

Tasman Peninsula & Port Arthur



Just an hour from Hobart are the staggering coastal landscapes, sandy surf beaches and potent historic sites of the Tasman Peninsula. The *numero uno* ticket on the Tassie tourist trail is here – the Port Arthur Historic Site. There are boundless other attractions (natural and otherwise) down this way – enough to warrant a stay of at least a couple of days. If you're feeling active, bushwalking, surfing, sea-kayaking, scuba diving and rock climbing opportunities abound.

On the wild side of proceedings, don't miss a visit to the peninsula's legendary 300m-high sea cliffs, which will dose you up on natural awe. Most of the cliffs are protected by Tasman National Park, a coastal enclave that also embraces chunky offshore islands, magical underwater kelp forests, and heaths containing rare plants. The cliffs are a safe haven for innumerable seabirds, including wedge-tailed eagles, while the fertile waters below throng with seals, dolphins and whales. Waiting portentously at the end of Arthur Hwy is Port Arthur, the infamous and allegedly escape-proof penal colony of the mid-19th century. The crowds mill around the ruins – kids laugh and kick footballs while dads poke sausages on BBQs – but it's impossible to forget that this is a tragic place, both historically and more recently. Figures show that the downturn in regional tourism following the 1996 massacre has been reversed in recent years, and a number of tourism developments (new resort-style hotels and expansions of old ones) are leaping from architects' drawing boards into reality.

HIGHLIGHTS

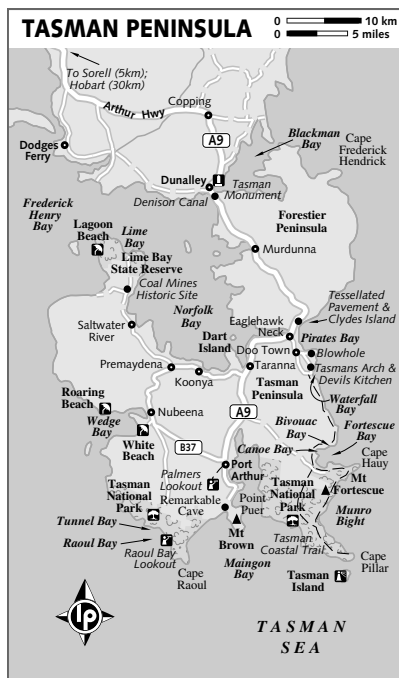
- Paying your respects to the past, both distant and recent, at the **Port Arthur Historic Site** (p128)
- **Sea-kayaking** (p122) around the Tasman Peninsula's broken coastline
- Getting your hands dirty picking fresh raspberries, apricots and silvanberries at the **Sorell Fruit Farm** (p123)
- Spotting seals, dolphins and maybe even a whale on a cruise around **Tasman Island** (p129) from Port Arthur
- Battling vertigo atop the southern hemisphere's highest sea cliffs at Cape Pillar on the **Tasman Coastal Trail** (p124)
- Carving up the southern surf (or learning how to) at **Eaglehawk Neck** (p125)
- Chowing down on a canal-side burger at the **Waterfront Café** (p123) in Dunalley
- Pitching your tent at remote **Fortescue Bay** (p127) and falling asleep to the lull of the waves



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ www.tasmanregion.com.au

■ www.portarthur.org.au



Getting There & Around

Take care driving down the peninsula to Port Arthur if you're behind the wheel, as plenty of gnarly accidents have occurred on the Arthur Hwy. It's a wiggly, narrow road in places, with exits hidden behind hills and around corners, and the usual idiots with lead feet.

Regional public-transport connections are surprisingly poor. **Tassielink** (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) runs a weekday evening bus from Hobart to Port Arthur (\$25, 2¼ hours) during school terms, reducing to Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings during school holidays. Buses stop at the main towns en route.

Redline Coaches (☎ 1300 360 000; www.redlinecoaches.com.au) also operates some weekday services between Hobart, Sorell and Dunalley, but no further south.

TOURS

If you don't have wheels, you can take a coach or ferry tour to the Tasman Peninsula from Hobart. Many operators run trips to Port Arthur. Some options:

Bottom Bits Bus (☎ 1800 777 103, 6229 3540; www.bottombitsbus.com.au; full-day tours \$110) Small-group backpacker-focused day trips (every day except Tuesday and Thursday) including Port Arthur entry, evening ghost tour (Saturday only; additional cost) and visits to the peninsula's natural attractions (Tessellated Pavement, Tasman Arch, Devil's Kitchen).

Gray Line (☎ 6234 3336, 1300 858 687; www.grayline.com.au; full-day tour adult/child \$90/45) Coach tours ex-Hobart, including a harbour cruise around the Isle of the Dead, Port Arthur admission and guided tour, and pit stops at Tasman Arch and the Devils' Kitchen.

Navigators (☎ 6223 1914; www.navigators.net.au; Brooke St Pier, Hobart; full-day tour adult/child \$149/110) Cruises from Hobart to Port Arthur, returning on a coach, departing Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Includes entrance to the historic site, guided tour and morning tea. Also running is a cruise around Tasman Island from Port Arthur (see p93).

Port Arthur Bus Service (☎ 6250 2200; www.tasmancruises.com.au; full-day trip adult/child \$90/55) Meet Port Arthur on your own terms, with a ride there and back (including admission) from Tasman Island Cruises. Departs Hobart visitors centre at 8am; bookings required.

Roaring 40s Ocean Kayaking (☎ 6265 5000; www.roaring40stours.com.au; 1-/3-day tour \$255/1150) Based in Kettering (p136), Roaring 40s also conducts epic sea-kayaking tours around the Tasman Peninsula, paddling past the monumental coastline. Prices include equipment, meals, accommodation and transfers from Hobart.

Tasman Island Cruises (☎ 6250 2200; www.tasmancruises.com.au; full-day tour adult/child \$220/150) Take a bus to Port Arthur for a three-hour ecocruise around Tasman Island, then explore the Port Arthur Historic Site and bus it back to town. Includes morning tea, lunch and Port Arthur admission. Departs Hobart visitors centre at 8am; bookings required. You can also take just the cruise from Port Arthur (see p129).

SORELL

☎ 03 / pop 1730

Sorell is one of Tasmania's oldest towns, settled in 1808 primarily to supply locally processed wheat and flour to the rest of the colony, but its historic aura has tarnished over time. These days it's a T-junction service town with more petrol stations and fast-food joints than anything else, but it's still the gateway to the Tasman Peninsula. For maps and peninsula info, swing into the **Sorell visitors centre** (☎ 6265 6438; www.tasmanregion.com.au; 16 Main Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm May, 10am-4pm Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Apr). Pick up the *Tasman - The Essence of Tasmania* and the *Convict Trail* booklets, which cover the peninsula's key historic sites.

A handful of 19th-century buildings have survived near the centre of town and are worth a look. The 1841 **Scots Uniting Church** (Arthur St) is behind the high school. Also near the school are the **Sorell Barracks** (31 Walker St), now colonial accommodation, and the 1829 **Blue Bell Inn** (cnr Somerville & Walker Sts). On the main drag is the 1884 **St George's Anglican Church** (Gordon St), its adjacent **graveyard** propped with the headstones of early settlers.

The perfect pit stop is the **Sorell Fruit Farm** (☎ 6265 3100; www.sorellfruitfarm.com; 174 Pawleena Rd; pay per kilo, \$6 minimum pick; ☎ 8.30am-5pm late Oct-May) where you can pick your own fruit from their intensively planted 12.5 acres. There are 15 different kinds of edibles on offer, including strawberries, raspberries, cherries, apricots, peaches and apples, and more exotic varieties like loganberries, tayberries and silvanberries. December and January are the best months for variety, but different fruits are in season at different times – check the website for a nifty chart. Afterwards, enjoy a snack or a mellifluous coffee in the **tearooms** (lights meals \$5-9), or purchase a wide range of fruity jams, chutneys, sauces, wines and liqueurs. To get here, head east through Sorell towards Port Arthur. After exiting the town you'll see Pawleena signposted on your left.

Sleeping & Eating

Given its proximity to the airport, Sorell makes a handy overnight stop if you have an early flight.

Blue Bell Inn (☎ 6265 2804; www.bluebellinnsorell.com.au; 26 Somerville St; s/d incl breakfast from \$100/130) A two-storey sandstone inn dating back to 1829, Blue Bell offers colonially furnished rooms and a barrage of cooked breakfasts in its elegant, plum-washed interior. The dining room (mains \$20 to \$29; open for breakfast and dinner) serves well-prepared meals (some with a Polish bent) to both guests and visitors, and will cater to vegans and coeliacs with prior notice. Book ahead. Quatro the Great Dane patrols the corridors.

Cherry Park Estate (☎ 6265 2271; www.cherryparkestate.com.au; 114 Pawleena Rd; d \$120-140) Close to Sorell Fruit Farm, this property has three rooms with bathrooms, lots of surrounding open spaces, home-grown apricots (no cherries?) and creative (albeit *nouveau-riche*) flourishes like a Wild West-themed bar, and chandeliers and friezes. Cooked breakfast available with the higher tariff.

There's a slew of takeaways and cafés along the main street, and pubs serving farm-sized meals.

Getting There & Away

The **Tassielink** (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) service down the Tasman Peninsula from Hobart stops at Sorell (\$7, 40 minutes).

DUNALLEY

☎ 03 / pop 290

The thickly timbered Forester Peninsula – the precursor peninsula you'll cross en route to the Tasman Peninsula – is connected to mainland Tasmanian soil by the isthmus town Dunalley. Gouged-out in 1905, the **Denison Canal**, complete with a raiseable bridge, bisects the isthmus, providing a short cut for small boats. There's not much to see here, but there are a couple of good places to stay and eat.

Sleeping & Eating

Potters Croft (☎ 6253 5469; www.potterscroft.com.au; Arthur Hwy; s/d from \$100/146, extra person \$35) At Dunalley's northern end is this convict-brick, family-run estate, tripling as a craft gallery, local wine outlet and provider of snug accommodation. There are four en suite rooms sharing a large kitchen and lounge area, and a self-contained cottage sleeping four. Guided eco-expeditions (fishing, boating, walking, cycling, painting, photography – check the website) can also be arranged. Good winter rates.

our pick Waterfront Café (☎ 6253 5122; 4 Imlay St; meals \$12-25; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat Oct-Apr) Dunalley's cultural and culinary hot spot is this fabulous hybrid antique store and elegant café, with a broad outdoor deck and views across the water. The menu lists interesting options like fish off the local pier, homemade cakes, brilliant coffee, Tassie wines and a world-famous sweet potato, spinach and cashew burger. Occasional live music (the estimable likes of Deborah Conway).

Dunalley Hotel (☎ 6253 5101; Arthur Hwy; mains \$18-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Traditionalists might prefer the town boozier, a friendly country pub serving lots of local seafood. Outdoor tables, a wide veranda and a seafood feast for two (\$60) – life is good.

Getting There & Away

The **Tassielink** (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) Tasman Peninsula service will take you to Dunalley from Hobart (\$18, one hour).

GONNA MAKE A JAILBREAK

In 1842 the notorious bushranger Martin Cash became one of the few felons to successfully flee Port Arthur and make it across Eaglehawk Neck to freedom. Cash and his cohorts George Jones and Lawrence Kavanagh busted out of Port Arthur easily enough, but the real test awaited at the Neck, with its ferocious Dogline. Shark attack must have seemed a lesser gamble – the three men swam around the Neck, losing only their clothes en route. On the other side they pilfered some clobber and bolted for the Midlands, where they successfully terrorised north–south travellers for several months before being recaptured. Cash and Kavanagh were banished to Norfolk Island for life; Jones was less fortunate, ending his days dangling from a noose.

EAGLEHAWK NECK

☎ 03 / pop 100

Eaglehawk Neck is the second isthmus you'll cross heading to Port Arthur, this one connecting the Forestier Peninsula to the Tasman Peninsula. In the days of convicts at Port Arthur to the south, the 100m-wide Neck had a row of ornery dogs chained across it to prevent escape – the infamous Dogline. Timber platforms were also built in narrow Eaglehawk Bay to the west, and stocked with yet more ferocious dogs to prevent convicts from wading around the Dogline. Rumours were circulated that the waters were shark-infested to discourage swimming – the occasional white pointer does indeed shimmy through these waters, but 'infested' overstates things a bit. Remarkably, despite these efforts, several convicts made successful bids for freedom (see the boxed text, above). The key convict sites are now protected as the **Eaglehawk Neck Historic Site** (☎ 1300 368 550; www.parks.tas.gov.au/fact-sheets/parks_and_places/EaglehawkNeck.pdf).

There's an ATM and a handful of brochures at the Officers Mess (opposite).

Sights

As you approach Eaglehawk Neck from the north, turn east onto Pirates Bay Dr for the **lookout** – there's an astonishing view of Pirates Bay, the Neck and the rugged coastline beyond. Down on the isthmus, the only remaining structure from the convict days is the 1832

Officers Quarters (admission free; ☎ 9am–4.30pm), the oldest wooden military building in Australia. Sitting diagonally opposite the Officers Mess general store, its interior is fitted out with information boards on the history of the building and Eaglehawk Neck.

At the northern end of Pirates Bay is **Tessellated Pavement**, a rocky terrace that has eroded into what looks like tiled paving. At low tide you can walk along the foreshore to **Clydes Island**, where there are wicked coastline panoramas and several graves. You can see as far south as Cape Hauy.

Follow the signposted side roads to **The Blowhole**, **Tasman Arch** and the **Devil's Kitchen** for some close-up views of spectacular coastal cliffs. Watch out for sporadic blows at the Blowhole, and keep behind the fences at the other sites – the cliff edges are prone to decay. The Eaglehawk Neck Jetty is opposite the Blowhole car park.

On the road to the Blowhole is the signposted turn-off to the 4km gravel road leading to **Waterfall Bay**, which has yet more camera-conducive views (see Waterfall Bluff below).

Activities

BUSHWALKING

From the car park at Waterfall Bay, take the 1½-hour return hike to **Waterfall Bluff**. Much of the walk is through a forest of tall, slender trees that somewhat obscure the view, but the track stays close to the water and there are plenty of places to stop and gawp at the magnificent scenery from the clifftops (unfenced, except at the car park). Make sure you continue to the bluff itself before returning to the part of the walk that takes you down past the falls – if the bluff vista doesn't make you say 'Wow!', nothing will.

Waterfall Bay is also the start of the **Tasman Coastal Trail**, which climbs over Tatnells Hill then follows the coast to Fortescue Bay, out to Cape Hauy and on to Cape Pillar. Walkers should allow three to five days for the one-way trip; see www.parks.tas.gov.au/recreation/tracknotes/tasman.html for information.

If you'd rather tackle a one-day walk, traipse along the coast from Waterfall Bay to Bivouac Bay (six hours) or on to Fortescue Bay (eight hours), with camping available at both bays. If you need to return to your car, only walk as far as Tatnells Hill, from which there's an amazing view all the way

from Eaglehawk Neck to the craggy rock formations of Cape Hauy.

Hit the bookshops for *Peninsula Tracks* by Peter and Shirley Storey (\$18) – track notes for 35 walks in the area.

SURFING & DIVING

Pirates Bay (the ocean beach at Eaglehawk Neck) is one of southern Tassie's most reliable surfing spots. There are trusty beach and sandbar breaks around the bay, plus more challenging breaks around the cliffs near the Tessellated Pavement. If you're new to the ocean, you can take a surf lesson here with **Island Surf School** (☎ 6265 9776, 0400 830 237; www.islandsurfschool.com.au; 2hr group lessons \$40). Boards and wetsuits are provided. Private lessons are available too.

Eaglehawk Dive Centre (☎ 6250 3566; www.eaglehawkdive.com.au; 178 Pirates Bay Dr; 1-1/2-1/4-day courses \$200/395/550) conducts underwater explorations (sea caves, giant kelp forests, a sea lion colony and shipwrecks) and a range of PADI courses. A one-day introduction to scuba diving costs \$199 (no experience necessary). Equipment rental is \$85 per day; two boat dives with equipment costs \$190. They provide free Hobart pick-ups, and dorm accommodation for divers for \$25 per night.

Tours

Personalised Sea Charters (☎ 6250 3370; seachart@southcom.com.au; 322 Blowhole Rd, Eaglehawk Neck; trips per hr/day from \$65/440) Takes small groups on game, deep sea, reef or bay fishing and sightseeing charter trips. All gear supplied.

Sealife Experience (☎ 6253 5325, 0428-300 303; www.sealife.com.au; 3½-hour cruises adult/child/family \$95/50/260) Cruises taking in the peninsula's dramatic east coast from Eaglehawk Neck to Cape Hauy, with beautiful sea life along the way – bring your camera! Tours depart Eaglehawk Neck Jetty at 10am; bookings essential.

Sleeping

The advantages of staying at Eaglehawk Neck are that it's far more scenic than Port Arthur, relatively uncrowded and it's close to all the peninsula's major drawcards.

Eaglehawk Neck Backpackers (☎ 6250 3248; 94 Old Jetty Rd; unpowered sites/dm \$16/20) A very simple, family-run hotel in a peaceful location signposted west of the isthmus. There are just four beds in the dorm, plus a couple of tent spots on the back lawn and a camp kitchen. Bike hire is \$5 for the duration of your stay.

Lufra Hotel (☎ 6250 3262; www.lufrahotel.com; 380 Pirates Bay Dr; d \$90-120, 2br apt \$180) This chowder-coloured pub has a superb outlook over Pirates Bay above the Tessellated Pavement ('a bit of a view' – are they serious?). Rooms are modest but comfortable, all with bathrooms. A new wing of slick two-bedroom apartments should be finished by the time you read this. Chow down in the downstairs bistro (see below).

our pick Eaglehawk Café & Guesthouse (☎ 6250 3331; www.theneck.com.au; 5131 Arthur Hwy; d incl breakfast \$110-130) Upstairs at this artsy little café (built in 1929) are three lovely B&B rooms, taking up the spaces once occupied by slumbering shipwrights. Two of the rooms have beautiful French doors opening onto a balcony overlooking Eaglehawk Bay. Breakfast in the café (with its crankin' espresso machine).

Eaglehawk Hideaway (☎ 6250 3513; www.eaglehawkhideaway.com; 40 Ferntree Rd; s/d \$120/140, breakfast \$20) About 1km beyond Eaglehawk Neck is the turn-off to this big brick house, the ground floor of which is given over to guests. The bloom-filled gardens are great, but the house itself is nothing to write home about – stay for the location, not the accommodation. Dinner by arrangement.

Eating

Officers Mess (☎ 6250 3635; off Arthur Hwy; mains \$10-22; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ♿) A basic drive-up tourist-trap general store and café. There's not a lot to recommend it, but it does serve hot food and takeaways (including soup, roast beef and pizzas), it's good for kids and it's opposite the historic Officers Quarters (opposite).

Lufra Hotel (☎ 6250 3262; 380 Pirates Bay Dr; mains \$15-34; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This hefty hotel aims to please all comers with its bistro serving fine local produce (seafood, quail, wal-laby), and public bar with pool table where you can get traditional pub grub for a few dollars less.

Eaglehawk Café & Guesthouse (☎ 6250 3331; 5131 Arthur Hwy; mains \$10-23; ☎ breakfast & lunch year-round, dinner Fri-Sun Dec-Feb) Arguably the peninsula's best dining option, just south of Eaglehawk Neck. Stylish décor, local art lining the walls, wines by the glass and a fine day-turns-to-night menu (try the Doo Town venison kebabs). Or just stop in for coffee and cake.

DOO TOWN

No-one is really sure how it all started, but the raggedy collection of fishing shacks at Doo Town (3km south of Eaglehawk Neck on the way to the Blowhole) all contain the word 'Doo' in their names. There's the sexy 'Doo Me', the approving 'We Doo', the unfussy 'Thistle Doo Me', the Beatles-esque 'Love Me Doo' and (our favourite) the melancholic 'Doo Write'. We doo hope the new breed of architecturally gymnastic beach houses here maintain the tradition.

Getting There & Away

Tassielink (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) can bus you from Hobart to Eaglehawk Neck in 1½ hours; the one-way fare is \$21.

TARANNA

☎ 03 / pop 160

Taranna is a small town strung out along the shores of Norfolk Bay about 10km north of Port Arthur, its name coming from an Aboriginal word meaning 'hunting ground'. Historically important, it was once the terminus for Australia's first railway, which ran from Long Bay near Port Arthur to here. This public transport was powered by convicts, who pushed the carriages uphill, then jumped on for the ride down. In those days Taranna was called Old Norfolk. Not far offshore, **Dart Island** was used as a semaphore station to relay messages from Port Arthur to Hobart. Today, the waters near the island are used for oyster farming.

Taranna's main attraction (apart from a few good places to eat and sleep), is the **Tasmanian Devil Conservation Park** (☎ 6250 3230; www.tasmaniandevilpark.com; adult/child/family \$24/13/59; Arthur Hwy; ☎ 9am-6pm), which functions as a quarantined breeding centre for devils to help protect against DFTD (see p51). It's also a breeding centre for endangered birds of prey. There are plenty of other native species here too, with feedings throughout the day: devils at 10am, 11am, 1.30pm and 5pm (4.30pm in winter), and kangaroos at 2.30pm. There's also a sea eagle show at 11.15am and 3.30pm. The park usually runs the much-touted **Devils in the Dark** nocturnal prowl, but it was on hold when we visited – call to see if it's been reinstated. The **Park Café** here was also closed when we visited,

but should be open again by the time you read this.

The **Federation Chocolate Factory** (☎ 6250 3435; fax 6250 3451; 2 South St; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) sits alluringly close to Taranna. Check out chocolate being hand made and chew on some intriguingly flavoured delights (from favourites such as honeycomb or caramel nougat to the surprisingly good apple flavour, or perhaps liquorice or brandied apricot). Inside the factory is a ye-olde museum of blacksmithing and saw-milling equipment.

Sleeping & Eating

Teraki Cottages (☎ 6250 3435; fax 6250 3451; 996 Arthur Hwy, Taranna; s \$70-80, d \$80-90, extra adult/child \$20/10) Perhaps the best-value accommodation on the peninsula, these three neat-as-a-pin, self-contained bushman's huts. At the southern end of Taranna they exude basic, rustic charm in a quiet bush setting with open fires. Breakfast provisions (free-range eggs, homemade jams) are a few dollars extra. No credit cards.

Norfolk Bayview B&B (☎ 6250 3855; norfolkbayviewbb@bigpond.com; 111 Nubeena Rd; s \$85-100, d \$120-135) Modern B&B on 45 rural acres just west of Taranna (past Teraki Cottages), with rates including a cooked breakfast and far-reaching views from the elevated verandas over Norfolk Bay. There's an open fire in the guest lounge.

Abs by the Bay (☎ 6250 3719; www.absbythebay.com; 5730 Arthur Hwy; d \$88-110, extra person \$20) Abalone? Abdominals? We suspect it's the former, and the water-view deck here affords the opportunity to relax the latter. Flexible configurations to accommodate two couples or two singles in suburbanite units.

Mason's Cottages (☎ /fax 6250 3323; 5741 Arthur Hwy; d \$90-100, extra person \$20) On the highway at the northern edge of town, this place has a huddle of suburban-looking, two-bedroom brick units available for your self-contained discretion. Nothing flash, but you get what you pay for.

Norfolk Bay Convict Station (☎ 6250 3487; www.convictstation.com; 5862 Arthur Hwy; d incl breakfast \$150-160) Built in 1838 and once the railway's port terminus (as well as the first pub on the Tasman Peninsula, the Tasman Hotel), this gorgeous old place is now a top-quality waterfront B&B. Eclectic rooms come with ripping cooked breakfasts. Complimentary port. Fishing gear for hire.

Fish Lips Café & Accommodation (☎ 6250 3066; www.fishlipstasmania.com.au; 5934 Arthur Hwy; r \$66-180)

Between the highway and Little Norfolk Bay is this newish joint, offering fishy café lunches (mains \$15 to \$25), and a collection of affordable shared-bathroom rooms (sleeping up to three) and classier waterside double cottages. There's also a farmers market here on summer Sundays from 10am to 2pm.

Mussel Boys (☎ 6250 3088; 5927 Arthur Hwy, Taranna; mains \$16-26; ☎ lunch & dinner) Open from noon, this bright, fresh café-restaurant has a mussel-bound menu worth screeching into the driveway for. Try the mussels in dill and coconut curry broth, or the expansive seven-course tasting menu (which might chew up your afternoon).

Getting There & Away

The **Tassielink** (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) Tasman Peninsula service calls in at Taranna (\$21 one way, 1¼ hours) en route from Hobart to Port Arthur.

FORTESCUE BAY & TASMAN NATIONAL PARK

Sequestered 12km down a gravel road from the highway (the turn-off is halfway between Taranna and Port Arthur) is becalmed **Fortescue Bay**, with a sweeping sandy arc backed by thickly forested slopes. The sheltered bay was one of the semaphore station sites used during the convict period to relay messages to and from Eaglehawk Neck. Early last century a timber mill was in operation, and the boilers and jetty ruins are still visible near Mill Creek, as are the remains of some of the timber tramways used to collect the timber. The mill closed in 1952.

Fortescue Bay is one of the main access points for **Tasman National Park** (www.parks.tas.gov.au/natparks/tasman), encompassing the territory around Cape Raoul, Cape Hauy, Cape Pillar, Tasman Island and the rugged coast north to Eaglehawk Neck. Offshore, dolphins, seals, penguins and whales are regular passers-by. The usual national park entry fees apply at Fortescue Bay (see p64).

Sights & Activities

Apart from swimming and bumming around on the beach, most people come here to launch their fishing boats or do some **bushwalking**. Several walking tracks kick off at Fortescue Bay. To the north, a solid track traces the shoreline to **Canoe Bay** (two hours return) and **Bivouac Bay** (four hours return), continuing

all the way to the Devil's Kitchen car park at **Eaglehawk Neck** (10 hours one way). To the east, a track meanders out to **Cape Hauy** (four to five hours return) – a well-used path leading out to sea cliffs with sensational views of the famous sea stacks **The Candlestick** and **Totem Pole**. To get into some rain forest, follow the same track towards Cape Hauy, then take the steep side track to **Mt Fortescue** (six to seven hours return). Another track extends all the way to **Cape Pillar** near **Tasman Island**, where the sea cliffs are 300m high – purportedly the highest in the southern hemisphere. You'll need two to three days return to knock off the Cape Pillar track. For track notes, see Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia*.

Sleeping

You can dream the night away to the sound of gentle surf at **Fortescue Bay Campground** (☎ 6250 2433; www.parks.tas.gov.au; Tasman National Park; unpowered sites \$24). There are no powered sites and showers are cold, but fireplaces and gas BBQs compensate. National park fees apply in addition to camping fees; book ahead during summer. There are no shops here so BYO food and drink.

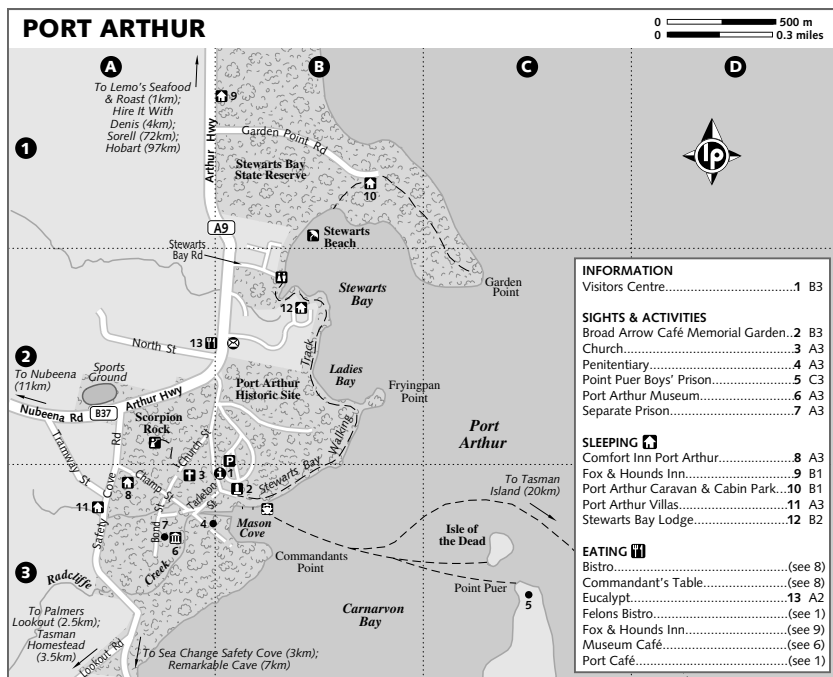
PORT ARTHUR

☎ 03 / pop 200

Port Arthur is the name of the small settlement which has grown up around the Port Arthur Historic Site. In 1830 Governor Arthur chose the Tasman Peninsula to confine prisoners who had committed further crimes in the colony. A 'natural penitentiary', the peninsula is connected to the mainland by a strip of land less than 100m wide – Eaglehawk Neck (p124) – where ferocious guard dogs and tales of shark-infested waters deterred escape.

Between 1830 and 1877, 12,500 convicts did hard, brutal prison time at Port Arthur. For most it was hell on Earth, but those who behaved often enjoyed better conditions than they'd endured in England and Ireland. Port Arthur became the hub of a network of penal stations on the peninsula, its fine buildings sustaining thriving convict-labour industries, including timber milling, shipbuilding, coal mining, shoemaking and brick and nail production.

Australia's first railway literally 'ran' the 7km between Norfolk Bay at Taranna and Long Bay near Port Arthur: convicts pushed the carriages along the tracks. A semaphore



telegraph system allowed instant communication between Port Arthur, other peninsula outstations and Hobart. Convict farms provided fresh vegetables, a boys' prison was built at Point Puer to reform and educate juvenile convicts, and a church was erected.

Despite its redemption as a major tourist site, Port Arthur remains a sombre, haunting place. Don't come here expecting to remain unaffected by what you see. There's a sadness here that's undeniable; a gothic sense of woe that can cloud your senses on the sunniest of days. Perhaps this is what brought a deranged young gunman here in April 1996. Unleashing an indiscriminate fusillade of bullets, he murdered 35 people and injured 37 more. After burning down a local guesthouse, he was finally captured and imprisoned north of Hobart, his file stamped 'Never to be Released'.

Port Arthur Historic Site

The **Port Arthur Historic Site** (☎ 6251 2310, 1800 659 101; www.portarthur.org.au; Arthur Hwy; 🚗 tours & buildings 9am-5pm, grounds 8.30am-dusk) remains one of Tasmania's busiest tourist attractions. Inside

the main entry building is a visitors centre, a café, restaurant and gift shop (which stocks some interesting convict-focused publications). Downstairs is an interpretative gallery where you can follow the convicts' journey from England to Tasmania. Buggy transport around the site can be arranged for people with restricted mobility – ask at the information counter. The ferry plying the harbour is also wheelchair accessible.

Beyond the main building are dozens of restored structures, most of which you visit on the guided tour (opposite). The **Port Arthur Museum**, containing numerous displays and a café, was originally an asylum, housing patients from throughout the colony. The **Separate Prison** was built as a place of punishment for difficult prisoners, following a decision to 'reform' prisoners by isolation and sensory deprivation rather than by flogging. The **Church** was built in 1836 but was destroyed by fire in 1884, while the **Penitentiary**, converted from a granary in 1857, was also damaged by fire in 1897. The **Broad Arrow Café**, scene of many of the 1996 shootings, was gutted following the massacre. Today, the shell of the

building has been preserved and a **Memorial Garden** established around it.

ADMISSION PASSES

Admission to the site is via a fairly complex hierarchy of passes: either a Bronze, Silver, Gold or After Dark Pass. For details on the various tours and eating options included with the passes, see Guided Tours (below) and Eating (p130).

Bronze Pass (adult/child/concession/family \$28/14/23/62) Includes admission to the site, a guided tour and a harbour cruise. Suits visitors here for half a day or so.

Silver Pass (adult/child/concession \$66/48/61) Includes all of the above plus a tour of Isle of the Dead or Point Puer, an audio tour and lunch at either the Museum Café or Port Café. Suits visitors here for a full day.

Gold Pass (adult/child/concession \$98/76/93) Includes all the Silver Pass offers, but you get to do both the Point Puer and the Isle of the Dead tour, and have morning and afternoon tea thrown into the mix. If you're staying overnight in the area, this is the pass for you (it's valid for two days).

After Dark Pass (adult/child \$50/42) Gets you onto the Historic Ghost Tour and snares you a two-course meal at Felons Bistro.

GUIDED TOURS

A forty-minute guided tour of the historic site is included in the price of admission and leaves regularly from the visitors centre – an excellent intro to the site, visiting all the old buildings. Also included in the price of your ticket is a 25-minute commentated **Harbour Cruise** past Point Puer and the Isle of the Dead. When you buy your ticket you'll be told the times of the next tour and cruise.

More detailed guided tours include the **Isle of the Dead Cemetery Tour** (adult/child/family \$12/8/34) through Port Arthur's old burial ground on an island in the harbour, and the **Point Puer Boys' Prison Tour** (adult/child/family \$12/8/34), which visits the first reformatory in the British Empire built for juvenile male convicts (aged nine to 18). Book both these tours well in advance if you can.

Another humungously popular tour is the 90-minute, lantern-lit **Historic Ghost Tour** (☎ 1800 659 101; adult/child/family \$20/12/55), which leaves from the visitors centre nightly at dusk (rain or shine) and visits a number of historic buildings, with guides relating spine-chilling occurrences. Bookings essential.

Activities

About 5km north of the Historic Site is **Hire it with Denis** (☎ 6200 9998, 0427 362 789; hirewithdenis@bordernet.com.au; 6 Andersons Rd). Denis offers reasonably priced rental of canoes (two hours \$47), kayaks (two hours \$36), bikes (half day \$14), fishing gear (full day \$8), tents (\$19 per week) and more. Free delivery to Port Arthur; minimal charge to other areas. Denis also has accommodation available.

Tours

Take a cruise from Port Arthur out to Tasman Island:

Navigators (☎ 6223 1914; www.navigators.net.au; 1½hr cruise adult/child/concession/family \$65/45/59/174) Monday and Thursday cruises from Port Arthur around the sea cliffs and seal colonies of Tasman Island.

Tasman Island Cruises (☎ 6250 2200; www.tasmancruises.com.au; Arthur Hwy; 3hr cruise adult/child/family \$100/55/300) Run by the same folks as Bruny Island Charters (p139), this cruise chugs around the awesome sea cliffs of Cape Pillar and Tasman Island and up the coast to Cape Hauy. Plenty of seals and bird life en route.

Sleeping

Given the iconic status of Port Arthur to Tasmania's tourism, it's surprising to find few quality accommodation or dining offerings down here – bland, dated motel units and cheesy B&Bs prevail, with a few notable exceptions.

Port Arthur Caravan & Cabin Park (☎ 6250 2340, 1800 620 708; www.portarthurcaravan-cabinpark.com.au; Garden Point Rd; dm \$18, unpowered sites \$20, powered sites \$22-28, cabins \$95-105) Spaciously sloping with plenty of greenery, this well-facilitated park (including camp kitchen, wood BBQs and shop) is 2km before Port Arthur, not far from a sheltered beach. Port Arthur's best (and only) budget option.

Fox & Hounds Inn (☎ 6250 2217; www.foxandhounds.com.au; 6789 Arthur Hwy; d \$100-190) *Ewww*, mock Tudor! Still, the rooms off to the side of the main building are the cheapest motel doubles south of Eaglehawk Neck (especially in winter), and it's a matter of seconds from the Port Arthur gates. You can get a bang-up pub meal here, too (p130).

Port Arthur Villas (☎ 6250 2239, 1800 815 775; www.portarthurvillas.com.au; 52 Safety Cove Rd; d \$135-160) Not far from the Comfort Inn, this place has reasonable self-contained units sleeping up to four, horseshoeing around garden and outdoor barbecue area. Externally it's

all faux-Victorian lace and brickwork, but inside things are a little more stylish. Walking distance to the historic site.

Comfort Inn Port Arthur (☎ 6250 2101, 1800 030 747; www.portarthur-inn.com.au; 29 Safety Cove Rd; d \$145-185) A motel with flashy views over the historic site but unremarkable rooms. More impressive is the restaurant, Commandant's Table (right). Ask about packages including accommodation, dinner, breakfast and a Port Arthur ghost tour (from \$236 for two).

Stewarts Bay Lodge (☎ 6250 2888; www.stewartsbaylodge.com; 6955 Arthur Hwy; d \$155-200, 2/3br cabin from \$195/255) Not far from the Port Arthur Historic Site (you can walk there around the coast), this place offers one-, two- and three-bedroom self-contained, updated log cabins on a slope running down to swimmable Stewarts Bay. Tasty internet rates.

Sea Change Safety Cove (☎ 6250 2719; www.safetycove.com; 425 Safety Cove Rd; d \$160-200) Whichever way you look from this guesthouse there are fantastic views – misty cliffs, sea-wracked beach or scrubby bushland. It's 4km south of Port Arthur, just off the sandy sweep of Safety Cove Beach. There's a beautiful communal deck, a couple of B&B rooms inside the house, plus a large self-contained unit sleeping five.

Tasman Homestead (☎ 6250 3331; www.tasmanhomestead.com; off Safety Cove Rd; d \$220, extra adult/child \$40/30) Brilliant views extend from the wrap-around veranda at this rangy, mudbrick-and-timber homestead, perfect for families and groups (sleeps up to nine). It's 3.5km off Safety Cove Rd (past Palmers Lookout), fully self-contained (breakfast provisions included) and totally private. Bookings are through the Eaglehawk Café & Guesthouse (p125) – be sure to specify that it's the homestead you're after.

Eating

There are a couple of daytime food options at the historic site: the Museum Café in the Old Asylum and the hectic Port Café inside the visitors centre, both serving the usual takeaway suspects.

Lemo's Seafood & Roast (☎ 6250 3403; 6555 Arthur Hwy; mains \$8-36; ☎ lunch & dinner) Almost new when we visited, Lemo's first appears to be an unashamed money trap snaring passing tourists (they could fit 20 tour buses in the car park), but then you think, "Where else am I gonna get some curried duck around here?" Affordable, authentic Asian food; fully licensed.

The Bistro (☎ 6250 2101; Comfort Inn Port Arthur, 29 Safety Cove Rd; mains \$12-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) A less inviting companion to the Commandant's Table (below), this viewless bar serves pedestrian pub nosh (schnitzels, roasts, fish and chips, steak).

Eucalypt (☎ 6250 2555; 6962 Arthur Hwy; mains \$12-22; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Fri) A relative newcomer to the peninsula, Eucalypt extols the virtues of the best things in life: 'Coffee, Art, Food'. Organic breakfasts, light Mod Oz lunches and casual dinners with a glass of wine. Perfect.

Commandant's Table (☎ 6250 2101; Comfort Inn Port Arthur, 29 Safety Cove Rd; mains \$17-28, ☎ dinner). The better of the two dining options at the Comfort Inn (left), with wide historic site views and an unexpectedly worldly menu (try the fish of the day with Nonya sambal, ginger and lemon juice on basmati rice).

Fox & Hounds Inn (☎ 6250 2217; 6789 Arthur Hwy; mains \$17-34; ☎ lunch Dec-Mar, dinner nightly) This restaurant at the Fox & Hounds does reputable meals in its backdated, ye-olde-themed dining room, mostly from the pub menu roll call of timeless classics (reef 'n' beef, mixed grill, lamb cutlets, curried scallops). It also has a children's menu, and oceans of cold Cascade on tap.

Felons Bistro (☎ 6251 2310, 1800 659 101; visitors centre; mains \$20-28; ☎ dinner). In a wing of the visitors centre, Felons is a worthy choice before you head off on the Ghost Tour. Upmarket, creative dinners with a seafood bias reinforce their catchy slogan: 'Dine with Conviction'. Try the Cajun-style fish of the day. Reservations advised.

Getting There & Away

See p122 for information on public transport and tours to Port Arthur.

REMARKABLE CAVE

About 5km south of Port Arthur is Remarkable Cave, a long tunnel eroded from the base of a collapsed gully, under a cliff and out to sea. A boardwalk and stairs provide access to a metal viewing platform above the gully, a few minutes' amble from the car park. Believe it or not, hardcore surfers brave the turbulent swell surging in through the cave, paddling out through the opening to surf the offshore reefs beyond.

You can also follow the coast east from the car park to **Maingon Blowhole** (one hour return)

DETOUR: SALTWATER RIVER & LIME BAY

At Premaydena, take the signposted turn-off (the C431) 13km northwest to **Saltwater River** and the restored ruins at the **Coal Mines Historic Site** (☎ 1300 369 550; www.parks.tas.gov.au; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), a powerful reminder of the colonial past. Excavated in 1833, the coal mines were used to punish the worst of the convicts, who worked in abominable conditions. The poorly managed mining operation wasn't economically viable, and in 1848 it was sold to private enterprise. Within 10 years it was abandoned. Some buildings were demolished, while fire and weather put paid to the rest.

A low-key contrast to Port Arthur, the old mines site is interesting to wander around, following a trail of interpretive panels. Don't go burrowing into any old mine shafts – they haven't been stabilised and are potentially dangerous. You can, however, snipe around the well-preserved solitary confinement cells, which are torturously small and dark.

Not far away is **Lime Bay State Reserve**, a beautiful area aflutter with rare birds and butterflies, and with some lazy coastal walks. From Lime Bay, the 2½-hour return journey to Lagoon Beach is an untaxing amble. There's free bush camping to the north along a sandy track. Camping is very basic, with pit toilets. BYO drinking water and fuel stores.

or further on to **Mt Brown** (four hours return), from which there are awesome views. On the way back it's worth deviating to **Palmers Lookout** for majestic views of the entire Port Arthur and Safety Cove area.

KOONYA & NUBEENA

☎ 03

There's not a whole lot of shakin' going on in diminutive **Koonya** (population 100), apart from accommodation at Cascades (right) and the **Seaview Riding Ranch** (☎ 6250 3110; 60 Firetower Rd; 1-1/2hr rides from \$30/55), signposted off the main road from Taranna. On offer is horse riding for all ages and skill levels, with scenic rides led by long-time locals.

About 12km further along the road is charmless **Nubeena** (population 300), the largest town on the peninsula, fanned out along the shore of Wedge Bay. It's much more low-key than Port Arthur – it's really just a holiday destination for locals – but if all the other accommodation on the peninsula is booked out (trust us, it happens), you might be able to find a bed here.

The surrounding natural areas are much more appealing than Nubeena itself. The main things to do here are swimming and chilling out on **White Beach**, or fishing from the jetty or foreshore. Down a side road 3km south of town is some energetic walking to **Tunnel Bay** (five hours return), **Raoul Bay Lookout** (two hours return) and the exquisitely named **Cape Raoul** (five hours return). To the north is **Roaring Beach**, which gets wicked surf but isn't safe for swimming.

Sleeping & Eating

White Beach Tourist Park (☎ 6250 2142; www.whitebeachtouristpark.com; 128 White Beach Rd, Nubeena; unpowered/poweredsites \$24/26, cabins \$85-100) Beachfront park in quiet, ghost gum-dotted surroundings south of Nubeena. Facilities include laundry, shop, petrol bowser, playground and barbecue areas with impossibly well-manicured lawns. Ask about local walks and cheaper off-season rates.

White Beach Holiday Villas (☎ 6250 2152; www.whitebeachholidayvillas.com.au; 309 White Beach Rd, Nubeena; d \$100-140, extra person \$15) At the other end of the beach from the tourist park, this holiday hub has seven rather dated, self-contained brick villas (one with spa) with plenty of space; the units up the hill are newer and pricier. New owners might shake things up (including a new name).

Storm Bay Guest House (☎ 6250 2933; www.stormbay.com.au; 91 White Beach Rd, Nubeena; guesthouse d \$130-190, 2br cottage d \$220, extra person \$20) Getting rave reviews from readers – for value, quality and surrounds – this guesthouse on Hardy's Hill offers magical views across stormy Storm Bay to Bruny Island. Beaut breakfasts and glasses of wine (not necessarily at the same time) on the deck, plus tasteful interiors. Kids OK in the cottage (sleeps six) but not the guesthouse.

Cascades (☎ 6250 3873; www.cascadescolonial.com.au; 533 Main Rd, Koonya; d incl breakfast \$160-320) This old property was originally an outstation for Port Arthur, with around 400 convicts working here at one time. Some of the buildings have been restored in period style to become snug, self-contained cottages (including one luxury

option with spa). Full breakfast provisions and entry to a private museum included.

Nubeena Tavern & Restaurant (☎ 6250 2250; 1599 Main Rd, Nubeena; mains \$12-25; 🍴 lunch & dinner)

There are a couple of takeaways in Nubeena – good for a pie or a pastie – but if you're after something meatier, try the local pub for a reef 'n' beef or chicken schnitzel and a glass

of Norfolk Bay chardonnay (grapes grown at Koonya). Occasional live bands too.

Getting There & Away

Tassielink (☎ 1300 300 520; www.tassielink.com.au) will take you from Hobart to Koonya in 1¼ hours; the one-way fare is \$22. The bus continues to Nubeena (\$24, two hours).