggest it is the world's oldest discovered open-cave network, formed millions of years before the demise of the dinosaurs. The caves – pronounced *jeh-noh-lan* – were known as *Binoomur* or 'Dark Places' by the Gundungarra people, to whom they had special significance. White explorers first passed through in 1813. In fact, early European cave enthusiasts were remarkably forward thinking – the Jenolan Caves area was protected from 1866, one of the reasons the translucent crystal formations, giant underground

TRANSPORT: JENOLAN CAVES

Distance from Sydney to Jenolan Caves 190km

Direction West

Travel time 45 minutes by car from Hartley

Car Turn off the Great Western Hwy at Hartley – the caves are on Jenolan Caves Rd.

Tours The caves are on plenty of tour itineraries available from Sydney or Katoomba.

Walk The Six Foot Track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves is a fairly easy three-day walk, but make sure you get information from the NPWS at the Blue Mountain Heritage Centre. The truly hardcore keep-fit fanatic could even attempt the marathon that takes place here every March (see www.sixfoot.com).

caverns and subterranean rivers have been preserved to this day. One cave has been open to the public since 1860, and nine more are open today. Cave snobs will not be disappointed.

Top-notch guided tours, with varying levels of difficulty, leave regularly each day, lasting from two to eight hours. Adventure tours take abseilers and spelunkers to places that are normally off-limits. Be warned, however: the sheer number of visitors can be overwhelming. A quarter of a million visitors troop through the caves each year. If you're visiting at the weekend or in holiday season, it is definitely worth booking in advance. Check times and cave popularity if you would prefer to do a tour without the constant burr of camcorders and 30 other visitors in tow.

Another recent feature is the self-guided audio tour of the enormous, mysterious **Devil's Coach House** and the open **Nettle Cave**, where you may hear the haunting screech of roosting sooty owls. It's informative and free if you buy a ticket for any of the guided cave visits.

EATING & SLEEPING

Jenolan Caves Cottages (☎ 6359 3311; www.jenolancaves.com.au; cottages per 6 people Sun-Thu \$89, Fri-Sat \$121, Bellbird Cottage \$143-176) All the mod-cons are to be found in these country-style timber cottages. They are 8km before the caves, but there is also the 1930s Bellbird Cottage just a short stroll from the caves.

Jenolan Caves Resort (☎ 6359 3322; www.jenolancaves.com.au; Gate House \$30 per person, Mountain Lodge Units Sun-Thu \$135, Fri-Sat \$155, Caves House d Sun-Thu \$115, Fri-Sat \$125) There are three types of accommodation at this grand old Jenolan Caves institution. There's the classic Caves House with many of the original 19th century furnishings, the motel-style Mountain Lodge and good backpacker beds at the Gate House. There's a restaurant/bistro on site.

Jenolan Cabins (☎ 6335 6239; www.jenolancabins.com.au; 42 Edith Rd, Jenolan Caves; d Mon-Thu \$98, Fri-Sun \$115; 🚰) These are a comfortably furnished, self-catering cottages with log fires, BBQ facilities and TV. Pull the blinds at night as the sunbeams reach powerfully across the valley in the morning. They are 5km beyond the caves. There's a two-night minimum stay at weekends.

HUNTER VALLEY WINERIES

Nestled serenely at the foot of the Brokenback Range, the Hunter Valley produces enough grapes to keep Bacchus' cup spilling over for eternity. It is the oldest wine-growing country in Australia, with the first vines planted here in 1831. Semillon, Shiraz and, more recently, Chardonnay are the specialties and more than 100 vineyards are dotted about the rolling countryside around **Pokolbin**, the heart of this wine country. Weirdly, the area is also known for its coal mining – some good-value accommodation is in the mining town of Cessnock – but the Hunter Valley is firmly on the tourist radar for its wineries. A whole bunch of galleries, gourmet food-tasting outfits and golf courses have mushroomed off the vineyards' success. These wineries range from mega-producers to tiny boutique operations that don't even have a cellar door. The vast majority encourage visits and tastings and the bigger and more established players sometimes offer tours. If you can, plan your trip for midweek when the valley is less crowded and the accommodation is cheaper. If you're driving, it's worth taking the scenic route along the old convict-built road that passes through Wollombi, a charming old town in its own right.

Traditionalists grumble that the area has lost its low-key charm since corporate wine and golf packages started creeping in. There is a certain 'wine as theme park' approach in some parts. But with so many cellar doors

TRANSPORT: HUNTER VALLEY WINERIES

Distance from Sydney to Cessnock 180km

Direction Northwest

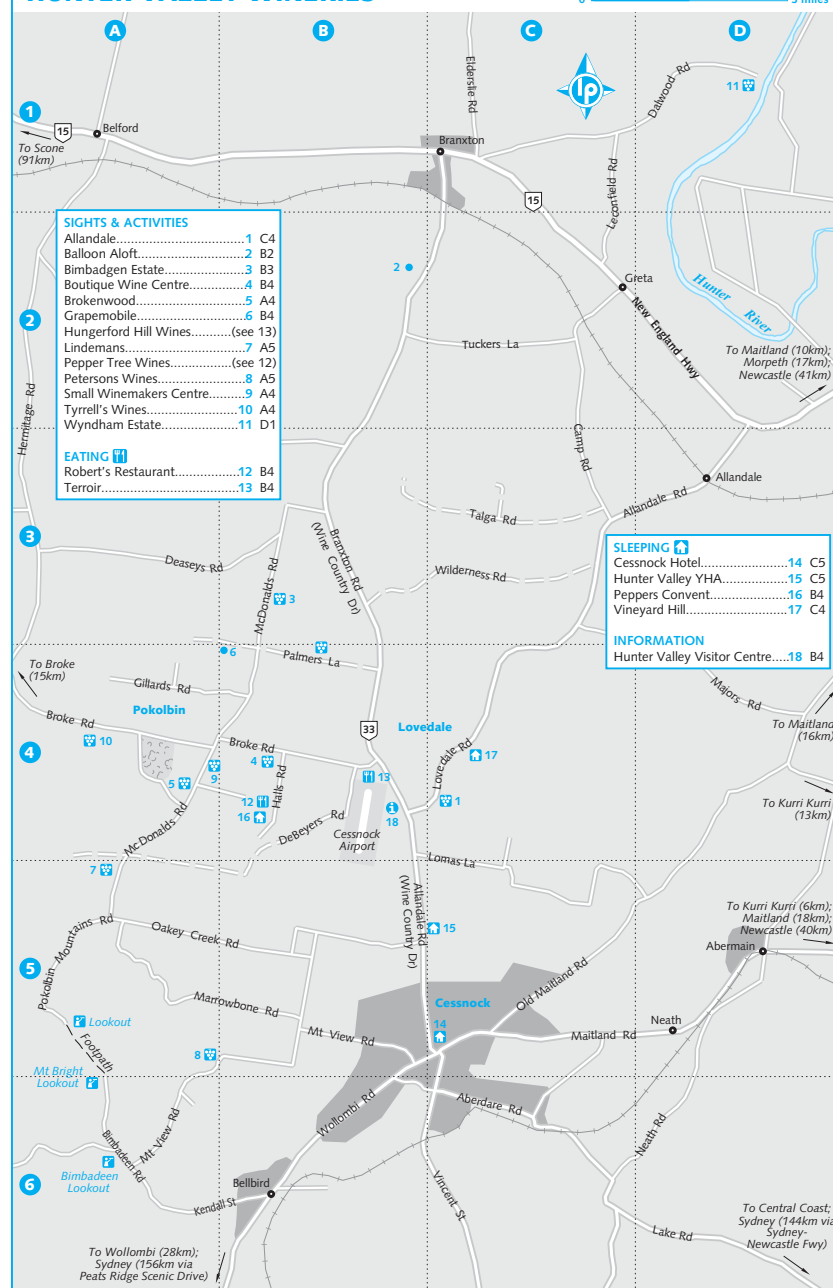
Travel time 2½ hours

Car Take the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy, which starts in Wahroonga on the North Shore, then take Rte 82 to Cessnock.

Bus This is probably your best public transport option. **Rover Coaches** (☎ 1800 801 012; www.rovercoaches.com.au) has buses from Sydney (return adult/child \$70/35). It departs from Central Station Bay 14.

Train CityRail to Newcastle (\$17.40), then Rover Coaches bus service 160 to Cessnock.

HUNTER VALLEY WINERIES



dotted around the meandering country roads, it's still easy – and very pleasant – to create your own independent version of the movie *Sideways* (drink-driving excepted, obviously). We mention a few of our favourite wineries below. But perhaps the most fun is to be had by following your nose: dip in and out of the many boutique cellar doors on your own personal quest for the perfect drop.

The most oft-mentioned name to the question, 'Which vineyard *must* I visit?' is **Tyrell's Wines** (☎ 4993 7000; www.tyrells.com.au; 1838 Broke Rd, Pokolbin; tours \$4; 🕒 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–4:30pm Sat, tours 1.30pm Mon–Sat). It's one of the most established old-school vineyards in the area, and has fiercely defended its independence. There are wine tours and some great views from its cellar door. The vineyard pioneered Chardonnay growing in the valley.

Bimbadgen Estate (☎ 4998 7585; www.bimbadgen.com.au; 790 McDonalds Road, Pokolbin; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) is on the crest of a hill, giving its lovely, lunch-only Esca restaurant a spectacular look-out over its vines through the floor to ceiling glass window.

Pepper Tree Wines (☎ 4998 7539; www.peppertree.wines.com.au; Halls Rd, Pokolbin; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm Sat & Sun) is another upmarket boutique operation in lovely grounds. It produces a wide variety of different grapes.

Over in Lovedale, **Allandale** (☎ 4990 4526; www.allandalewinery.com.au; Lovedale Rd, Lovedale; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun) produces all its wines on site. Chardonnay is one of its signature wines. Its wine cellar is perched on a hillside with valley panorama.

Brokenwood (☎ 4998 7559; www.brokenwood.com.au; 401–427 McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin; 🕒 9:30am–5pm Mon–Sun) has a low-key, popular cellar door, usually with a line of people clamouring to try the excellent Semillons and Chardonnays.

Petersons Wines (☎ 4990 1704; www.petersonswines.com.au; Mt View Rd, Mount View; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun) has arguably the prettiest location of all the vineyards. It has sparkling wines and Semillons. The staff positively encourage you to set up your own BBQ in the grounds.

Lindemans (☎ 4998 7684; www.lindemans.com.au; McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sun) is the undisputed heavyweight of the area – visit here for a taste of wine as seriously big business.

If you are a real connoisseur, drop into either the **Boutique Wine Centre** (☎ 4998 7474; www.boutiquewinecentre.com.au; Broke Rd, Pokolbin; 🕒 9am–4:30pm Mon–Sat, 10–4:30pm Sun) or the **Small Winemakers Centre** (☎ 4998 7668; www.smallwinemakerscentre.com.au; McDonalds Rd, Pokolbin; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sun), which

both have wines from boutique producers so small they don't even have cellar doors. These are bottles you won't find in any supermarket.

The **Hunter Vintage Festival**, held from January to March in the Hunter Valley, attracts hordes of wine enthusiasts for tastings, grape-picking and grape-treading contests. Other events, such as the **Lovedale Long Lunch** (www.lovedalelonglunch.com.au) in May are great ways of tasting the best of the area's wines and food. Some of the bigger wineries also hold musical events in their rambling, extensive grounds. They run the gamut from opera to Bryan Adams. They are held most frequently at the long-established **Wyndham Estate** (☎ 4938 3444; www.wyndhamestate.com; 700 Dalwood Rd, Dalwood; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sun) in its picturesque riverside grounds each year.

Balloon Aloft (☎ 4938 1955; www.balloonaloft.com; 1443 Wine Country Dr, North Rothbury; balloon flights over the valley per adult/child \$295/180) is a great – but pricey – adventure travel experience. Apparently marriage proposals are common in the rarefied dawn air above the Hunter Valley. Cheaper, last-minute standby options are also available.

Grapemobile (☎ 0418 404 039; cnr McDonalds Rd & Palmers Lane, Pokolbin; bike hire per day/2 days from \$25/\$35) offers advice on pedalling through the vines.

INFORMATION

Hunter Valley Visitor Centre (☎ 4990 0900; www.winecountry.com.au; 455 Wine Country Drive, Pokolbin; 🕒 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 9am–4pm Sun) This visitors centre has a huge stock of leaflets and information on accommodation, attractions and dining in the region.

EATING & SLEEPING

Cessnock Hotel (☎ 4990 1002; 234 Wollombi Rd, Cessnock; d Sun–Thu \$60, d incl breakfast Fri & Sat \$90) This large, town-centre pub offers maintained rooms with high ceilings and many of their original early 20th-century fittings.

Wright Taste (☎ 4991 4414) The bright, fresh café that adjoins the Cessnock Hotel.

Hunter Valley YHA (☎ 4991 3278; www.yha.com.au; 100 Wine Country Dr, Nulkaba; dm \$25, tw \$70–90) This is an excellent, small-scale and friendly hostel with very helpful staff. Staying here is easily the best-value way to see the region. Ask for the Grape Escape tour which includes transfers, a wine-tasting tour and accommodation for \$159.

Peppers Convent (☎ 4998 7764; www.peppers.com.au; Halls Rd, Pokolbin; d including breakfast from \$198 per person) The building, a former nunnery, was transferred in blocks from hundreds of kilometres inland and refurbished in a sumptuous, almost fussy French-provincial style. Nearby is the equally upmarket Robert's Restaurant, part of the adjoining Pepper Tree Wines (opposite).

Terroir (☎ 4990 0711; 1 Broke Rd, Pokolbin; mains \$33–39; 🕒 noon–3pm Tue–Sun, 6pm–late Wed–Sat) Located at the Hungerford Hill Wines, this is *the* deluxe, refined eating option in the area, with a modern Australian menu rigorously tested to complement fine wines.

Vineyard Hill (☎ 4990 4166; www.vineyardhill.com.au; Lovedale Rd, Lovedale; d \$118 Sun–Thu, \$170 Fri & Sat) The pleasant self-contained units have decks on which to stretch out and enjoy fine views of the Hunter Valley. There is a BBQ area for guests too. This place usually gets booked up on weekends.

ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

This gem of a park is just 32km south of central Sydney. Formed in 1879, it is the second-oldest national park in the world (the oldest is Yellowstone in the USA). Dramatic coastal cliffs plummet to the Tasman Sea on the eastern side, broken up with the occasional secluded beach. For a relatively small pocket of protected land, the park is home to a surprising range of habitats and fauna – largely due to very careful management by the National Wildlife and Parks Services. Heathlands dominate in the northern sandstone section. Creek gullies and rainforest are further inland. It won't take you long to spot the park's wildlife, whether it's a kookaburra sitting casually on a park sign or a water dragon lizard scuttling off the path. Echidnas, yellow-tailed black cockatoos and swamp wallaby are other notable residents. Be aware too that the park is home to several species of poisonous snake, so watch your step. They are usually just as keen to avoid you as you are them.

The park is also testament to the Australian bush's remarkable powers of recovery. Large swathes of the park were scorched by the 1994 bush fires, but much of the growth has already been regenerated.

Royal National Park begins at Port Hacking, just over 30km south of Sydney, and stretches 20km further south. A road runs through the park with detours to the small township of **Bundeena** on Port Hacking, to the

beautiful swimming beach at **Wattamolla**, and to the windswept surfers' paradise, **Garie Beach**.

On the north coast, one excellent walk goes from Bundeena to the **Jibbon Aboriginal rock engravings**, which are mostly outlines of the animals that the Dharawal people used to hunt and live off. Other Aboriginal sites have been discovered within the park, although they are only accessible by **tour** (p212).

Right in the heart of the park, **Forest Island** is a favourite hang-out of lyre-birds. With its picturesque picnic area, this is a particularly recommended stop-off for those with kids.

The spectacular two-day, 26km **coastal walking trail** running the length of the park is highly recommended. A walking and cycling trail follows the Hacking River south from Audley, and other walking tracks pass tranquil, freshwater swimming holes. You can swim in the upper reaches of **Kangaroo Creek** but not the Hacking River. To do the coastal walks you'll need a permit (adult/child per night \$3/2) from the visitors centre. You can also drive to the campsite at **Bonnie Vale**.

The Bungoona path near the visitors centre is a 1km wheelchair-friendly section of track that leads to Bungoona Lookout, which has far-reaching views over Hacking River and the rest of the park.

The **visitors centre** is at the bottom of the hill down from the park's main entrance, off the Princes Hwy near Audley. The friendly and knowledgeable staff sell camping permits and help with any questions about bushwalking or other aspects of the park. You can hire

TRANSPORT: ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

Distance from Sydney to Royal National Park
32km

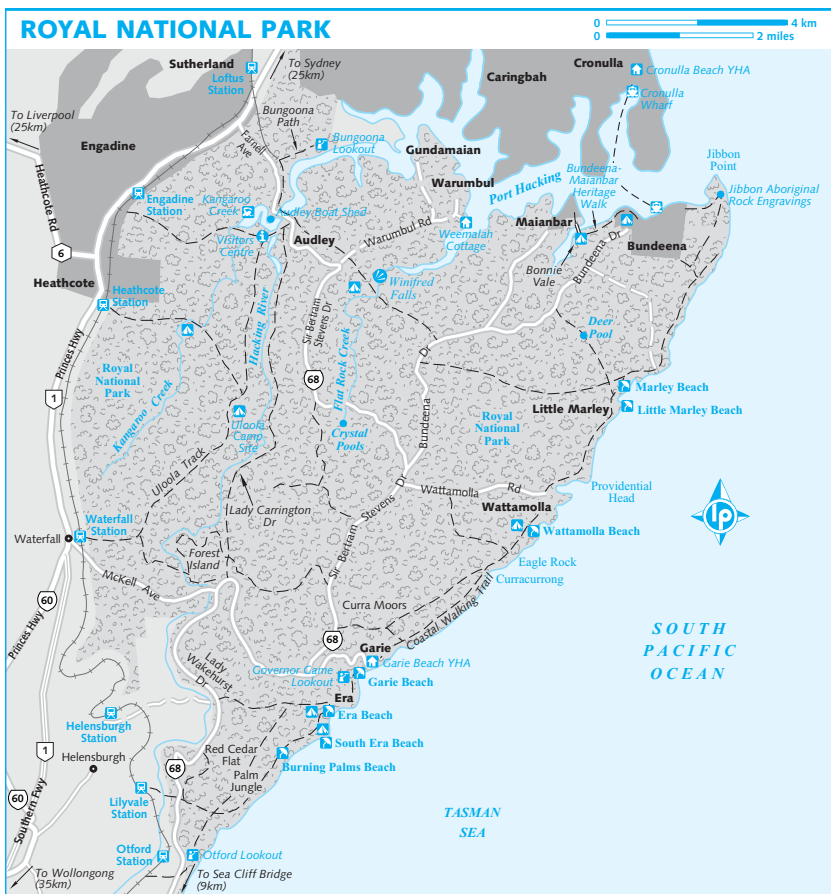
Direction South

Travel time One hour

Car Leave Sydney via the Princes Hwy and turn left off the highway 2.3km south of Sutherland. Audley is 2km further down the road.

Train Take the Illawarra line to Loftus, Engadine, Heathcote, Waterfall or Otford train stations (adult/child peak return \$10.40/5.20), all of which are on the park boundary and have walking trails into the park.

Ferry Access to the coastal walking track can be reached from Bundeena. Take the ferry from Cronulla. This is the best way to get to the park if you're bringing a bike.



equipment at the **Audley Boat Shed** just across the lake from the visitors centre.

The road through the park and the off-shoot to Bundeena are permanently open but the detours to the beaches close at 8:30pm. Those coming by car should consider continuing the journey further south to the recently opened **Sea Cliff Bridge**, a magnificent 665m stretch of raised road between Coalcliff and Clifton.

INFORMATION

Audley Boat Shed (☎ 9545 4967; Farnell Ave; canoes & kayaks per hr/day \$16/30, bicycles per hr/day \$14/30, aqua bikes per 30min \$12; 🕒 9am-5pm)

Discovery Walks Talks and Tours (☎ 9542 0629, 9542 0666; Royal National Park Visitors Centre) This outfit offers

a wide variety of themed Royal National Park tours, ranging from eagle-spotting to Aboriginal survival techniques.

Royal National Park Visitors Centre (☎ 9542 0648; per car per day \$11, free for cyclists & pedestrians; 🕒 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-4:30pm Sat & Sun)

SLEEPING

Bonnie Vale Campsite (per night adult/child \$10/5) This site is well-equipped with toilets, showers and picnic tables.

Garie Beach YHA (☎ 9261 1111; bookings@yhansw.org.au; dm per person \$15) This hostel's remote location by the park's coastal path is delightful. Facilities are basic (cold showers are in the car park) and you will need to bring supplies, including linen, with you. Booking ahead is essential.

Weemalah Cottage (☎ 9542 0632; per night May-Sep \$190, Oct-Apr \$220) Often booked up a long time

in advance at weekends, but worth a shot if you are staying midweek. Within the confines of the national park, the solar-powered cottage has three bedrooms and sleeps eight; features include gas heating, a BBQ, and TV and video.

HAWKESBURY RIVER

The Hawkesbury River weaves for hundreds of kilometres through NSW. A sense of the wild lingers on its shores – much of the riverside is little changed from the time the first European settlers ventured into the bush. Its lower reaches are lined with mangroves, and it meets the sea at Broken Bay, 30km north of Sydney. Before hitting the ocean, the river expands into bays and inlets such as Berowra Creek, Cowan Creek and Pittwater on the southern side, and Brisbane Water on the northern side. The river flows between a number of national parks – **Marramorra** and **Ku-ring-gai Chase** (see p112) to the south; and **Dharug**, **Brisbane Water** and **Bouddi** to the north. The town of Windsor is about 120km upstream.

A great way to get a feel for the river is to catch the **Riverboat Postman** from the sleepy town of Brooklyn. This mail boat does a 40km round trip on weekdays, running as far as Marlow, near Spencer. There are also coffee cruises and all-day outings (bookings are recommended).

The settlements along the river have their own distinct character and life in Brooklyn revolves around boats and the river. The town is on the Sydney–Newcastle railway line, just east of the Pacific Hwy. **Berowra Waters** is another

quaint community further upstream, clustered around a free 24-hour winch ferry that crosses Berowra Creek. There are a couple of cafés overlooking the water, and a marina where you can hire an outboard boat for about \$65 for a half-day. Berowra Waters is 5km west of the Pacific Hwy; there's a train station at Berowra, but it's a 7km hike down a very narrow road to the ferry.

The small settlement of **Wisemans Ferry** overlooks the Hawkesbury River roughly halfway between Windsor and the mouth of the river. It was named after an emancipated convict, Solomon Wiseman, who was granted land in the area and put in place the first ferry in 1826. Winch ferries are still the only means of crossing the river here to this day. Fortunately, they run 24-hours and are free. Mostly tranquil, Wisemans Ferry is getting increasingly used to Sydneysiders out for a rural escape.

An early convict-built road (unsealed, but in good condition) leads north about 21km from Wisemans Ferry to the tiny, delightful settlement of **St Albans**. It's a pretty drive, with bush on one side, and the flats of Macdonald River, a tributary of the Hawkesbury, on the other. In town it's worth stopping for a drink or meal at the **Settlers Arms Inn**, a charming inn dating back to 1836.

Yengo National Park, a rugged sandstone area covering the foothills of the Blue Mountains, stretches from Wisemans Ferry to the Hunter Valley. It's a wilderness area with very few facilities and limited road access. There are some trekking trails (plan your water supply), including a stretch along the Old Great North Rd, and a camping area at Mogo Creek. North of

TRANSPORT: HAWKESBURY RIVER

Distance from Sydney to Berowra Waters 40km

Direction North and northwest

Travel time One hour

Car To reach Berowra Waters, turn off the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy at Berowra, taking Berowra Waters Rd. To reach Brooklyn, take the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy and follow the signs. A road (signposted) leads to Wisemans Ferry from Pitt Town, near Windsor. You can also get there from Sydney on Old Northern Rd, which branches off Windsor Rd north of Parramatta.

Train There are trains running regularly from Central Station to Brooklyn's Hawkesbury River train station; the 7.40 or 8.15am trains from Central Station (\$6.20 one way) gets you to the station in time to meet the morning Riverboat Postman (above).

Ferry Free 24-hour car ferries across the Hawkesbury at Wisemans Ferry put you on the road to St Albans. The **Riverboat Postman** (☎ 9985 7566; Brooklyn Wharf, Brooklyn; adult/child/family \$45/25/115; 🕒 departs Brooklyn 9.30am, returns approximately 1.15pm, Mon-Fri) runs a ferry service and a return boat trip from Brooklyn. Bookings are recommended (see above).

the river, a scenic road leads east from Wisemans Ferry to the Central Coast, following the river before veering north through bushland and orange groves.

Dharug National Park, also on the north side of the river, is a wilderness noted for Aboriginal rock carvings that date back nearly 10,000 years. You can also walk along the convict-built Old Great North Rd. There's camping at Mill Creek 8km east of Wisemans Ferry, and Ten Mile Hollow (walk-in track only).

Marramarra National Park, south of the Hawkesbury, has vehicle access from the Old Northern Rd south of Wisemans Ferry. Camping is allowed here.

EATING & SLEEPING

Ripples (☎ 9985 5555, 9985 5534; www.ripples.com.au; 87 Brooklyn Rd, Brooklyn; 4-berth houseboats for 2 nights \$500-1200) Prices fluctuate wildly according to seasons and whether you want to travel at the weekend, but if you're in a group, this self-contained floating home with cooking facilities is reasonable value – and there are few finer ways to experience the river.

Settlers Arms Inn (☎ 4568 2111; www.settlersarms.com.au; 1 Wharf St, St Albans; d from \$130 during the week) This historic sandstone pub would not look out of place on the banks of the English Avon, besides the corrugated-iron roof and the veranda. The rooms, which are in external log cabins, are very comfortable and much better appointed than the exterior suggests.

Wisemans Ferry Inn (☎ 4566 4301; Old Northern Rd; d/tw \$75) This historic hotel is trading somewhat on its past reputation. The bistro is good (although marred by a bystanding army of beeping slot machines) while the accommodation is passable.

THE CENTRAL COAST

The Central Coast has superb surf beaches, lakes and national parks. Once a backwater, it is now developing rapidly and is a very popular weekend escape for Sydneysiders. It is also a popular refuge for retirees seeking stress-free good living. Its beautiful waterways include **Broken Bay** and **Brisbane Water** in the south and three contiguous lakes in the north – **Tuggerah Lake**, **Lake Budgewoi** near Toukley, and **Lake Munmorah**. A few kilometres north of Lake Munmorah is **Lake Macquarie**, which stretches north to Newcastle.

Gosford, the largest town in the area, is 12km inland on the shores of Brisbane Water. On the northern side of the Hawkesbury River, across from Ku-ring-gai Chase National

TRANSPORT: THE CENTRAL COAST

Distance from Sydney to Gosford 85km

Direction North

Travel time One hour 15 minutes

Car The Central Coast is easily accessible from Sydney via the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy.

Train Regular CityRail trains connect Sydney with Gosford (\$8.20) and other central coast towns.

Park, **Brisbane Water National Park** (entry per car \$7) is 7km southwest of Gosford. It extends from the Pacific Hwy in the west to Brisbane Water in the east. Made up of rugged sandstone country, the park has mangrove stands and harbours swamp wallabies, platypi and the rare yellow-bellied gliding possum. Head here for the accessible **Aboriginal rock engravings** at Bulgandry. These were etched by the Guringai tribe whose territory stretched from Sydney Harbour to Lake Macquarie before European settlers arrived. You can reach the engravings via a short signposted walk off Woy Woy Rd, 3km south of the Pacific Hwy. They are best seen in early morning or late afternoon.

Just off the Pacific Hwy southwest of Gosford is the **Australian Reptile Park** (☎ 4340 1146, www.reptilepark.com.au, Pacific Hwy; adult/child \$22.50/15.00, ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sun), famous for Eric, its enormous crocodile, and for milking deadly snakes and its venomous funnelweb spiders.

South of Brisbane Water National Park is **Patonga**, a small fishing village on Broken Bay, with a large campsite available. A 500m walk off the road to Patonga is **Warrah Lookout**, which has a lovely panoramic view of Broken Bay.

Bouddi National Park is a smaller protected area, which has some sweet secluded beaches where you are allowed to camp, most notably at **Putty Beach**.

Upmarket **Terrigal**, 12km east of Gosford, is the centre of the region's café and restaurant culture. In September 2008, an Australian Navy frigate, the **HMAS Adelaide**, is set to be sunk just off the town's shore, creating a whole new artificial reef for divers to explore. **Terrigal Dive School** (☎ 4384 1219; www.terrighaldiver.com.au; The Haven), Australia's oldest dive school, can help with diving in the area.

North of Terrigal, **Bateau Bay** meets the southern section of the small Wyrabalong National Park. It's popular for surfing.

At **Avoca Beach** there is a lovely curving surf beach guarded by a string of tall pine trees. It is a low-key little place which also has the charming old-school **Avoca Beach Picture Theatre** (☎ 4382 1777; www.avocabeachpicturetheatre.com.au; 69 Avoca Beach; admission adult/child \$12.50/10).

The Entrance, on the sea inlet of Tuggerah Lake, 15km north of Terrigal, is a slice of suburban sprawl set beside a beautiful lake and superb surf beach. It is known as the pelican capital of Australia for its daily beachfront feeding (at 3:30pm) of these charismatic long-beaked birds (interesting fact: the Australian pelican has the longest bill of any bird in the world). You can reach The Entrance either by driving north from Terrigal or by taking the Tuggerah exit off the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy.

North of here are the towns of **Toukley** and **Budgewoi**, popular bases for boating and fishing.

INFORMATION

Central Coast Tourism (☎ 1300 132 975, 4385 4430; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; The Avenue, Mt Penang Parklands, Kariang) Well informed and very helpful main office of the region's tourist authority.

Gosford Visitor Centre (☎ 1300 132 975; 4385 4430; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; 200 Mann St, Gosford; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun)

National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS office ☎ 4320 4203; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; Suite

36-38, 207 Albany St North, Gosford; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Call here for info on Brisbane Water and Bouddi National Parks.

The Entrance Visitor Centre (☎ 1300 132 975; 4385 4430; www.visitcentralcoast.com.au; Marine Pde, The Entrance; ☎ 9am-5pm)

EATING & SLEEPING

Crowne Plaza Terrigal (☎ 4384 9111; www.crowneplaza.com.au; Pine Tree La, Terrigal; d from \$199) At the hub of Terrigal's tourist business, this monolith has some plush rooms with great views over the beach. There are three restaurants, spas and massage too. Room prices fluctuate radically according to season and availability.

DG's Deli (☎ 4384 3678; 82 Terrigal Drive; mains \$17-24; ☎ 7am-8:30pm Mon-Sun) The cuisine at DG's Deli is a notch above most options on the beachfront.

Reef Restaurant and Grill (☎ 4385 3222; The Haven, Terrigal; mains \$27-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sun) Expensive, very good restaurant (with a cheaper adjoining café) that scoops major critical plaudits for its modern Australian cuisine. The sweeping ocean panorama from the dining room isn't bad either.

Ye Olde Miami Guesthouse (☎ 4384 1919; www.miamiquesthouse.com.au; 9 Ocean View Dr, Terrigal; s/d with shared bathroom \$50/65) These cramped, clean pine-floored rooms are about 10 minutes' walk from the main restaurant and beach zone.

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