

# Wessex



The land stretching west from Hampshire and encompassing Dorset, Wiltshire, Bristol, Bath and Somerset was once the core of the now nonexistent Anglo-Saxon realm of Wessex. However, the area still rings to tales of its ruler, Alfred the Great, who made Winchester his power base. Legends linger everywhere, often accompanied by contemporary delights. Somerset's rolling green hills give way to the hippie haven of Glastonbury with its Arthurian tales, grail quests and fabled faery kings. The shaded lanes of Wiltshire wind towards awe-inspiring megalithic monuments at Stonehenge and Avebury. In Dorset, myth-rich Iron Age hill forts shelter behind a coast peppered with shimmering blue bays, sparkling sandy coves and fossils waiting to be found. In genteel Bath the legend is one of conquest, while the legacy is Britain's most impressive cluster of Roman buildings – a stunning Regency cityscape adds to the appeal.

Evidence of more-modern myth-makers abounds. The Wessex wordsmith Thomas Hardy wove Dorset's market towns into his writings, while Hampshire and Bath celebrate their links with the novelist Jane Austen. Portsmouth has 18th-century naval hero Admiral Nelson and a rejuvenated waterfront; in Bristol, reminders of engineering genius Isambard Kingdom Brunel now nestle amid innovative restaurants, clubs and bars. Add the great escape of remote Exmoor's cliffs and moors, the activities of the New Forest, and the funky holiday hot spot that is the Isle of Wight, and Wessex emerges as not just a lost kingdom laced with legends, but also as a region ripe with adventure, alive to the present and demanding to be explored.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Sleeping in style inside the massive, mystical stone circle at **Avebury** (p328)
- Soaking like a centurion in a super-chic spa in the Roman city of **Bath** (p344)
- Foraging for 200-million-year-old fossils on the constantly crumbling **Jurassic Coast** (p310)
- Having your very own happy, hippie happening at **Glastonbury** (p356)
- Watching the red deer amid autumnal dawn mists on **Exmoor** (p363)
- Revelling in street art and cutting-edge music in the vibrant, gritty city of **Bristol** (p329)



■ POPULATION: 2.8 MILLION

■ AREA: 5026 SQ MILES

■ RATIO OF SHEEP TO PEOPLE  
ON EXMOOR: 50:1

## History

Wessex can trace its human history back as far as the Stone Age – a 9000-year-old skeleton was found at Cheddar Gorge (p354). By 3000 BC a complex tribal society with clearly defined social hierarchies and shared religious beliefs had developed. This so-called Wessex culture constructed the magnificent stone circles of Avebury (p326) and Stonehenge (p320), as well as the many barrows and processional avenues scattered across the region. Centuries later, Iron Age peoples engineered massive forts at Maiden Castle (p307) and Old Sarum (p319), before being subjugated by the Romans – it is their city of Aquae Sulis that we now know as Bath (p341).

The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex was founded by King Cerdic in the 6th-century after the Romans withdrew. At the kingdom's heart was land now covered by Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset, but borders shifted over the centuries, and at its height the kingdom stretched from Kent in the east to Cornwall in the west. The most famous ruler was King Alfred (r 871–99), who made Winchester his capital and ensured Wessex was the only sizeable part of the Anglo-Saxon lands not overrun by the Danes. Wessex was officially incorporated into the kingdom of England in the mid-9th century.

Dorset novelist Thomas Hardy revived the name of Wessex 1000 years later and used it as the setting for his novels. The old title Earl of Wessex, which had last been awarded in the 11th century, was only recently revived and presently belongs to HRH Prince Edward.

## Orientation & Information

Hampshire sits to the east, Dorset continues west along the south coast, while Wiltshire heads north to Somerset and the cities of Bath and Bristol. The other big conurbations are Portsmouth and Bournemouth. Exmoor National Park hugs the north coast and spills over into Devon.

See [www.visitsouthwest.co.uk](http://www.visitsouthwest.co.uk) for information on the west of the region; [www.visit-hampshire.co.uk](http://www.visit-hampshire.co.uk) covers the east. County-specific websites are listed throughout this chapter.

## Activities

### CYCLING

Gentle gradients and quiet rural lanes make Wessex ideal cycling country. In the **New Forest**

(see boxed text, p290) hundreds of miles of cycle-paths snake through a historic, wildlife-rich environment. Wiltshire is another highlight – the 160-mile circular **Wiltshire Cycleway** (p315) is a good basis for long or short rides. The **Isle of Wight** (p293) has 62 miles of bike-friendly routes and its own cycling festival.

The **West Country Way** (p362) is a fabulously varied 250-mile jaunt from Bristol to Padstow in Cornwall. **Exmoor** (p362) provides some superb, and testing, off-road cycling, as do the fields, woods and heathland of the 19km long **Quantock Hills** (p359), an Ares of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which peaks at 300m. The **North Wessex Downs** provide gentler terrain and take in the World Heritage Site of Avebury, the market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford and the western part of the Ridgeway National Trail.

## WALKING

This is a fantastic region for hitting the trail. Top spots include **Exmoor** (p363), the **Mendips** (p355), the **Quantock Hills** (p359) and the **Isle of Wight** (p293). The rugged **South West Coast Path** ([www.southwestcoastpath.com](http://www.southwestcoastpath.com)) runs along the region's northern and southern shores, cutting through some of the main coastal towns en route.

In northeastern Wiltshire, the **Ridgeway National Trail** (p328) starts near Avebury and winds 44 miles through chalk hills to meet the River Thames at Goring in Oxfordshire. The route then continues another 41 miles (another three days' walk) through the Chiltern Hills.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Water sports draw many to Wessex's coasts. Highlights are the Olympic venues at Weymouth and Portland (boxed text, p309), the yachting havens of the Isle of Wight (p294), and the watery playgrounds of Poole (p301), where you can try your hand at everything from kitesurfing to powerboating. Horse riding, fishing and falconry are available on Exmoor while beachcombing takes on a whole new meaning around Lyme Regis, where the Jurassic Coast serves up superb fossil hunting (see boxed text, p310).

## Getting Around

**Traveline South West** (☎ 0871 200 22 33; [www.travelinesw.com](http://www.travelinesw.com); calls per min 10p) can answer regionwide questions about bus and train routes.



**TOP FIVE STATELY HOMES**

- Osborne House (p295)
- Wilton House (p319)
- Kingston Lacy (p302)
- Longleat (p322)
- Montacute House (p360)

**BUS**

Local bus services are fairly comprehensive, but it pays to have your own wheels to reach the more-remote spots. Route maps and timetables are available online and at tourist offices.

**First Travel** (📞 timetables 0871 200 22 33, customer service 0870 010 6022; [www.firstgroup.com](http://www.firstgroup.com)) The region's largest bus company. The FirstDay Southwest ticket (adult/child £7/5.20) is valid for one day on most First buses.

**PlusBus** ([www.plusbus.info](http://www.plusbus.info)) Allows you to add local bus travel to your train ticket. Participating cities include Bath, Bristol, Taunton and Weymouth. Tickets cost from £2 to £3 per day and can be bought at railway stations.

**Stagecoach** (📞 timetables 0871 200 22 33, customer service 0845 121 0190) A key provider in Hampshire. A one-day Explorer Ticket costs £7/4 per adult/child.

**Wilts & Dorset** (📞 01202-673555; [www.wdbus.co.uk](http://www.wdbus.co.uk)) One-day Explorer tickets (adult/child £7/4) cover transport on most Wilts & Dorset buses and some other companies.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

There are plenty of car-hire companies in the region, often around the airports and main-line train stations. Rates are similar to elsewhere in the UK, starting at around £35 per day for a small hatchback (see p807).

**TRAIN**

The main railway hub is Bristol, which has links to London, the southwest, the Midlands, the north and Scotland. In the south, Weymouth, Bournemouth, Southampton and Portsmouth are linked to London and Bath. For more information contact **National Rail Enquiries** (📞 0845 748 4950; [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)) or **Traveline South West** (📞 0871 200 22 33; [www.travelinesw.com](http://www.travelinesw.com); calls per min 10p). The **Freedom of the SouthWest Rover pass** (adult/child £95/45) allows eight days' unlimited travel over 15 days in an area that includes Salisbury, Bath, Bristol and Weymouth.

# HAMPSHIRE

Hampshire is the historic heart of Wessex. Kings Alfred the Great, Knut and William the Conqueror all based their reigns in the ancient cathedral city of Winchester. Its jumble of historic buildings sits in the centre of an undulating landscape of chalk downs and fertile valleys. The county's coast is awash with heritage – in rejuvenated Portsmouth you can clamber aboard the pride of Nelson's navy, *HMS Victory*, wonder at the *Mary Rose* (Henry VIII's flagship), and wander wharfs buzzing with restaurants, shops and bars. Hampshire's southwestern corner claims the lovely open heath and woodlands of the New Forest and, just off shore, the happy holiday haven of the Isle of Wight – both areas are covered in separate sections in this chapter.

**WINCHESTER****pop 41,420**

Calm, collegiate Winchester is a mellow must-see for all visitors to the region. The past still echoes strongly around the flint-flecked walls of this ancient cathedral city. It was the capital of Saxon kings and a power base of bishops, and its statues and sights evoke two of England's mightiest myth-makers: Alfred the Great and King Arthur (he of the round table). Winchester's architecture is exquisite, from the handsome Elizabethan and Regency buildings in the narrow winding streets to the wondrous cathedral at the town's core. Thanks to its location, nestled in a valley of the River Itchen, there are also charming waterside trails

**A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN**

After a rural bolt-hole far from the maddening crowd? Then check out these companies for self-catering cottages.

**Cottages Direct** (📞 0870 197 6964; [www.cottagesdirect.com](http://www.cottagesdirect.com))

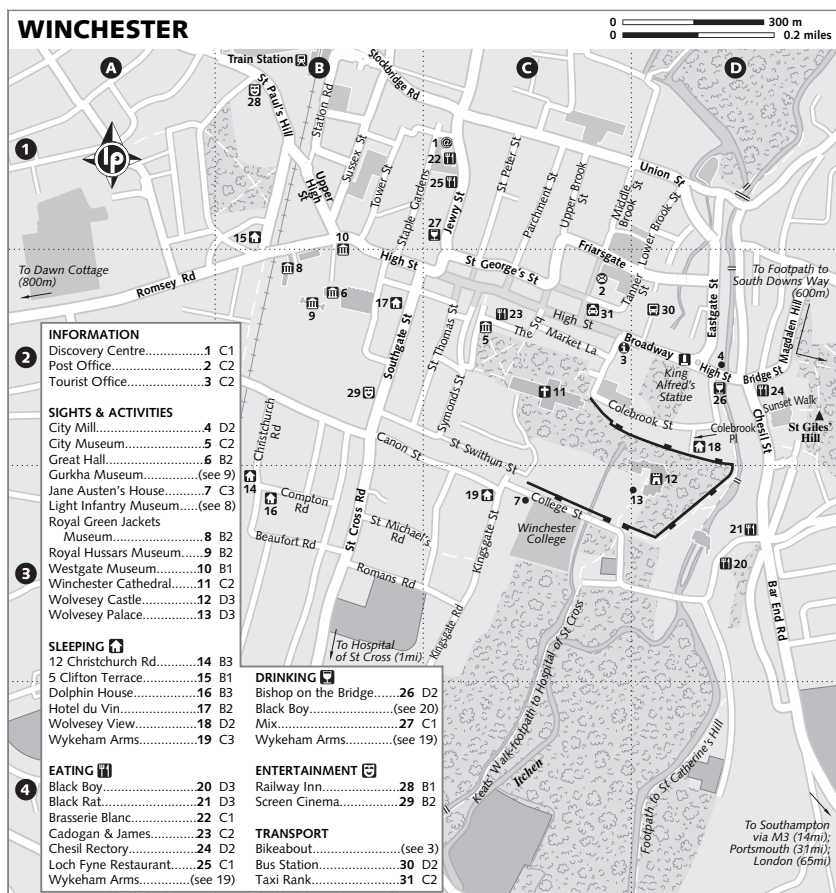
**Dorset Coastal Cottages** (📞 0800 980 4070; [www.dorsetcoastalcottages.com](http://www.dorsetcoastalcottages.com))

**Dream Cottages** (📞 01305-789000; [www.dream-cottages.co.uk](http://www.dream-cottages.co.uk))

**Farm & Cottage Holidays** (📞 01237-479146; [www.holidaycottages.co.uk](http://www.holidaycottages.co.uk))

**Hideaways** (📞 01747-828170; [www.hideaways.co.uk](http://www.hideaways.co.uk))

**New Forest Self Catering** (📞 01425-653908; [www.newforestcottages.com](http://www.newforestcottages.com))



to explore, and the city marks the beginning of the beautiful South Downs Way (see p173).

## History

The Romans first put their feet under the table here, but Winchester really took off when the powerful West Saxon bishops moved their episcopal see here in AD 670. Thereafter, Winchester was the most important town in the powerful kingdom of Wessex. King Alfred the Great (r 871–99) made it his capital, and it remained so under Knut (r 1016–35) and the Danish kings. After the Norman invasion of 1066, William the Conqueror arrived here to claim the throne of England. In 1086 he commissioned local monks to write the all-important *Domesday Book*, an adminis-

trative survey of the entire country and the most significant clerical accomplishment of the Middle Ages. Winchester thrived up until the 12th century, when a fire gutted most of the city – after this, London took its crown. A long slump lasted until the 18th century, when the town revived as a trading centre.

## Orientation

The city centre is compact and easily managed on foot. The partly pedestrianised High St runs from west to east, where you'll find a towering statue of a wild-looking King Alfred the Great. The bus station is in the middle of town opposite the Guildhall and tourist office; the train station is five minutes' walk northwest.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01962-840500; www.visitwinchester.co.uk; High St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), in the Gothic Revival Guildhall, has information and an accommodation booking service. The new **Discovery Centre** (☎ 0845 603 5631; Jewry St; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), a library-cum-entertainment space, has free internet access. There's a **post office** (☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) on Middle Brook St, and there are plenty of banks and ATMs on High St.

## Sights

### WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Almost 1000 years of history are crammed into Winchester's superb **cathedral** (☎ 01962-857200; www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk; adult/child £5/free, combined admission & tower tour £8; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 5.30pm Sun), which is not only the city's star attraction but one of southern England's most awe-inspiring buildings. The exterior, with a squat tower and a slightly sunken rear, isn't at first glance appealing, despite a fine Gothic facade. But the interior contains one of the longest medieval naves (164m) in Europe, and a fascinating jumble of features from all eras.

The cathedral sits beside foundations that mark the town's original 7th-century minster church. The cathedral was begun in 1070 and completed in 1093, and subsequently entrusted with the bones of its patron saint, St Swithun (bishop of Winchester from 852 to 862). He is best known for the proverb that states that if it rains on St Swithun's Day (15 July), it will rain for a further 40 days and 40 nights.

Soggy ground and poor workmanship spelled disaster for the early church; the original tower collapsed in 1107 and major restructuring continued until the mid-15th century. Look out for the monument at the rear to diver William Walker, who saved the cathedral from collapse by delving repeatedly into its waterlogged underbelly from 1906 to 1912 to bolster rotting wooden foundations with vast quantities of concrete and brick.

On the south side of the nave, the **Cathedral Library & Triforium Gallery** (adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-4pm Mon Apr-Oct) provide a fine elevated view of the cathedral body, and contains the dazzlingly illuminated pages of the 12th-century *Winchester Bible* – its colours as bright as if they were painted yesterday.

You can also see the grave of one of England's best-loved authors, Jane Austen. It's

near the entrance in the northern aisle. Austen died a stone's throw from the cathedral in 1817 at **Jane Austen's House** (8 College St), where she spent her last six weeks. It's now a private residence and is marked by a slate plaque.

The transepts are the most original parts of the cathedral, and the intricately carved medieval choir stalls are another must-see, sporting everything from mythical beasts to a mischievous green man.

Flooding often prevents tours of the **crypt** (tours free; ☎ 10.30am, 12.30pm & 2.30pm Mon-Sat) from going ahead; if it is open, look out for the poignant solitary sculpture by Anthony Gormley called *Sound 2*.

Cathedral body **tours** (free; ☎ hourly 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) last one hour. There are also **tower and roof tours** (£5; ☎ 2.15pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am & 2.15pm Sat Jun-Sep, 2.15pm Wed, 11.30am & 2.15pm Sat Oct-May) up narrow stairwells and with views as far as the Isle of Wight. Sunday services take place at 8am, 10am and 11.15am, with evensong at 3.30pm. Evensong is also held at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday.

### THE GREAT HALL

Winchester's other showpiece is the cavernous **Great Hall** (☎ 01962-846476; Castle Ave; suggested donation adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 10am-5pm), the only part of 11th-century Winchester Castle that Oliver Cromwell spared from destruction. Crowning the wall like a giant-sized dartboard of green and cream spokes is what centuries of mythology have called **King Arthur's Round Table**. It's actually a 700-year-old fake, but a fascinating one nonetheless. It's thought to have been constructed in the late 13th century and later painted in the reign of Henry VIII (King Arthur's image is unsurprisingly reminiscent of Henry's youthful face).

This hall was also the stage for several dramatic English courtroom dramas, including the trial of adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh in 1603, who was sentenced to death but received a reprieve at the last minute.

Outside, near the hall's entrance, there's also a section of an old Roman wall, built around AD 200, and more remains of Winchester Castle, built around 1000 years later.

### MUSEUMS

**City Museum** (☎ 01962-863064; The Square; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct,

10am–4pm Tue–Sat, noon–4pm Sun Nov–Mar) whizzes through Winchester’s fascinating Roman and Saxon history, lingers on its Anglo-Norman golden age, pays homage to Jane Austen, and reconstructs several early-20th-century Winchester shops.

Fitting snugly into one of Winchester’s two surviving medieval gateways, **Westgate Museum** (☎ 01962-869864; High St; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Tue–Sat, noon–4pm Sun Feb & Mar) was once a debtors’ prison with a macabre set of gibbeting irons last used to display an executed criminal’s body in 1777. Scrawled crudely all over the interior walls is the 17th-century graffiti of prisoners.

There’s a clutch of army museums dotted around the Peninsula Barracks on Romsey Rd. The highlight is the **Royal Green Jackets Museum** (☎ 01962-828549; www.winchestermilitarymuseums.co.uk; adult/child £2/1; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun Mar–mid-Nov), which has a mini rifle-shooting range, a room of 6000 medals and an impressive blow-by-blow diorama of Napoleon’s downfall, the Battle of Waterloo.

The militarily minded may also enjoy the jungle tableau of the **Gurkha Museum** (☎ 01962-842832; www.thegurkhamuseum.co.uk; adult/senior/child £2/1/free; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun), the **Light Infantry Museum** (☎ 01962-828550; admission free; 🕒 10am–4pm Tue–Sat, noon–4pm Sun), complete with a chunk of the Berlin Wall, and the **Royal Hussars Museum** (☎ 01962-828541; admission free; 🕒 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, noon–4pm Sat & Sun), which gallops through combat history from the Charge of the Light Brigade to armour-clad vehicles.

### WOLVESEY CASTLE & PALACE

The fantastic, crumbling remains of early-12th-century **Wolvesey Castle** (EH; ☎ 023-9237 8291; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Apr–Sep) huddle in the protective embrace of the city’s walls, despite the building having been largely demolished in the 1680s. According to legend, its odd name comes from a Saxon king’s demand for an annual payment of 300 wolves’ heads. It was completed by Henry de Blois, and it served as the Bishop of Winchester’s residence throughout the medieval era. Queen Mary I and Philip II of Spain celebrated their wedding feast here in 1554. Access via College St. Today the bishop lives in the adjacent **Wolvesey Palace**.

### CITY MILL

The city’s 18th-century water-powered **mill** (NT; ☎ 01962-870057; Bridge St; adult/child £3.40/1.70;

🕒 11am–5pm Mar–Dec) is now working again – you can see the process in action and buy stone-ground flour in the shop.

### HOSPITAL OF ST CROSS

Monk, bishop, knight, politician and grandson of William the Conqueror, Henry de Blois was a busy man. But he found time to establish this still-impressive **hospital** (☎ 01962-851375; www.stcrosshospital.co.uk; St Cross Rd; adult/child/senior £2.50/50p/£2; 🕒 9.30am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10.30am–3.30pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar) in 1132. As well as healing the sick and housing the needy, the hospital was built to feed and bed pilgrims and crusaders en route to the Holy Land. It’s the oldest charitable institution in the country, and is still roamed by 25 elderly black- or red-gowned brothers in pie-shaped trencher hats, who continue to hand out alms. Take a peek into the stumpy church, the brethren hall, the kitchen and the peaceful gardens. The best way to arrive is via the 1-mile Keats’ Walk (below). Upon entering, claim the centuries-old traditional Wayfarer’s Dole – a crust of bread and horn of ale (now a small swig of beer) from the Porter’s Gate.

### Activities

#### WALKS

Winchester has a tempting range of rambles. The 1-mile **Keats’ Walk** meanders through the water meadows to Hospital of St Cross (above). Its beauty is said to have prompted the poet to pen the ode *To Autumn* – pick up the trail near Wolvesey Castle. Alternatively, head down Wharf Hill, through the water meadows to **St Catherine’s Hill** (1 mile). The tranquil **Riverside Walk**, meanwhile, trails a short distance from the castle along the bank of the River Itchen to High St. The stiffer **Sunset Walk** up St Giles’ Hill rewards with fine city views, especially at dusk – to get here head up East or Magdalen Hills. St Giles’ Hill is also the beginning (or end) of the **South Downs Way** (p173).

### Tours

The tourist office runs a wide variety of 1½-hour **guided walks** (adult/child £4/free; 🕒 11am Mon–Fri year-round, 2.30pm Sat Apr–Oct, 11am Sat Nov–Mar); look out for the evening strolls, which sometimes feature Jane Austen’s Winchester and a ‘Bring Out Your Dead’ plague tour.

### Sleeping

**Wolvesey View** (☎ 01962-852082; www.wintonian.com; 10 Colebrook Pl; s/d £40/68; 📞 📍) Book the Yellow

Room here and you'll open the curtains to grandstand views of Wolvesey Castle's fairytale tumblings. It's a simply furnished, family-run affair, with shared bathrooms – all hidden away in a quiet cul-de-sac.

**Dolphin House** (☎ 01962-853284; www.dolphinhousestudios.co.uk; 3 Clifton Rd; s/d £55/70; (P)) A kind of B&B-plus, the two rooms (with attached bathroom) in this charming town house share a compact kitchen to which your Continental breakfast is delivered – allowing for lazy lie-ins. The terrace, complete with cast-iron tables and chairs, overlooks a gently sloping lawn.

**5 Clifton Terrace** (☎ 01962-890053; chrissiejohnston@hotmail.com; 5 Clifton Tce; s/d/f £55/65/89; (P) (Q)) Blending old and new, this tall Georgian town house sees plush furnishings rub shoulders with antiques, and modern comforts coexist alongside claw-foot baths. The owners are utterly charming.

**ourpick Wykeham Arms** (☎ 01962-853834; www.accommodating-inns.co.uk; 75 Kingsgate St; s £90-100, d £105-150) At 250-odd years old, the Wykeham is bursting with history – it used to be a brothel and also put up Nelson for a night (some say the two events coincided). Creaking, winding stairs lead to the cosy, traditionally styled bedrooms above the pub, while the posher rooms (over the converted post office, opposite), look out onto a pocked-sized courtyard garden.

**Hotel du Vin** (☎ 01962-841414; www.hotelduvin.com; Southgate St; r £135-205; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Tucked in behind a red-brick facade and gleaming white porticoes, this oh-so-chic hotel boasts ultracool minimalist furniture, ornate chaise longues and opulent stand-alone baths. The bistro delivers Georgian elegance and modern versions of English and French classics (mains £16).

Also recommended:

**12 Christchurch Rd** (☎ 01962-854272; 12 Christchurch Rd; s/d £35/50) A reassuringly traditional B&B, with lace doilies, feather beds and a flower-filled conservatory.

**Dawn Cottage** (☎ 01962-869956; dawncottage@hotmail.com; 99 Romsey Rd; s/d £55/68; (P)) A tranquil, vine-covered house a mile from the middle of town. Has lovely views, a sun deck and pretty gardens.

## Eating

**Cadogan & James** (☎ 01962-840805; 31A The Square; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Self-caterers will need to be dragged out of this delightful delicatessen, full of the smells of freshly baked breads, herbs and spices, and gourmet goodies.

**Wykeham Arms** (☎ 01962-853834; 75 Kingsgate St; mains £9-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun)

Somehow reminiscent of an endearingly eccentric old uncle, this charming pub-restaurant has 1400 tankards hanging from the ceilings, as well as an impressive array of school canes. The food is legendary – try the pan-fried salmon, or sausages flavoured with local bitter, then finish off with some seriously addictive sticky toffee pudding.

**Brasserie Blanc** (☎ 01962-810870; 19 Jewry St; mains £13; ☎ lunch & dinner) Get a taste of French home cooking, Raymond (Blanc) style, at this super-sleek chain. The celebrity chef may not necessarily sauté your starter himself, but the chicken stuffed with morel mushrooms and the Toulouse sausage with onion gravy are full of Gallic charm.

**Black Rat** (☎ 01962-844465; 88 Chesil St; mains £17; ☎ dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) Worn wooden floorboards and warm red-brick walls give this relaxed restaurant a cosy feel. Duck with brioche, mushrooms with truffle-oil and woodpigeon with pine nuts all find their way onto the sanded-down tables.

**Chesil Rectory** (☎ 01962-851555; 1 Chesil St; 1-2-/3-course lunch £15/19/23, 2-3-/6-course dinner £39/49/65; ☎ dinner Tue, lunch & dinner Wed-Sat) Duck through the hobbit-sized door, settle down amid the 15th-century beams and prepare to enjoy some fine modern Continental cuisine. Confit of duck, Solent sea bass with oyster sauce, and ravioli of lobster with diver-caught scallops all feature on the assured menu.

Also recommended:

**Loch Fyne Restaurant** (☎ 01962-872930; 18 Jewry St; mains £9-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Quality seafood served surrounded by a stunning array of twisted Tudor beams and wooden galleries.

**Black Boy** (☎ 01962-861754; 1 Wharf Hill; mains £8-10; ☎ dinner Tue, lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, lunch Sun) Dishes up decent pub grub in a completely quirky environment.

## Drinking

Winchester isn't big on late-night revelry, though the students head for cheap pubs along Jewry St.

**Black Boy** (☎ 01962-861754; 1 Wharf Hill; ☎ noon-11pm) This adorable old pub is filled with obsessive and sometimes freaky collections, from pocket watches to wax facial features, bear traps and sawn paperbacks.

**Bishop on the Bridge** (☎ 01962-855111; 1 High St; ☎ noon-11pm) The riverside beer garden of this contemporary pub makes a great spot to down a drink; you'll be overlooking the rushing water below.



**Mix** (☎ 01962-860900; 10 Jewry St; ☎ 4pm-1am Mon-Sat, 4pm-1am Sun) A poseur's paradise: perch elegantly on a velvet dressing-table chair in this black, pink and aquamarine champagne and cocktail bar.

The **Wykeham Arms** (see Eating, opposite) is a wonderfully characterful place for a pint.

## Entertainment

For listings, pick up the free *What's On in Winchester* from the tourist office.

**Railway Inn** (☎ 01962-867795; www.liveattherailway.co.uk; 3 St Paul's Hill; ☎ 5pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri, to 1am Sat) Catch live bands from 8pm at this grungy place behind the station.

**Screen Cinema** (☎ 01962-877007; www.screencinemas.co.uk; Southgate St) Watch movies in a converted 19th-century military chapel.

## Getting There & Away

Winchester is 65 miles west of London and 14 miles north of Southampton.

### BUS

National Express has several direct buses to London Victoria bus station (£13, 2¼ hours). Buses also run to Southampton (40 minutes). Wilts & Dorset Explorer tickets (adult/child £7.50/4.50) let you roam the region to the west, including the New Forest.

### TRAIN

Trains leave every 20 minutes from London Waterloo (£24, one hour) and Southampton (15 to 23 minutes) and hourly from Portsmouth (£8.60, one hour). There are also fast links to the Midlands.

## Getting Around

There's plenty of day parking within five minutes' walk of the centre or you can use the park-and-ride for £2.70 per day. The **Bikeabout** (☎ 01962-840500; www.winchester.gov.uk/bikeabout; membership £20) scheme lets members borrow bikes free for 24 hours at a time. Bikes can be picked up and dropped off at the tourist office.

For a taxi try the rank outside Sainsbury's on Middle Brook St or phone **Wintax Taxis** (☎ 01962-878727).

## PORTSMOUTH

pop 187,056

Prepare to splice the main brace, hoist the halyard and potter around the poop deck.

Portsmouth is the principal port of Britain's Royal Navy, and its historic dockyard ranks alongside Greenwich as one of England's most fascinating centres of maritime history. Here you can jump aboard Lord Nelson's glorious warship *HMS Victory*, which led the charge at Trafalgar, and glimpse the atmospheric remains of Henry VIII's 16th-century flagship, the *Mary Rose*.

Regeneration at the nearby Gunwharf Quays has added new glitz to the city's waterfront. A spectacular millennium-inspired structure, the Spinnaker Tower – keelhauled by the British media for delays and spiralling costs – finally opened here in 2005, with views to knock the wind from the critics' sails.

However, Portsmouth is by no means a city noted for its beauty; it was heavily bombed during WWII and a combination of sometimes soulless postwar architecture and surprisingly deserted waterfront promenades can leave a melancholy impression. But the city's fine array of naval museums justifies an overnight stay, while the suburb of Southsea boasts some fair beaches, bars and good restaurants.

## Orientation

It's easy to find Portsmouth's key sights – the futuristic Spinnaker Tower (p285) soars into the sky to point the way. The central quay area alongside, known as The Hard, also has the Historic Dockyard, tourist office, train station and the passenger-ferry terminal for the Isle of Wight. Just southeast lies Old Portsmouth, where more ancient buildings feature amid the postwar rebuild. Next door sits the Point, a cluster of seaworn, atmospheric buildings around the old harbour. Southsea is about 2 miles south.

## Information

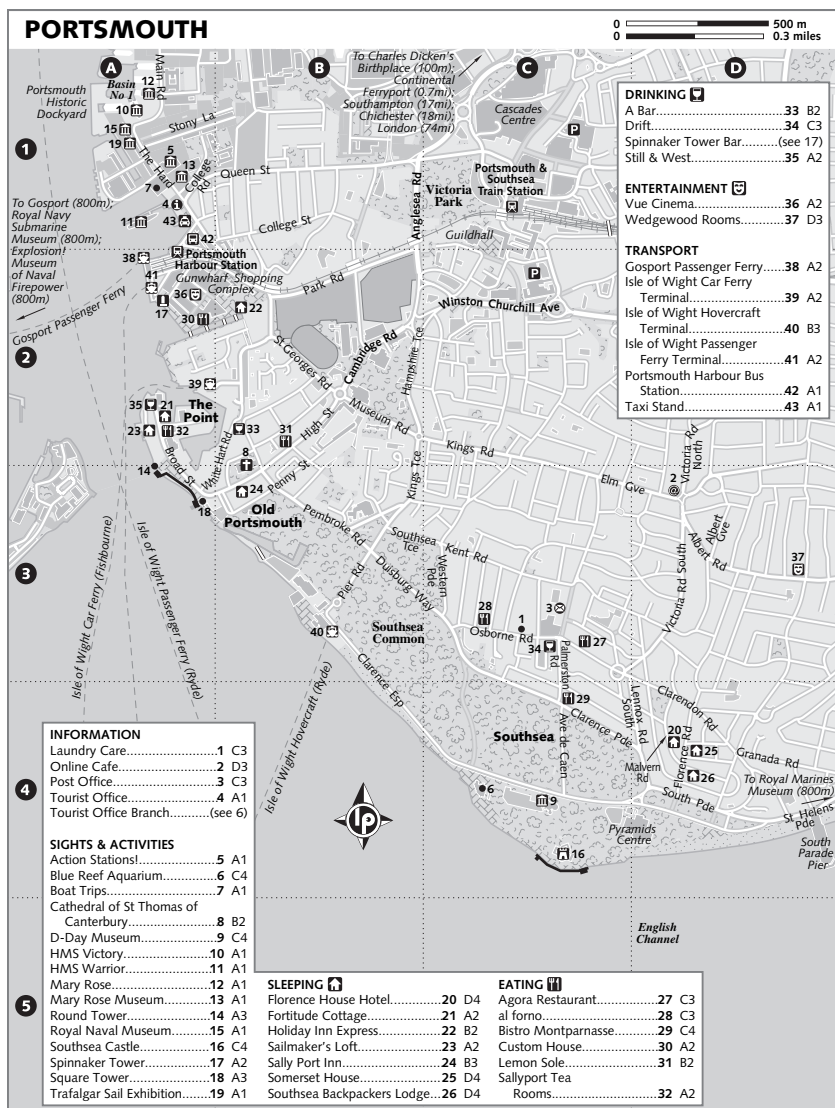
**Laundry Care** (☎ 023-9282 6245; 59 Osborne Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm)

**Online Cafe** (☎ 023-9283 1106; 163 Elm Grove, Southsea; internet access per 10min/1hr 50p/£2.60; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun)

**Post office** (Palmerston Rd, Southsea)

**Tourist office** (☎ 023-9282 6722; www.visitportsmouth.co.uk; The Hard; ☎ 9.30am-5.45pm Apr-Sep, to 5.15pm Oct-Mar) Can arrange walking tours (£2), and has an accommodation service.

**Tourist office branch** (☎ 023-9282 6722; Clarence Esplanade, Southsea; ☎ 9.30am-5.45pm Jul & Aug, to



5.15pm Mar-Jun, to 4pm Sep-Feb) Next to the Blue Reef Aquarium, this branch gives discounts to several attractions (if you buy tickets in advance).

## Sights & Activities

### PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD

Portsmouth's blockbuster attraction is the **Historic Dockyard** (☎ 023-9283 9766; www.historic

dockyard.co.uk; adult/child single-attraction ticket £10/8, all-inclusive ticket £18.50/14; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Nov-Mar, last admission 1½hr before closing). Set in the heart of the country's most important naval port, it comprises three stunning ships and a clutch of museums that pay homage to the historical might of the Royal Navy. Together they make for a full day's outing,

though you may spend much of your time swimming through a tide of schoolchildren. The all-inclusive ticket provides access for one year to all the ships and museums, and it includes a harbour tour (see Tours, p286) – the single ticket limits you to just one of the attractions.

### The Ships

As resplendent as she is venerable, the dockyard's star sight is **HMS Victory** ([www.hms-victory.com](http://www.hms-victory.com)), Lord Nelson's flagship at the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar and the site of his infamous 'Kiss me, Hardy...' dying words when victory over the French had been secured. This remarkable ship is topped by a forest of ropes and masts, and weighted by a swollen belly filled with cannon and paraphernalia for an 850-strong crew. Clambering through the low-beamed decks is a stirring experience and there's huge demand for the excellent 40-minute tours – arrive early to bag a place (you can't book in advance).

Equally thrilling are the remains of 16th-century warship and darling of Henry VIII, the **Mary Rose** ([www.maryrose.org](http://www.maryrose.org)), the only such ship on display in the world. This 700-tonne floating fortress sank off Portsmouth after a mysterious incident of 'human folly and bad luck' in 1545. In an astoundingly ambitious piece of marine archaeology, the ship was raised from its watery grave in 1982. It now presents a ghostly image that could teach Hollywood a few tricks, its vast flank preserved in dim lighting, dripping and glistening in a constant mist of sea water.

Anywhere else, the magnificent warship **HMS Warrior**, built in 1860, would grab centre stage. This stately dame was at the cutting edge of technology in her day, riding the transition from wood to iron and sail to steam. Visitors can wander freely around the four decks to imagine life in the Victorian navy.

### Mary Rose Museum

At this museum, which is set away from the ship herself, you can bear witness to the Herculean salvage operation to raise the *Mary Rose* from the seabed. Crammed full of recovered treasures and fascinating facts, displays also feature a 15-minute film showing just how they managed to extract her from Portsmouth Harbour. A single-attraction ticket to this museum also includes admission to the ship (see above).

### Royal Naval Museum

This huge museum has five galleries of naval history, model ships, battle dioramas, medals, paintings and much more. Audiovisual displays recreate the Battle of Trafalgar and one even lets you take command of a battleship – see if you can cure the scurvy and avoid mutiny. One gallery is entirely devoted to Lord Nelson.

### Trafalgar Sail Exhibition

This small exhibition (🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) showcases HMS *Victory*'s only remaining sail from the Battle of Trafalgar. Clearly bearing the scars of conflict, it's riddled with the holes made by Napoleonic cannon – a telling illustration of the battle's ferocity.

### Action Stations!

Stumble into this warehouse-based **interactive experience** ([www.actionstations.org](http://www.actionstations.org)) and you'll soon be controlling a replica Merlin helicopter, commanding a warship, upping periscope or jumping aboard a jerky simulator. The whole set-up is a thinly disguised recruitment drive for the modern navy, but it's a fun one, nonetheless.

### SPINNAKER TOWER

Soaring to 170m above Gunwharf Quays, **Spinnaker Tower** (☎ 023-92857520; [www.spinnakertower.co.uk](http://www.spinnakertower.co.uk); Gunwharf Quays; adult/child £7/5.50; 🕒 10am-10pm Aug, 10am-6pm Sun-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-Jul) is Portsmouth's unmistakable new landmark, a symbol of the city's new-found razzle-dazzle. Its two sweeping white arcs resemble a billowing sail from some angles, and a sharp skeletal ribcage from others.

As the UK's tallest publicly accessible structure, it offers truly extraordinary views over Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, the South Downs and even Chichester, 23 miles to the east. Observation Deck 1 has a hair-raising view through the glass floor, while the roofless Crow's Nest on Deck 3 allows you to feel the wind in your hair. Below, the glitzy mall and promenades dotted with palm trees complete the designers' vision of 21st-century Portsmouth.

### GOSPORT

Gosport sits on the other side of Portsmouth Harbour, and is easily reached by ferry from The Hard.

Less than a mile from the ferry port, **Royal Navy Submarine Museum** (☎ 023-9252 9217; www.rnsubmus.co.uk; adult/child £7/5.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) includes a bona-fide ex-service submarine – clambering aboard provides a revealing insight into the claustrophobic conditions.

Or, if it's things that go bang that float your boat, head for **Explosion! Museum of Naval Firepower** (☎ 023-9250 5600; www.explosion.org.uk; Priddy's Hard; adult/child £4/2; 🕒 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), less than a mile from the Gosport ferry terminal, in the opposite direction from the Royal Navy Submarine Museum. An old gunpowder magazine, built in 1771, houses this museum of munitions and ordinance.

### OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A short waterside walk from Gunwharf Quays, but a world apart in atmosphere, the **Point** is home to characterful cobbled streets dotted with salty sea-dog pubs. It's a top spot from which to gaze at the Spinnaker Tower and the passing parade of ferries and navy ships.

Just off the Point you can mount the **Round Tower** (originally built by Henry V), the **Square Tower** of 1494, and take a stroll along the old fort walls. A short walk from the water, the airy **Cathedral of St Thomas of Canterbury** (☎ 023-9282 3300; www.portsmouthcathedral.org.uk; High St; 🕒 9am-5pm) retains fragments of its 12th- and 17th-century incarnations, but a striking modern makeover has introduced some quirky little statuettes by Peter Eugene Ball; look for Thomas Becket with a sword through his mitred head.

There's a cluster of attractions on Clarence Esplanade at the Southsea end of the waterfront. **Blue Reef Aquarium** (☎ 023-9287 5222; www.blureefaquarium.co.uk; adult/child £9/7; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) has open-topped tanks, huge underwater walkways and a captivating 'seahorse ranch' – a sure hit with kids. A short stroll away is bunkerlike **D-Day Museum** (☎ 023-9282 7261; www.ddaymuseum.co.uk; Clarence Esplanade; adult/child £6/4.20; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), which recounts Portsmouth's important role as departure point for the Allied D-Day forces in 1944.

Alongside, squat **Southsea Castle** (☎ 023-9282 7261; www.southseacastle.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) was built by Henry VIII and is said to be where he watched his beloved *Mary Rose* sink. The castle was much altered in the early 19th century and there's now a lighthouse plonked on top.

Further south, **Royal Marines Museum** (☎ 023-9281 9385; www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk; Barracks Rd; adult/child £5.25/3.25; 🕒 10am-5pm) tells the story of the navy's elite force, and has a jungle-warfare display complete with live snakes and scorpions.

East of the Historic Dockyard you can also poke your nose into **Charles Dickens' Birthplace** (☎ 023-9282 7261; www.charlesdickensbirthplace.co.uk; 393 Old Commercial Rd; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm mid-Apr–Oct); the hard-hitting author was born here in 1812. He also died here in 1870 – you can see the couch upon which he breathed his last breath.

### Tours

**Boat trips** (☎ 023-9272 8060; Historic Dockyard; 🕒 11am-3pm Easter–Oct) Weather permitting, 40-minute harbour tours leave on the hour from just inside the entrance to the Historic Dockyard. They're free with the all-inclusive Dockyard ticket or can be bought separately (adult/child £5/3).

**Walking tours** (adult/child £3/free; 🕒 2.30pm Sun) The tourist office runs a program of guided tours; check with the office for details and departure points.

### Sleeping

Most B&Bs are in Southsea. Centrally located spots fill up quickly, so book ahead.

**Southsea Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 023-9283 2495; www.portsmouthbackpackers.co.uk; 4 Florence Rd, Southsea; dm £15, d £38-38; 📶) This old-fashioned backpackers hostel is a warren of four- to eight-bed dorms. The shower-to-people ratio isn't that high, but there are other extras like a pool table, patio and BBQ.

**Fortitude Cottage** (☎ 023-9282 3748; www.fortitudecottage.co.uk; 51 Broad St, The Point; s from £45, d £70-80) The ferry-port views from this fresh and airy B&B are interesting, if industrial. The lovely bay-windowed breakfast area is ideal for munching a sausage as the ships come in.

**Sally Port Inn** (☎ 023-9282 1860; High St, Old Portsmouth; s/d/f £45/70/80) The slightly worn bedrooms in this 16th-century inn are showing their age; they also share bathrooms. But history buffs might enjoy the slanting floors, beams scavenged from shipwrecks and a Georgian cantilever staircase built with a ship's mast.

**Florence House Hotel** (☎ 023-9275 1666; www.florencehousehotel.co.uk; 2 Malvern Rd, Southsea; d £70-140; 📶 wi-fi) Edwardian elegance combines beautifully with modern flourishes at this

superstylish oasis of boutique bliss. It's a winning combination of plush furnishings, sleek bathrooms, open fireplaces and the odd chaise longue – the suite, complete with spa bath, is top-notch.

**our pick Somerset House** (☎ 023-9275 3555; www.somersethousehotel.co.uk; 10 Florence Rd, Southsea; d £110-190) At this late-Victorian sister to Florence House (opposite), opposite, the same team has created another achingly tasteful haven of designer calm. Here, stained glass, dark woods and polished floors cosy up to Balinese figurines and the very latest word in luxury bathrooms.

Also recommended:

**Sailmaker's Loft** (☎ 023-9282 3045; sailmakersloft@aol.com; 5 Bath Sq, The Point; s/d £28/55) Unbeatable views across the water towards Gosport.

**Holiday Inn Express** (☎ 0870 417 6161; www.hi.express.com; The Plaza; r £105; ) Spotlessly bland, but set right amid Gunwharf Quays' restaurants and bars.

## Eating

**Sallyport Tea Rooms** (☎ 023-9281 6265; 35 Broad St, The Point; breakfast £3.75-5.25, lunch £3-5; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Just as a traditional tearoom should be: civilised, filled with fussy collectibles and serving up loose-leaf speciality teas and other old-fashioned delights to the strains of 1940s jazz.

**Custom House** (☎ 023-9283 2333; Gunwharf Quays; mains £8; lunch & dinner) The best of Gunwharf Quays' numerous swanky eateries. Custom House is in the 1790 Vernon Building, now a traditional-style pub with better-than-average bar food.

**al forno** (☎ 023-9282 0515; 39 Osborne Rd; mains £8; noon-10pm) This cool little Italian brings a touch of *la dolce vita* to not-terribly Continental Southsea. The decor may not be traditional (think burgundy candy stripes and elegant chairs), but the chef still rustles up all the old pasta and pizza favourites.

**Agora Restaurant** (☎ 023-9282 2617; 9 Clarendon Rd, Southsea; mains £8.50-10.50; dinner) Festeoned with fake beams, this familial little Turkish hookah bar serves up tasty Mediterranean food, washed down with ouzo and raki. Watch out for its occasional belly-dancing nights.

**our pick Lemon Sole** (☎ 023-9281 1303; 123 High St, Old Portsmouth; mains £9.50-18; lunch & dinner) A colourful little pick-your-own seafood restaurant, Lemon Sole lets you size up freshly netted critters at a counter, then choose how you want them cooked. Try the seafood and

shellfish chowder, the devilled mackerel or the stunning fish platters (£39 for two). The menu includes veggie and meat options, too. It's all tucked away in a lemon-yellow, gold and blue interior with a whole wall full of wine bottles at the end.

**Bistro Montparnasse** (☎ 023-9281 6754; 103 Palmerston Rd, Southsea; lunch mains £11-22, 2-/3-course dinner £27/32; lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Along with polished wooden floors and chic decor, this classy, cosy bistro serves up French classics with an English twist. Wild mushroom and spinach Wellington, and local sea bass with crab ravioli are among the treats.

## Drinking

For a taste of modern Portsmouth, pick your way through the rows of bars and trendy terraced and balconied eateries that line Gunwharf Quays.

**A Bar** (☎ 023-9281 15585; 58 White Hart Rd, Old Portsmouth; 11am-11pm) There's actually been a pub here since 1784 – these days it's home to worn floorboards, squishy leather sofas, a soundtrack of groovy tunes and a chilled, gently trendy vibe.

**Still & West** (☎ 023-9282 1567; 2 Bath Sq, The Point) This relaxed salty-sea-dog pub has served many a sailor and smuggler in the last 300 years. The waterside terrace is a great spot to down a beer to a backdrop of passing yachts and ferries.

**Drift** (☎ 023-9277 9839; www.driftbar.com; 78 Palmerston Rd, Southsea; 10pm-3am) All slick chrome and smooth wood, this hip London-style bar languishes behind a frosted glass and pebble-dashed front. The lounge showcases DJs at the weekends and acoustic sets on Sundays.

**Spinnaker Tower Bar** (☎ 023-9285 7520; Gunwharf Quays; 10am-11pm) OK, it's the most touristy cafe-bar in Portsmouth, but it provides a prime coffee-sipping, wine-supping, boat-watching vantage point.

## Entertainment

Southsea is thick with nightclubs and live-music venues.

**Wedgewood Rooms** (☎ 023-9286 3911; www.wedgewoodrooms.co.uk; Albert Rd, Southsea) One of Portsmouth's best live-music venues; also hosting DJs and comedians.

For cinema, head to **Vue** (www.myvue.com; Gunwharf Quays).

## Getting There & Away

Portsmouth is 100 miles southwest of London.

### BOAT

**P&O Ferries** (☎ 08716 645 645; www.poferries.com) sails twice a week to Bilbao in Spain (10 hours).

**Brittany Ferries** (☎ 0870 366 5333; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) has overnight services to St Malo (10½ hours), Caen (5½ hours) and Cherbourg (three hours) in France. **LD Lines** (☎ 0844 576 8836; www.ldlines.co.uk) has overnight ferries to Le Havre (8½ hours) in France. **Condor Ferries** (☎ 0845 609 1024; www.condorferries.co.uk) runs a weekly car-and-passenger service to Cherbourg (5½ hours).

Prices for all routes vary wildly depending on times and dates of travel – an example fare is £152 return for a car and two adults on the Portsmouth–Cherbourg route. Book in advance, be prepared to travel off-peak and look out for special deals.

The Continental Ferryport is north of the Historic Dockyard.

For details on how to reach the Isle of Wight from Portsmouth, see p294.

### BUS

There are 15 National Express buses from London (£14.30, 2½ hours) daily; some go via Heathrow airport (£14.30, 2¾ hours) and continue to Southampton (50 minutes). Bus 700 runs to Chichester (one hour) and Brighton (3½ hours) half-hourly Monday to Saturday, and hourly on Sunday.

### TRAIN

Trains run every 15 minutes from London Victoria (£24.40, two hours 20 minutes) and Waterloo Stations (£24.40, one hour and 40 minutes). Trains also go to Southampton (£7.80, 40 to 55 minutes, four hourly), Brighton (£12.80, one hour and 40 minutes, hourly), Winchester (£7.90, one hour, hourly) and Chichester (£5.60, 30 to 46 minutes, twice an hour).

For the Historic Dockyard get off at the final stop, Portsmouth Harbour.

## Getting Around

Bus 6 operates between the Portsmouth Harbour bus station and South Parade Pier in Southsea, via Old Portsmouth.

The **Gospport Passenger Ferry** (☎ 023-9252 4551; www.gospportferry.co.uk; adult/child return £2.10/1.40, bicycle

70p) shuttles between The Hard and Gosport every 10 to 15 minutes.

For a taxi try **Aquacars** (☎ 023-9266 6666, 9265 4321) in Southsea, or the rank near the bus station.

## SOUTHAMPTON

pop 234,224

A no-nonsense port city and gateway to the Isle of Wight, Southampton lies deep in the folds of the Solent, an 8-mile inlet fed by the rivers Itchen and Test. The city was once a flourishing medieval port but its centre was gutted by merciless bombing in WWII and consequently there's little left of its early heritage. Southampton today is more a transport hub than an appealing place to stay. Its gritty waterfront waved the *Titanic* off on its ill-fated voyage in 1912, while larger-than-life ocean liners such as the *QEII* still dock here.

The **tourist office** (☎ 023-8083 3333; www.visit-southampton.co.uk; 9 Civic Centre Rd; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–3.30pm Sun) has details of free 90-minute **guided walks** (☎ 10.30am Jul & Sep, 10.30am & 2.30pm Aug, 10.30am Sun Oct–Jun), which meet at the Bargate on High St.

## Sights & Activities

Set in a 14th-century waterfront warehouse, the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 023-8063 5904; The Wool House, Town Quay; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sat, 1–4pm Sun) tells the tragic story of the *Titanic* and outlines Southampton's history. The building was once a prison – look out for the inmates' names carved in the impressive timber roof.

For a glimpse of Southampton's medieval heyday, visit the nearby **Medieval Merchant's House** (EH; ☎ 023-8022 1503; French St; adult/child £3.70/2; ☎ noon–5pm Sun late Mar–Sep), which dates back to 1290.

The **Southampton Art Gallery** (☎ 023-8083 2277; www.southampton.gov.uk/art; Commercial Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, 1–4pm Sun) features work by some of the best names in 20th-century British art, including Spencer, Turner and Gainsborough.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Southampton International Airport** (☎ 0870 040 0009; www.southamptonairport.com) has links to 40 UK and European destinations, including Amsterdam, Paris and Dublin. There are five trains an hour between the airport and the main train station (seven minutes).

**BOAT**

**Red Funnel** (☎ 0844 844 9988; [www.redfunnel.co.uk](http://www.redfunnel.co.uk)) runs regular passenger and car ferries to the Isle of Wight (see p294). There's a half-hourly **ferry service** (☎ 023-8084 0722; one-way adult/child £3.20/2.40) from the Town Quay to Hythe in the New Forest.

**BUS**

National Express runs to London and Heathrow 16 times a day (£13.80, 2½ hours). It also runs a 7.20pm bus to Lymington (40 minutes) via Lyndhurst (20 minutes) in the New Forest.

Bus M27 runs to Portsmouth six times daily (40 minutes). Buses 31 and 32 run to Winchester (one hour) every two hours Monday to Saturday, and half-hourly on Sunday. Buses 56 and 56A go to all the main towns in the New Forest hourly (every two hours on Sunday). Ask about the good-value Explorer tickets that are valid on these routes.

**TRAIN**

Trains to Portsmouth run every 15 minutes (£7.80, 40 to 55 minutes) and to Winchester (20 minutes) every 20 minutes.

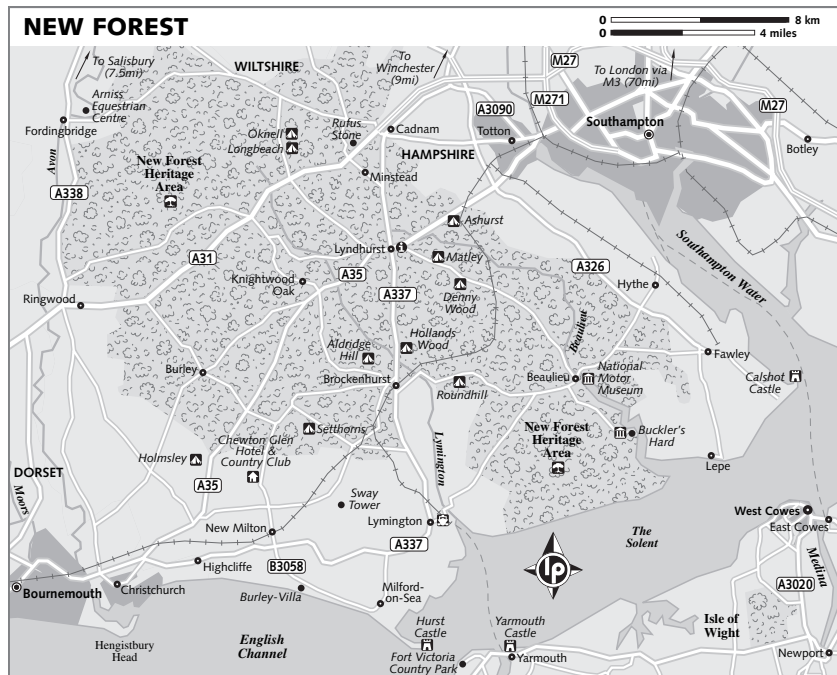
# NEW FOREST

With typical accidental English irony, the New Forest is anything but new. It's also not much of a forest, being mostly moorland ('forest' is from the Old French for 'hunting ground'). This ancient swathe of land has a unique history and archaic traditions that date back almost 1000 years (see boxed text, p291). Its incarnation as a national park is much more modern, having been awarded that status in 2005. The forest's combined charms make it a joy to explore. Wild ponies mooch around pretty scrubland, deer flicker in the distance and rare birds flit among the foliage. Genteel villages lightly dot the landscape, connected by a web of walking and cycling routes.

The park is also a hugely popular destination for campers; Lyndhurst's tourist office has a free brochure detailing designated areas. For more information, go to [www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk).

**Activities****CYCLING**

With all that picturesque scenery, the New Forest makes for superb cycling country, and



hundreds of miles of trails link the main villages and the key railway station at Brockenhurst

*New Forest Cycle Map* (£2) shows the approved off-road and quieter 'on-road' routes. *New Forest Cycle Experience Route Pack* (£4) features seven trips, ranging from a 4-mile jaunt through the forest to a 24-mile leg test round the cliffs of the Isle of Wight. David Hancock's *Mountain Bike Guide to Hampshire and the New Forest* (£5) outlines routes of 13 to 20 miles. Maps and guides can be bought from Lyndhurst tourist office (right) or via its website.

There are several rental shops. You'll need to pay a deposit (usually £20) and provide identification.

**AA Bike Hire** (☎ 023-8028 3349; www.aabikehirenewforest.co.uk; Fern Glen, Gosport Lane, Lyndhurst; adult/child per day £10/5)

**Country Lanes** (☎ 01590-622627; www.countrylanes.co.uk; Railway Station, Brockenhurst; bike/tandem per day £14/25; ☺ Easter-Oct)

**Cydxperience** (☎ 01590-624204; www.newforestcyclehire.co.uk; Brookley Rd, Brockenhurst; adult/child per day £11/6)

**Forest Leisure Cycling** (☎ 01425-403584; www.forestleisurecycling.co.uk; The Cross, Village Centre, Burley; adult/child per day from £11/6)

## HORSE RIDING

No, we're *not* talking about saddling up one of the wild ponies. But riding *is* a wonderful way to roam the New Forest. These stables can arrange rides, and they welcome beginners:

**Arniss Equestrian Centre** (☎ 01425-654114; Godshill, Fordingbridge; per hr £20)

**Burley-Villa** (Western Riding; ☎ 01425-610278; per 1-/2hr hack £28/48) It's off the B3058, just south of New Milton.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

There are regular guided walks with Forestry Commission staff called **Rambles with a Ranger**

(☎ 023-8028 3141; walks per person £4). **New Forest Activities** (☎ 01590-612377; www.newforestactivities.co.uk), near Beaulieu, offers canoeing (adult/child per hour £15/12, per two hours £25/20), kayaking (per two hours £25) and archery (per 1½ hours adult/child £20/15).

## Getting There & Around

There are regular bus services from Southampton and Bournemouth. Trains run every hour to Brockenhurst from London Waterloo (£29.50, two hours) via Winchester (£8, 31 minutes) and on to Bournemouth (£5, 25 minutes). Local trains also link Brockenhurst with Lymington (see p293).

The **New Forest Tour Bus** (☎ 023-8061 8233; www.thenewforesttour.info; adult/child £9/4.50; ☺ tours hourly 10am-4pm late May-Aug) is a two-hour hop-on hop-off bus service that passes through Lyndhurst's main car park, Brockenhurst Station, Lymington and Beaulieu; buses also have cycle trailers.

A **Wilts & Dorset** (www.wdbus.co.uk) Network Ticket offers unlimited travel on main bus lines in the region (one/seven days costs £7.50/20); the tourist office in Lyndhurst also sells them.

## LYNDHURST

pop 2281

A good base from which to explore the national park or simply stop off for a pint, a cuppa or a map, the quaint country village of Lyndhurst is one of the New Forest's larger settlements. It has an excellent information centre, as well as several cosy pubs and restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 023-8028 2269; www.thenewforest.co.uk; High St; ☺ 10am-5pm) sells a wide variety of information on the New Forest, including camping guides and walking and cycling

### FOUR DAYS FREEWHEELING THROUGH THE FOREST

Start your woodland two-wheeled adventure with some research at Lyndhurst's **visitor centre and museum** (above). Then limber up with an 8-mile, largely off-road jaunt via Denny Wood south to Brockenhurst before checking into the camper pad that is **Whitley Ridge** (opposite). Day two is a 9-mile peddle east via copses and quiet roads to the **National Motor Museum** (opposite) at **Beaulieu**. Next comes the 2-mile dash south to **Buckler's Hard** (p292) and some supercomfy digs at the **Master Builder's House Hotel** (p292). The next day it's back to Brockenhurst, via a more southerly route, and from there a further 8 miles southwest leads to **Chewton Glen Hotel & Country Club** (p293), where an unbelievably luxurious spa should soothe away any aches and pains. Day four is a 15-mile power north via lanes, forest and pubs back to Lyndhurst, having explored some of the best cycle trails the New Forest has to offer.



## VERDERERS, AGISTERS & PONIES

The woods of the New Forest are some of the few areas of England to remain largely untouched since Norman times, partly thanks to their unsuitability as agricultural land. But more significantly, the New Forest has also been protected by an 11th-century law: William the Conqueror officially declared the whole area a royal hunting preserve in 1079, thereby protecting it from development. The crown still owns 260 sq km of the New Forest, though the Forestry Commission has maintained it since 1924.

The remaining 130 sq km are owned by commoners, and by verderers, who, in the pre-automobile age, reared ponies as work horses. Today the animals are either schooled as riding ponies or left to graze the land at will. The verderers' status is protected by the Commoners' Charter, first laid down in 1077, which guaranteed them six basic rights, the most important of which is the right to pasture. Every year, the 300-odd verderers gather to elect five agisters, who are responsible for the daily management of the forest's 3000 ponies, 1800 cattle and smaller numbers of donkeys, pigs and sheep.

You can wander freely throughout the forest, but don't feed or touch the wild ponies. To protect ponies, cyclists and walkers, there is a 40mph speed limit. If you find an injured pony phone Lyndhurst Police on ☎ 0845 045 45 45.

maps. It also sells the more detailed Ordnance Survey (OS) map (No 22, £8). The displays of the **New Forest Museum** (☎ 023-8028 3444; www.newforestmuseum.org.uk; adult/child £3/free), alongside, run through the unique ecology and social history of the region.

Just across the car park, the **library** (☎ 023-8028 2675; ☎ 10am-1pm Fri & Sat, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue, 3-5pm Wed) has free internet access.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Acorns** (☎ 023-8028 4559; www.acornsofilyndhurst.co.uk; 31 Romsey Rd; d £50-70; (P)) One of many B&Bs along the A337 into the village from the south, Acorns gains from being set back from the road. Simple rooms, decked out in cream and pine, sit behind a flower-filled front garden.

**Crown Hotel** (☎ 023-8028 2922; www.crownhotel-lyndhurst.co.uk; 9 High St; s/d £88/145; (P) (Q)) There's such a deeply established feel to this oak-panelled, old-English coaching inn that you half expect to see a well-trained butler gliding up the grand stairs. The mullioned windows and ancient beams frame bedroom furnishings that are sometimes a little staid, and sometimes surprisingly snazzy.

**Waterloo Arms** (☎ 023-8028 2113; Pikes Hill; mains £7-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) This cosy 17th-century thatched pub serves good-value meals in a snug wood-beamed interior. On the town's northern edge, it's signposted off the A337 to Cadnam.

**our pick** **Whitley Ridge** (☎ 01590-622354; www.whitleyridge.com; Beaulieu Rd; Brockenhurst; r £95) If you hanker after a country-house atmosphere, head

here. Set in 6 hectares of dappled grounds, this ivy-clad Georgian pile pampers guests amid elegant period-style rooms finished with contemporary twists (think flat-screen TVs and gilt mirrors). The classy restaurant conjures up organic, seasonal, locally sourced creations finished with dashes of Anglo-French flair, and it's all tucked away 4 miles south of Lyndhurst at Brockenhurst.

## Getting There & Away

Buses 56 and 56A run twice hourly to Southampton (30 minutes) Monday to Saturday, with five buses on Sunday. Lyndhurst has no train station, and the nearest stop is at Brockenhurst, 8 miles south (see opposite).

**White Horse Ferries** (☎ 023-8084 0722; www.hythe ferry.co.uk) operates a service from Southampton to Hythe, 13 miles east of Lyndhurst, every half-hour (£4 off-peak return, 12 minutes).

## AROUND LYNDHURST

Petrol-heads, historians and ghost-hunters all gravitate to **Beaulieu** (☎ 01590-612345; www.beaulieu.co.uk; adult/child/family £16/8/44; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm Oct-May) – pronounced *bew-lee* – a tourist complex based on the site of what was once England's most important 13th-century Cistercian monastery. Following Henry VIII's monastic land-grab of 1536, the abbey fell to the ancestors of current proprietors, the Montague family.

Motor-maniacs will be in raptures at Lord Montague's **National Motor Museum**, a splendid

collection of vehicles that will sometimes leave you wondering if they are really cars, or strange hybrid planes, boats or metal bubbles with wheels. It's hard to resist the romance of the early classics, or the oomph of winning F1 cars. Here, too, are several jet-powered land-speed record-breakers including *Bluebird*, which famously broke the record (403mph, or 649km/h) in 1964. There are even celebrity bangers – look out for Mr Bean's Austin Mini and James Bond's whizz-bang speed machines.

Beaulieu's grand but indefinably homely **palace** began life as a 14th-century Gothic abbey gatehouse, but received a 19th-century Scottish Baronial makeover from Baron Montague in the 1860s. Don't be surprised if you hear eerie Gregorian chanting or feel the hairs on the back of your neck quiver – the abbey is supposedly one of England's most haunted buildings.

The New Forest Tour Bus stops directly outside the complex on its circular route via Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Lymington. You can also get here from Lymington (35 minutes) by catching bus 112, which continues to Hythe and the ferry to Southampton.

## BUCKLER'S HARD

For such a tiny place, this picturesque huddle of 18th-century cottages, near the mouth of the River Beaulieu, has a big history. It started life in 1722, when one of the dukes of Montague decided to build a port to finance an expedition to the Caribbean. His dream was never realised, but when the war with France came, this embryonic village with a sheltered gravel waterfront became a secret boathouse where several of Nelson's triumphant Battle of Trafalgar warships were built. In the 20th century it played its part in more clandestine wartime manoeuvres – the preparations for the D-Day landings.

The hamlet is now a fascinating heritage centre – **Buckler's Hard Story** (☎ 01590-616203; www.bucklershard.co.uk; adult/child £5.70/4.10; ☎ 10am–5pm Mar–Oct, to 4.30pm Nov–Feb) – which features immaculately preserved 18th-century labourers' cottages. The maritime museum charts the inlet's shipbuilding history and its role in WWII – for a little light relief, seek out Nelson's dinky baby clothes.

The luxurious **Master Builder's House Hotel** (☎ 01590-616253; www.themasterbuilders.co.uk; d £94-127; Ⓟ) is also part of the complex. This

beautifully restored 18th-century hotel has 25 chintz and candy-striped rooms, topped off with suitably nautical pictures. The acclaimed restaurant (mains £10 to £18) overlooks the river, while the Yachtsman's Bar serves pub grub from £4.

Swiftsure boats operate 30-minute **river cruises** (adult/child £4/2.50) from the waterfront between Easter and October.

Buckler's Hard is 2 miles downstream from Beaulieu; a lovely riverside walking trail links the two.

## LYMINGTON

pop 14,227

Yachting haven, New Forest base and jumping-off point to the Isle of Wight – the bustling harbour town of Lymington has several strings to its tourism bow. This pleasing Georgian town also boasts a range of inns, nautical stores and quirky bookshops, as well as a few stretches of utterly quaint cobbled streets.

### Information

Lymington's main **library** (☎ 01590-673050; North Close; ☎ 9.30am–7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am–1pm Wed, 9.30am–5pm Sat) has free internet access.

**Lymington Laundrette** (☎ 01590-672898; 11 New St; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) can make hiking gear smell sweet again; it's next door to the tourist office.

ATMs, banks and shops line the High St. There's a post office at the end of the High St near St Thomas Church.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01590-689000; www.thenewforest.co.uk; New St; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Jul–Sep, to 4pm Mon–Sat Oct–Jun), a block off the High St next to the museum, sells walking tours of town and can help with accommodation.

### Sights

Lymington was once known as a contrabandist port, and tales of local smugglers, salt-makers and yachties pack the **St Barbe Museum** (☎ 01590-676969; www.stbarbe-museum.org.uk; New St; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Sat).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Durlston House** (☎ 01590-677364; www.durlstonhouse.co.uk; 61 Gosport St; s £45, d £60-70; Ⓟ) For good value, head to this B&B of pine cabinets, subdued furnishings and neat-as-a-pin rooms, a few minutes' walk from town.

**DETOUR: CHEWTON GLEN**

This is your chance to play at being lord of the manor. The five-star **Chewton Glen Hotel & Country Club** (☎ 01425-275341; www.chewtonglen.com; r £300-540, ste £485-1280; (P) ♿ ♻️ 🚰) has the kind of effortless elegance that sees staff anticipating your needs before you've even realised them yourself. The sprawling grounds are framed by a croquet lawn that seems to have been snipped by nail scissors; the sophisticated rooms are chock-full of character and antiques; the superb Marryat restaurant has won many a plaudit; and the spa is sublime – you may not have known you wanted an aromatherapy sauna, but the staff did. Chewton is a mile or so north of New Milton village, in the south of the New Forest.

**Angel Inn** (☎ 01590-672050; www.roomattheinn.co.uk; 108 High St; s £50, d £80-100; (P)) There's a snug feel to this swish hotel, which is set in a renovated Georgian coaching inn. The rooms are warmly decorated and full of wood, while the cosy pub-bistro dishes up seared tuna, blue-cheese and chive tart, and Aberdeen Angus burgers (mains £7 to £18).

**our pick Stanwell House** (☎ 01590-677123; www.stanwellhouse.com; 14 High St; s £99-135, d £135-165, ste £195; 🚰) The epitome of discreet luxury, this beautiful boutique hotel is the place to wait for your ship to come in. Cane chairs dot the elegant conservatory, flowers frame a long, walled garden, and the rooms are an eclectic mix of stand-alone baths, rococo mirrors, gently distressed furniture and plush throws. The seafood restaurant (open noon to 10pm daily; tapas £6, mains £13 to £35) rustles up bouillabaisse and seafood platters, and the chic bistro tempts you with fine dining (two/three courses from £20/24). There's even a vaguely decadent satin-cushion-strewn bar.

**Getting There & Away**

The bus station is just off High St. Lymington has two train stations: Lymington Town and Lymington Pier. The latter is where the Isle of Wight ferry drops off and picks up. Trains to Southampton (£7.80, 45 minutes) via Brockenhurst leave every half-hour.

**Wightlink Ferries** (☎ 0870 582 7744; www.wightlink.co.uk) cross to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight (see p294).

**ISLE OF WIGHT**

This lovely island, just a few miles off the Hampshire coast, does its utmost to bottle and sell traditional childhood-holiday nostalgia. A popular escape for yachties, cyclists, walkers and the bucket-and-spade brigade

since Victorian times, it alternates between chocolate-box quaint and crazy-golf kitsch, and between rosy-cheeked activity and rural respite. But the 21st century has also seen a youthful buzz inject life into the island's southern resort towns, attracting a new generation of urbanites and romantic weekenders with gastropubs, slick hotels and big music festivals. Still, the island's principal appeal remains: a surprisingly mild climate, myriad outdoorsy activities and lush green hills that roll down to 25 miles of clean, unspoilt beaches.

For good online information, check out [www.islandbreaks.co.uk](http://www.islandbreaks.co.uk).

**Activities****CYCLING**

The Isle of Wight will make pedal-pushers smile – there is a 62-mile cycleway, and the island has its very own **Cycling Festival** (☎ 01983-203891; www.sunseaandcycling.com) every September. The tourist office has exhaustive information and sells trail guides.

Bike rentals are available all over the island for around £14 per day or £45 per week. Recommended companies:

**Tavcycles** (☎ 01983-812989; www.tavcycles.co.uk; 140 High St, Ryde)

**Wight Cycle Hire** (☎ 01983-731800; www.wightcyclehire.co.uk) Brading (Station Rd, Brading); Yarmouth (Station Rd, Yarmouth) Offers delivery and collection across the island.

**Wight Off Road** (☎ 01983-408587; 105 High St, Sandown)

**WALKING**

This is one of the best spots in southern England for gentle rambling; the island has a network of 500 miles of well-marked walking paths, including 67 miles of coastal routes. The island's **Walking Festival** (☎ 01983-813813; www.isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk), held over

two weeks in May, is feted as the largest in the UK. Tourist offices sell trail pamphlets (from £3).

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Water sports** are a serious business on Wight's northern shores – especially sailing but also windsurfing, sea-kayaking and surfing. Powerboat trips also run out to the Needles (p297). Wight also offers **gliding lessons**, **paragliding**, and even **llama-trekking**. Tourist offices can help fix you up with all of these.

## Getting There & Away

The cost of car fares to the Isle of Wight can vary enormously – make savings by booking ahead, asking about special offers and traveling in off-peak periods.

**Wightlink** (☎ 08705 82 77 44; www.wightlink.co.uk) operates a passenger ferry from The Hard in Portsmouth to Ryde pier (day-return adult/child £13.50/6.50, 20 minutes) and a car-and-passenger ferry to Fishbourne (day-return adult/child £11/5.40, 40 minutes). Both run every half-hour. Car fares start at £47 for a short-break return.

The Wightlink car ferry between Lymington and Yarmouth costs £10.80/5.40 per adult/child (day return), and from £40 for cars (30 minutes, every half-hour).

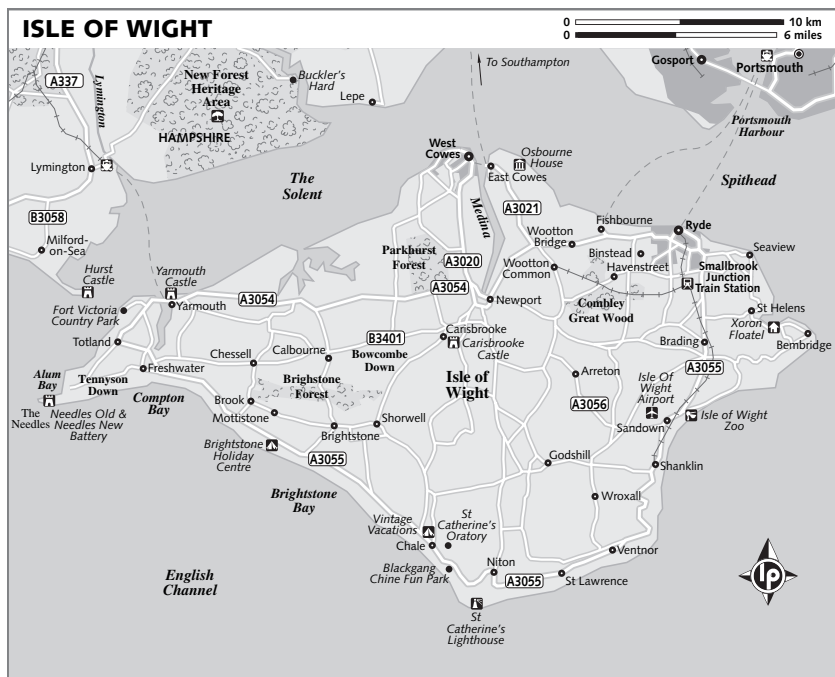
**Hovertravel** (☎ 01983-811000; www.hovertravel.co.uk) hovercrafts shuttle foot passengers between Southsea (near Portsmouth) and Ryde (day-return adult/child £12.50/6.25, 10 minutes, every half-hour).

**Red Funnel** (☎ 08448 44 99 88; www.redfunnel.co.uk) operates car ferries between Southampton and East Cowes (day-return adult/child £12/6, from £40 with car, 55 minutes) and high-speed passenger ferries between Southampton and West Cowes (day-return adult/child £16.60/8.30, 25 minutes). Check for deals that include admission to island attractions.

## Getting Around

**1st Call** (☎ 01983-400055; 15 College Close, Sandown) provides car hire (from £23 per day), collecting and delivering vehicles islandwide.

**Southern Vectis** (☎ 01983-827000; www.islandbuses.info) operates buses between the eastern towns about every 30 minutes; regular services are less frequent to the remoter southwest side be-



## WIGHT'S OWN WOODSTOCK

The tranquil Isle of Wight is commonly described as 'England, only a few decades ago', referring to its genteel traditions and often unspoilt charm. But the last few years have seen an altogether different revival of past decades. For this island was once the setting for a series of infamous rock festivals that burned short but bright from 1968 to 1970.

The final 1970 festival is the stuff of rock legend: an incredible 600,000 hippies gathered here to see the likes of the Doors, the Who, Joni Mitchell and – most famously – the last performance of rock icon Jimi Hendrix, who was to die less than three weeks later, aged just 27. The festival itself bit the dust after a bunch of revellers ran amok; the incident led to an Isle of Wight Act being passed in parliament, and all gatherings of over 10,000 people were henceforth banned.

But the noughties have seen a rekindling of the island's revolutionary festivals, which are fast growing into some of England's top music events. The new generation of **Isle of Wight Festivals** ([www.isleofwightfestival.org](http://www.isleofwightfestival.org)), held in mid-June, has already been headlined by the likes of REM, Coldplay, The Feeling, the Kaiser Chiefs and Keane, while dance-oriented **Bestival** ([www.bestival.net](http://www.bestival.net)), in early to mid-September, has seen the Pet Shop Boys, Scissor Sisters and more.

tween Blackgang Chine Fun Park and Brook. Twice daily between Easter and September the Island Coaster compensates by shuttling (each way) from Ryde, in the northeast, all the way around the southern shore to Alum Bay in the far southwest.

**Stagecoach Island Line** ([www.island-line.com](http://www.island-line.com)) runs trains twice-hourly from Ryde to Shanklin (25 minutes). The **Isle of Wight Steam Railway** (☎ 01983-885923; [www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk](http://www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk); 🚂 May-Sep) branches off Smallbrook Junction and goes to Wootton Common (adult/child £9/4.50, 1st class £13/8.50).

Rover Tickets provide unlimited use of buses and trains for a day (adult/child £10/5), two days (£15/7.50) or a week (adult/child/ family £20/10/40).

## COWES

Pack your yachting cap – this hilly Georgian harbour town on the island's northern tip is famous for **Cowes Week** ([www.skandiacowesweek.co.uk](http://www.skandiacowesweek.co.uk)), one of the longest-running and biggest annual sailing regattas in the world. Started in 1826, the regatta still sails with as much gusto as ever in late July or early August. Fibreglass toys and vintage sailboats line Cowes' waterfronts, which are lopped into East and West Cowes by the River Medina; a chain ferry shuttles regularly between the two (foot passengers free, cars £1.50).

The **tourist office** (☎ 01983-813813; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter) is at Fountain Quay.

Cowes' must-see sight is Queen Victoria's right-royal hideaway, **Osborne House** (EH; ☎ 01983-200022, 281784; East Cowes; adult/child £10/5;

🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, pre-booked tours only Nov-Mar), which is the kind of lemon-frosted confection of pomp that only the Victorian era knew how to execute. Built between 1845 and 1851, Queen Victoria grieved here for many years after the death of her husband, and died here herself in 1901. The obscenely extravagant rooms include the stunning Durbar Room, while the gardens have a delightful Swiss Cottage where the royal ankle-biters would play.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Anchorage** (☎ 01983-247975; [www.anchoragecowes.co.uk](http://www.anchoragecowes.co.uk); 23 Mill Hill Rd, West Cowes; s £40, d £60-80; (P)) A five-minute walk from town leads to this B&B of unfussy cream and blue rooms. There's also a green theme, with ecofriendly water and heating systems, and breakfasts full of fair-trade and island foods.

**Fountain** (☎ 01983-292397; [www.fountaininn-cowes.com](http://www.fountaininn-cowes.com); High St, West Cowes; s £75, d £95-120) It may be a classic old pub, but the bedrooms are all airy drapes, white linen and leather headboards – the best have views across the Solent. The cool cafe is the venue for espressos and pastries; the bar's the place for hearty pub grub (mains £7 to £12); and the seafront patio is the spot to watch the world drift by.

## NEWPORT & AROUND

The capital of the Isle of Wight, rambling Newport has little for holidaymakers except nearby **Carisbrooke Castle** (EH; ☎ 01983-522107; adult/child £6.50/3.20; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). An oft-repeated local saying states that whoever controlled this medieval castle

also controlled the island. While scrambling around the sturdy ramparts, spare a thought for the unfortunate Charles I, who was imprisoned here before his execution in 1649.

## RYDE

The nippiest foot-passenger ferries to Wight alight in this unglamorous Victorian town that's lined with kiss-me-quick seafront arcades. The **tourist office** (☎ 01983-813813; 81-83 Union St; ☎ 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3.30pm Sun Apr-Oct) can help with accommodation and transport.

More North Africa than East Wight, the funky B&B-cum-bar that is **Kasbah** (☎ 01983-810088; www.kasbah.co.uk; 76 Union St; s/d £50/80, mains £7; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎ wi-fi) brings a hot blast of the Mediterranean to Ryde. Intricate lanterns, stripy throws and furniture fresh from Marrakesh dot the smoothly comfy rooms. Falafel, tapas and paella are on offer in the chilled bar downstairs.

## BRADING

The cutesy little village of Brading, 4 miles south of Ryde, is home to the island's oldest standing house. A higgledy-piggledy timber-framed building dating from the 13th century, it now endures the indignity of housing a kitsch waxworks museum, the **Brading Experience** (☎ 01983-407286; www.bradingtheexperience.co.uk; 46 High St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Easter).

Just south of the village, the fascinating remains at nearby **Brading Roman Villa** (☎ 01983-406223; www.bradingromanvillas.co.uk; adult/child £4.25/2.20; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) feature some exquisitely preserved mosaics (including a famous cockerel-headed man) that illustrate the original owner's notoriously bacchanal pursuit of pleasure.

About 4 miles east of Brading you can go to sleep in a gunboat – the **Xoron Floatel** (☎ 01983-874596; www.xoronfloatel.co.uk; Bembridge Harbour; s/d £35/56) was a warship in WWII, but is now a cheery, bunting-draped houseboat B&B, with cosy cabins (and attached bathrooms).

Trains (11 minutes) and buses 2 and 3 (16 minutes) run regularly from Ryde to Brading.

## SANDOWN & SHANKLIN

The island's southeast coast is traditional family-holiday heaven. Hordes of sunburned vacationers wielding buckets and spades de-

scend in droves to the beaches framing the twin resort towns of Sandown and Shanklin. After indulging in candy floss and funfair rides, many go and growl at Britain's largest collection of tigers in the sprawling **Isle of Wight Zoo** (☎ 01983-403883; Sandown; adult/child £6/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct).

## VENTNOR

The Victorian town of Ventnor slaloms so steeply down the island's southern coast that you'd be forgiven for mistaking it for the south of France. The winding streets are also home to a scattering of quirky boutiques, musicians and artists.

The staid, self-contained flats at **Spy Glass Inn** (☎ 01983-855338; www.thespyglass.com; The Esplanade; apt £70) have swirling carpets and creaky cane furniture, but also rudimentary balconies overlooking the sea. The busy bar below is festooned with nautical knick-knacks and serves up crowd-pleasing grub (mains £8).

Up the hill at the chintz-free **Hambrough** (☎ 01983-856333; www.thehambrough.com; Hambrough Rd; d £150-187, ste £210; ☎), it's hard to say which are the better views: the 180-degree vistas out to sea, or the rooms themselves, full of subtle colours, clean lines and satiny furnishings. Espresso machines, dressing gowns and heated floors keep the luxury gauge set to high; one room overlooks the hills behind.

## SOUTH WIGHT

The southernmost point of the island is marked by the stocky mid-19th-century **St Catherine's Lighthouse**. Far more exciting, however, is the nearby stone rocket-ship lookalike, **St Catherine's Oratory**. This odd construction is a lighthouse dating from 1314 and marks the highest point on the island.

The kids will love **Blackgang Chine Fun Park** (☎ 01983-730052; www.blackgangchine.com; admission £9.50; ☎ 10am-10pm mid-Jul–Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-early Jul, Sep & Oct), a couple of miles northwest of St Catherine's Lighthouse. This Victorian landscaped garden-turned-theme park has water gardens, animated shows and a hedge maze.

Slightly further west, you'll find a dose of pure hippie-chic: **Vintage Vacations** (☎ 07802-758113; www.vintagevacations.co.uk; Chale; 4-person caravans per weekend £150-220, per week £360-495; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) is a dairy farm that rents out 10 1960s alumin-

ium Airstream trailers from California. All are lovingly refitted with retro furnishings – camping has never been so cool.

## WEST WIGHT

Rural and remote, the Isle of Wight's westerly corner is where the island really comes into its own. Sheer white cliffs rear from a surging sea and the stunning coastline peels away to Alum Bay in the far west and the most famous chunks of chalk in the region: the **Needles**. These jagged rocks rise shardlike out of the sea, forming a line like the backbone of a prehistoric sea monster.

Established in 1862, the **Needles Old Battery** (NT; ☎ 01983-754772; adult/child £4.65/2.35; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar–Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Feb–mid-March) was used as an observation post during WWII – trek down the 60m tunnel through the cliff to a searchlight lookout. The same site also houses the **New Battery** (☎ 01983-754772; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue & Sat mid-Mar–Oct), with its exhibitions on the clandestine space-rocket testing carried out here in the 1950s.

You can hike to the battery along the cliffs from Alum Bay (1 mile) or hop on the tourist bus that runs between the bay and battery hourly (twice hourly in July and August).

Alum Bay is also home to the happy hulla-baloo of kiddies' rides, boat trips and souvenir shops at **Needles Park** (☎ 0870 458 0022; www.theneedles.co.uk; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Nov), which also has a chairlift down to the beach. Look out for the fireworks nightly in August.

Twenty-minute **boat trips** (☎ 01983-761587; www.needlespleasurecruises.co.uk; adult/child £4/3; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Oct) head out from Alum Bay to the Needles, providing close-up views of those jagged white cliffs.

Four miles east along the north coast is the port of Yarmouth, an appealing tangle of cafes, pubs and restaurants. It's also home to Henry VIII's last great fortress, **Yarmouth Castle** (EH; ☎ 01983-760678; Quay St; adult/child £3.50/1.80; ☎ 11am-4pm Sun-Thu Apr-Oct). The facade, which is all that's left of it now, dates from 1547.

## Sleeping

**Totland Bay YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9348; www.yha.org.uk; Hirst Hill, Totland; dm £15.95; P) This large, marvellous Victorian house overlooking the water has mostly family-oriented dorms and a maximum of eight beds per room.

**Brighstone Holiday Centre** (☎ 01983-740244; www.brighstone-holidays.co.uk; 1-/2-person tents £7/9, caravans from £16, B&B per adult/child £28/14, 2-person cabins per week from £300; P) What a view to wake up to – this B&B, campsite and cabin park perches atop cliffs looking towards the spectacular bluffs at Alum Bay. It's located on the A3055, 6 miles east of Freshwater.

## DORSET

For many, Dorset conjures up the kind of halcyon holiday memories you find in flickering 1970s home movies. But this county's image deserves a dramatic revamp. In party-town Bournemouth the snapshots are as likely to be of stag and hen party frenzies as buckets and spades on the sand; Poole provides images of the super-rich; and Dorset's Jurassic Coast would catch the eye of even the most jaded cinematographer. This stunning shoreline is studded with exquisite sea-carved bays and creamy-white rock arches around Lulworth Cove, while beaches at Lyme Regis are littered with fossils ripe for the picking. Dorchester provides a biopic of Thomas Hardy; the massive Iron Age hill fort at Maiden Castle is a battle-ground epic; and the really rather rude chalk figure at Cerne Abbas will linger long in the memory. Then comes the regenerated resort of Weymouth, preparing to be catapulted onto TV screens worldwide as the sailing venue for England's 2012 Olympics.

## Orientation & Information

Dorset stretches along the south coast from Lyme Regis on the western (Devon) border, to Christchurch, which abuts Hampshire on the east. Dorchester, the county town, sits in between providing a central base for exploring, but Lyme Regis or Weymouth will suit those who prefer the coast.

Dorset has several useful websites:

**Dorset County Council** (www.dorset-cc.gov.uk)

**Rural Dorset** (www.ruraldorset.com)

**West Dorset** (www.westdorset.com)

## Getting Around

Dorset has two slow railway lines – one running from Bristol and Bath through Dorchester West to Weymouth, the other chugging from London and Southampton to Bournemouth and Poole.

The main bus company in east and central Dorset is **Wilts & Dorset** (☎ 01202-673555; www.wdbus.co.uk). For western Dorset and on to Devon and southern Somerset, **First** (☎ 0870 010 6022; www.firstgroup.com) is the main operator.

Regional timetables are available free from tourist offices or bus stations, or by downloading from the companies' websites. Otherwise call **Travelines South West** (☎ 0871 200 22 33; www.travelinesw.com).

## BOURNEMOUTH

pop 163,600

In Bournemouth, four worlds collide: old folks, families and corporate delegates meet club-loads of boozers out on a bender. Sometimes the edges rub – painfully. On weekend evenings parts of town transform into a massive frenzy of stag and hen parties, full of angels with L plates and blokes in frocks, blond wigs and slingbacks. But there's also a much sunnier side to the town. In 2007 a survey revealed Bournemouth had the happiest residents in the UK – thanks partly to its glorious 7-mile sandy beach. The town sprang to life as a resort in the Victorian era but these days it's busy adding a much more modern attraction: Europe's first artificial surf reef (see boxed text, below) is set to bring even bigger barrels and more amped-up board riders to the town.

### Orientation & Information

Bournemouth sprawls along the coast towards Poole to the west and Christchurch to the east. The main pier marks the central seafront area; the town centre and train station are northeast from here.

**Bournemouth Library** (☎ 01202-454848; 22 The Triangle; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, 9.30am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-5pm Wed) Internet access.

**Cyber Place** (☎ 01202-290099; 25 St Peter's Rd; per hr £2; ☎ 9.30am-midnight)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0845 051 1700; www.bournemouth.co.uk; Westover Rd; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun, to 6pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sun)

### Sights & Activities

Backed by 3000 deckchairs, Bournemouth's expansive, sandy **beach** regularly clocks up seaside awards. It stretches from Southborne in the far east to Alum Chine in the west – an immense promenade backed by ornamental gardens, cafes and toilets. The resort also prides itself on two piers (Bournemouth and Boscombe). Around Bournemouth Pier you can hire beach **chalets** (☎ 01202-451781; per day/week from £11/52; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct), deckchairs (£2 per day), windbreaks (£2) and parasols (£4), as well as sit-on-board **kayaks** (☎ 07970 971867; per 30min £5). For surfing, see boxed text, below.

Bournemouth's **Pleasure Gardens** are one part of the Victorian town that has survived – they're even Grade II listed. This colourful belt of greenery, shrubs and herbaceous perennials stretches 1.5 miles northwest from the seafront. Sadly, much of Bournemouth's Victorian architecture has been smothered by modern development, but the area is still noted for its chines (sharp-sided valleys), many of which are lined with holiday villas. **Alum Chine**, a mile west of the centre, is a good example.

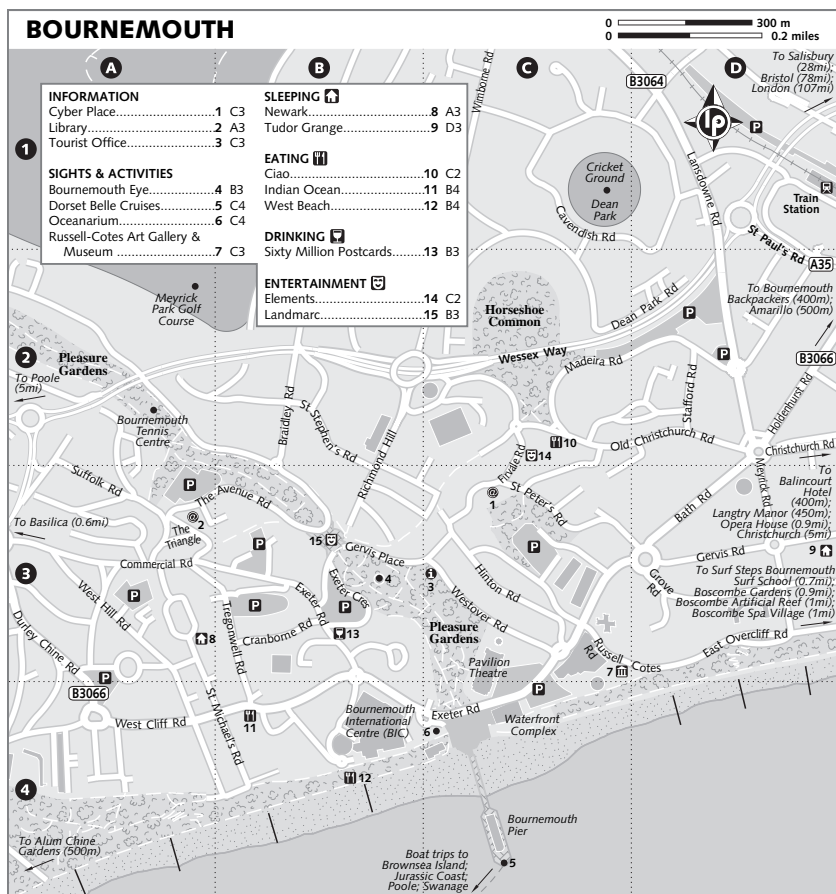
An ostentatious mix of Italianate holiday home and Scottish baronial pile, the **Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 01202-451858; www.russell-cotes.bournemouth.gov.uk; Russell-Cotes Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is set in landscaped grounds that include a formal Japanese garden, with views across Poole Bay. It's renowned for Victorian art and sculpture, and for a fine Japanese collection gathered by the museum's benefactors, Sir Merton and

### SURF'S UP?

In a bid to turn itself into south-coast surf-central, Bournemouth's been busy building the **Boscombe Artificial Reef** just east of Boscombe Pier. Construction has been delayed by bad weather several times but when the reef is completed, 60m-long, submerged sand-filled bags are set to produce heavy breaking, barrelling 2.5m waves – doubling the current size and creating a challenging ride. The £8 million redevelopment at Boscombe Spa Village will add a new wave of beach huts, showers, surf shops and restaurants to the mix.

Contact the tourist office for the latest about the reef and surf hire and tuition. You could also try **Surf Steps Bournemouth Surf School** (☎ 0800 043 7873; www.bournemouthsurfschool.co.uk; ☎ Feb-Nov), based 300m west of Boscombe Pier. It offers surf lessons (adult/child £35/30 per three hours) and half-day body-boarding sessions (£25).





Lady Russell-Cotes, during a visit to Japan in 1885.

Right next to Bournemouth Pier, the **Oceanarium** (☎ 01202-311933; [www.oceanarium.co.uk](http://www.oceanarium.co.uk); adult/child £8.50/6; 🕒 10am-5pm) recreates various marine habitats from around the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Amazon River and the inky realms of the deep sea. Highlights are the guitarfish, flesh-eating piranhas and giant sea turtles.

Some say a trip in the **Bournemouth Eye** (☎ 01202-314539; [www.bournemouthballoon.com](http://www.bournemouthballoon.com); Lower Gardens; adult/child £10/6; 🕒 7am-11pm Apr-Sep) hot-air balloon cures vertigo. Ascents to 150m last about 15 minutes, so at least you'll find out fast whether or not they're right. The views from the top extend 25 miles and are amazing.

Leaving from Bournemouth Pier, **Dorset Belle Cruises** (☎ 01202-558550; [www.dorsetbelles.co.uk](http://www.dorsetbelles.co.uk)) runs trips (adult/child £13/6, 2½ hours, 10.30am Thursday to Tuesday) to the sheer chalk cliffs at Old Harry – the start of the Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, p303) – as well as ferries to Swanage, Poole and Brownsea Island (p301).

## Sleeping

Bournemouth has huge concentrations of budget B&Bs, especially around the central St Michael's Rd and to the east of the train station.

**Bournemouth Backpackers** (☎ 01202-299491; [www.bournemouthbackpackers.co.uk](http://www.bournemouthbackpackers.co.uk); 3 Frances Rd; dm £13-15) Containing aluminium bunk beds and set

in a suburban house, the dorms in this hostel may be plain but the place is cheap and friendly. Reservations can only be made by email or by phoning between 5pm and 7pm on Sundays.

**Tudor Grange** (☎ 01202-291472; www.tudorgrangehotel.co.uk; 31 Gervis Rd; s £60-90, d £80-120, f £100-140) Five hundred years of history positively waft from the panelled walls and grand staircase of this pint-sized baronial pile. Rooms are either antique and flowery or historic with a twist – old oak meets buff throws.

**Balincourt Hotel** (☎ 01202-552962; www.balincourt.co.uk; 58 Christchurch Rd; s/d from £50/80) This Victorian B&B is a labour of love – even the china on the tea tray is hand painted to match each room's colour scheme. The decor is bright and deeply tasteful – respecting both the house's heritage and modern anti-frill sensibilities.

**ourpick Langtry Manor** (☎ 0800 988 5720; www.langtrymanor.com; Derby Rd; s £79-148, d £98-236) Prepare for a delicious whiff of royal indiscretion – this minimansion was built by Edward VII for his mistress Lillie Langtry. It instantly immerses you in a world of opulent grandeur – from the red carpet rolled out in the entrance to the immense chandeliers and intricately carved wood inside. The rooms combine Edwardian elegance with modern touches – recessed lights and Jacuzzis. The King's Suite is a real jaw-dropper: a monumental, climb-up-together-in-four-poster bed, and a tile fireplace big enough to have two seats inside.

Also recommended:

**Amarillo** (☎ 01202-553884; www.amarillohotel.co.uk; 52 Frances Rd; s £25-45, d £50-90, f £80) Minimalist decor, beige throws and clumps of twisted willow – a budget Bournemouth B&B with style.

**Newark** (☎ 01202-294989; www.thenewarkhotel.co.uk; 65 St Michael's Rd; s from £28, d £40-50) A Victorian-meets-modern B&B of gold flocked wallpaper, glinting chandeliers and 21st-century curtains.

## Eating

**Indian Ocean** (☎ 01202-311222; 4 West Cliff Rd; mains £8-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) Don't be fooled by this place's unimpressive glass frontage – the interior is modern and funkily lit and the menu includes unusual karai and Bangladeshi specials as well as tried and tested Indian favourites.

**Ciao** (☎ 01202-555657; 144 Old Christchurch Rd; mains £8-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) A cool hang-out with slabs of red paint on the walls, a huge glass-backed bottle-filled bar, and tables that spill

out onto the street. The food is firmly focused on pizza, pasta and gourmet panini.

**Basilica** (☎ 01202-757722; 73 Seamoore Rd; tapas from £3, mains £6-10; ☎ Mon-Sat) The menu at this groovy bistro visits more Mediterranean countries than your average InterRailer – expect mezze, Parma ham parcels, grilled halloumi and pasta with chorizo. The brick-lined interior is dotted with tables hacked out of single chunks of wood, and with jars of olives.

**ourpick West Beach** (☎ 01202-587785; West Promenade; mains £21; ☎ lunch & dinner) The venue of choice for Bournemouth's foodie crowd, this buzzy restaurant delivers both the best views and the best meals in town. The seafood is exemplary: rock oysters with shallot vinegar, monkfish medallions with Parma ham and a seafood platter crammed with crab claws, lobster, razor clams and crevettes (£30 per person). The view is of the seafront – it's so close to the beach that sand drifts right up to the door.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Most of the main entertainment venues are clustered around Firvale Rd, St Peter's Rd and Old Christchurch Rd.

**Sixty Million Postcards** (☎ 01202-292697; 19 Exeter Rd; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) A hip crowd inhabits this quirky drinking den. The worn wooden floors, battered sofas and fringed lampshades are home to everything from DJ sets (including indie, synth-pop and space disco), to board games and impromptu Sunday jumble sales.

**Landmarc** (☎ 01202-589868; www.thelandmarc.com; Exeter Rd; mains £9; ☎ show nights 7pm-1am) The preacher wouldn't recognise this vibrant bistro-cum-music venue, set in a former church – the old stained glass now merges with bright red neon. Acoustic acts, tribute bands and comedians entertain crowds tucking into Swiss burgers, grilled tuna steak and Thai chicken curry.

Also recommended:

**Elements** (☎ 01202-311178; www.elements-nightclub.co.uk; Firvale Rd) Massive queues and club anthems.

**Opera House** (☎ 01202-399922; www.operahouse.co.uk; Boscombe Arcade; 570 Christchurch Rd) Restored Victorian theatre lining up gigs (from jazz to rude-boy punk), DJ sets (from Northern soul to drum and bass), gay nights and comedy.

## Getting There & Away

National Express shuttles to London (£18, 2½ hours, hourly), Bristol (£15.40, four hours,

one daily) and Oxford (£19, three hours, three daily).

Bus X3 runs from Salisbury (1¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday), while the X35 comes from Southampton (1¼ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday). There's a multitude of M1 and M21 buses between Bournemouth and Poole (15 minutes).

Trains run from London Waterloo (£26.10, two hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday). There are regular connections to Poole (10 minutes, half-hourly), Dorchester South (£9, 45 minutes, hourly) and Weymouth (£11.40, one hour, hourly).

## POOLE

pop 144,800

Just a few miles west of Bournemouth, Poole was once the preserve of hard-drinking sailors and sunburned day-trippers. But these days you're as likely to encounter super-yachts and Porsches, because the town borders Sandbanks, one of the most expensive chunks of real estate in the world. However, you don't have to be knee-deep in cash to enjoy Poole's agreeable ancient port, thanks to a quaint old harbour dotted with restaurants and nautical pubs, some irresistible boat trips and a wide variety of tempting water sports.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01202-253253; www.poole tourism.com; Poole Quay; ☎ 9.15am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is on the quay.

## Sights & Activities

### BROWNSEA ISLAND

This small wooded island (NT; ☎ 01202-707744; adult/child £4.90/2.40; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Jul & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) in Poole Bay is now a nature reserve and wildlife haven run by the National Trust (NT). There are several tranquil walks around the island, which is home to a population of deer, peacocks and rare red squirrels, as well as terns, gulls and wading birds.

To get to the island, catch a ferry from Poole Quay. Try **Brownsea Island Ferries** (☎ 01929-462383; www.brownseaislandferries.com; adult/child £8/5.50), which also offers **cruises** to Sandbanks (adult/child £8/5.50) and the other bay islands, as well as a daily trip to Wareham (£5). It also runs occasional cruises along the Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, p303; adult/child £13/5) to the Old Harry rocks – a set of limestone stacks

that have been separated from each other by sea erosion.

### POOLE OLD TOWN & HARBOUR

Poole Old Town has rows of attractive 18th-century buildings, including a wonderful Customs House and Guildhall. The town's rightly proud of the new-look **Poole Museum** (☎ 01202-262600; 4 High St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct). Housed in a sensitively restored 18th-century harbour warehouse, it cracks through Poole's history both ashore and afloat – the star attraction is the 30ft-long Iron Age log boat, carved from a single tree 2300 years ago, which was recovered from the depths of Poole Harbour.

### WATER SPORTS

Poole's beaches sit 3 miles southeast of the old town at **Sandbanks**, a 2-mile, wafer-thin peninsula of land that curls around the expanse of Poole Harbour. The houses in this super-rich suburb are some of the most exclusive in the world, but the beaches that border them are free, and have some of the best water-quality standards in the country.

A clutch of water-sport operators base themselves at Sandbanks – **H2O Sports** (☎ 01202-733744; www.h2o-sports.co.uk; 91 Salterns Rd) offers courses in windsurfing and power-kiting (£49 per three hours). **FC Watersports Academy** (☎ 01202-708283; www.fcwatersports.co.uk) hires out kayaks (£10 per hour) and sailing dinghies (£20 per hour) and runs windsurfing tuition (from £25 per hour), kitesurfing classes (£100 per day) and a two-day start-sailing course (£165). Or try to wakeboard with **Surface2Air** (☎ 01202-738448; www.s2as.com; 14 Station Rd), at £60 per hour.

Towards Hamworthy, west of Poole, you can learn to sail at **Moonfleet** (☎ 0800 019 1369; www.moonfleet.net; Cobbs Quay Marina), with two/five days costing £185/425, or cling to a jet ski with **Absolute Aqua** (☎ 01202-666118; www.absoluteaqua.co.uk; Parkstone Marina) from £135 a day.

### POOLE LIGHTHOUSE

This cutting-edge **arts centre** (☎ 0844 406 8666; www.lighthousepoole.co.uk; 21 Kingland Rd) hosts a vibrant events calendar, including live music, theatre, film and exhibitions.

## Sleeping & Eating

**our pick** **Saltings** (☎ 01202-707349; www.the-saltings.com; 5 Salterns Way; d £70-85) You can almost hear

the languid drawl of Noël Coward in this utterly delightful 1930s B&B, where charming art-deco flourishes include curved windows, arched doorways and decorative up-lighters. Immaculate rooms feature dazzling white, spearmint and pastel blue as well as mini-fridges, digital radios and Lush toiletries. One room is more like a little suite, with its own seating area and pocket-sized balcony. Saltings is halfway between Poole and Sandbanks.

**Milsoms Hotel** (☎ 01202-609000; www.milsomshotel.co.uk; 47 Haven Rd; d £75; (P)) Supersleek and semi-boutique, this minihotel sits above Poole's branch of the Loch Fyne seafood restaurant chain. Bedrooms are decked out in achingly tasteful tones of mauve and cream, and finished with thoughtful extras such as cafetières and Molton Brown bath products.

**our pick Guildhall Tavern** (☎ 01202-671717; 15 Market St; mains £15-20; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) More Provence than Poole, the grub at this French-run brasserie is Gallic gourmet charm at its best: unpretentious and top-notch. Expect chargrilled sea bass flambéed with Pernod, or beef with Roquefort sauce. Exquisite aromas fill the dining room, along with the quiet murmur of people enjoying very good food.

Other options:

**Quayside** (☎ 01202-683733; www.poolequayside.co.uk; 9 High St; s £35-50, d £55-75, f £60-80) Snug rooms, pine, and jazzy prints in the heart of the old harbour.

**Custom House** (☎ 01202-676767; Poole Quay; mains from £12; ☺ lunch & dinner) Harbourside terrace, funky bar-bistro and fine-dining venue all rolled into one.

**Storm** (☎ 01202-674970; 16 High St; mains £13-18; ☺ dinner) Superb fish restaurant – the robust, eclectic menu depends on what the owner's caught.

## Getting There & Away

Countless buses cover the 20-minute trip to Bournemouth. National Express runs hourly to London (£18, three hours). Train connections are as for Bournemouth (p300); just add 13 minutes to times to London Waterloo (£26).

**Sandbanks Ferry** (☎ 01929-450203; www.sandbanksferry.co.uk; pedestrian/car 90p/£3) shuttles to Studland every 20 minutes. This is a short-cut from Poole to Swanage, Wareham and the west Dorset coast, but summer queues can be horrendous.

**Brittany Ferries** (☎ 0870 907 6103; www.brittany-ferries.com) sails between Poole and Cherbourg in France (2¼ to 6½ hours, one to three daily); expect to pay around £90 per foot passenger, or £335 for a car and two passengers.

To hire a bike, call ☎ 01202-855383 and it'll be dropped off at your hotel or B&B (per day £8).

Bus 152 goes from Poole to Sandbanks (15 minutes, three hourly Easter to September, hourly October to Easter). For a taxi try **Dial-a-Cab** (☎ 01202-666822).

## WIMBORNE

pop 14,844

Just 10 miles from Bournemouth, but half a world away, Wimborne sits in the middle of a peaceful, pastoral landscape. Its imposing minster, complete with an intriguing chained library, oversees a central array of Georgian houses, sedate tearooms and creaky old pubs. With the impressive ancestral pile of Kingston Lacy nearby, it is a soothing antidote to a sometimes cocksure coast.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01202-886116; wimbornetic@eastdorset.gov.uk; 29 High St; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar), based near the minster, sells a good town trail leaflet (£1). Wimborne's annual **folk festival** is in June.

## Sights

### WIMBORNE MINSTER

St Cuthburga founded a monastery in Wimborne in around 705, but most of the present-day **Wimborne Minster** (☎ 01202-884753; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) was built by the Normans between 1120 and 1180. As well as the impressive Perpendicular tower and its unusual 'Quarterjack', which strikes the quarter-hour, the minster also houses a remarkable 14th-century astronomical clock. In **Holy Trinity Chapel** is the tomb of Ettricke, the 'man in the wall', a local eccentric who refused to be buried in the church or village and was instead interred in the church wall.

Above the choir vestry is the famous **chained library** (☺ 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct). Established in 1686, it's filled with some of the country's oldest medieval books, 12th-century manuscripts written on lambskin, and ancient recipes, including ones for making ink out of oak apples.

### KINGSTON LACY

Looking every inch the setting for a period drama, **Kingston Lacy** (NT; ☎ 01202-883402; house & grounds adult/child £10/5, grounds only £5/2.50; ☺ house 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Mar-Oct) became home to the aristocratic Bankes family when they were evicted from Corfe Castle (p304) by the

**Roundheads.** This grand, 17th-century country mansion was later clad in stone by Charles Barry, architect of the Houses of Parliament (p116), but it's best known for its resplendent Spanish Room, which is hung with gilded leather. The property's wonderfully preserved interior is dotted with paintings by Titian, Brueghel and Van Dyck. Outside, the extensive landscaped gardens encompass the Iron Age hill fort of Badbury Rings. Kingston Lacy is 2.5 miles northwest of Wimborne off the B3082.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Old George** (☎ 01202-888510; [chrisse\\_oldgeorge@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:chrisse_oldgeorge@yahoo.co.uk); 2 Corn Market; d £60-80) Hidden away in a tiny square beside the minster, this charming 18th-century house has chic bedrooms decked out in light greens and russets as well as scattering of dinky cushions and elegant armchairs.

**ourpick Percy House** (☎ 01202-881040; [www.percyhouse.jazzland.co.uk](http://www.percyhouse.jazzland.co.uk); 4 East Borough; s/d/f £60/80/100) A sauna, hot tub in the garden, and a river in which to fish make this gorgeously Georgian house a slice of B&B heaven. An impressive staircase sweeps up to rooms where the style is rustic-meets-elegant: raspberry red walls, antique furniture and striped woods.

### Getting There & Away

Bus 3, the 'Wimborne Flyer', goes to Poole (30 minutes, two to four per hour). Bus 13 connects with Bournemouth (50 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday).

### SOUTHEAST DORSET

With its string of glittering bays and towering rock formations, the southeast Dorset shoreline is the most beautiful in the county. Also known as the 'Isle' of Purbeck (although it's actually a peninsula), it's also the start of the Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, below) and the scenery and geology, especially around Lulworth Cove, make swimming irresistible and hiking memorable. The hinterland harbours the immense, fairy-tale ruins of Corfe Castle and some intriguing sights linked to Lawrence of Arabia.

### Wareham & Around

pop 2568

Saxons established the sturdy settlement of Wareham on the banks of the River Frome in the 10th century, and their legacy lingers in the remains of their defensive walls and one of Dorset's last remaining Saxon churches. Wareham is also famous for its connections to the enigmatic TE Lawrence, the British

### A BOX-OFFICE COAST

The kind of massive, hands-on geology lesson you wish you had at school, the Jurassic Coast is England's first natural World Heritage Site (England's other World Heritage Sites are cultural). This puts it on a par with the Great Barrier Reef and the Grand Canyon. This exquisite shoreline, stretching from Exmouth in East Devon to just beyond Swanage in Dorset, encompasses 185 million years of the Earth's history in just 95 miles – so in a few hours' walk you can cover millions of years of geology.

The area was formed when massive earth movements tilted the rocks from west to east. Gradually, erosion exposed the different strata – leaving the oldest formations in the west and the youngest in the east. It's a tangible timeline: Devon's rusty-red Triassic rocks are some 200 to 250 million years old; the dark clay Jurassic cliffs around Lyme Regis (see boxed text, p310) ensure superb fossil hunting; and the bulk of the coast from Lyme Regis to the Isle of Purbeck is around 140 to 200 million years old. Pockets of much younger creamy coloured Cretaceous rocks (a mere 65 to 140 million years old) also pop up, notably around Lulworth Cove (p305), where erosion has sculpted a stunning display of cliffs, coves and arches – particularly at Durdle Door (p305).

The website [www.jurassiccoast.com](http://www.jurassiccoast.com) has more information, and local tourist offices sell the *Official Guide to the Jurassic Coast* (£4.95). Responsible fossil hunting is encouraged – these nuggets of prehistory would otherwise be destroyed by the sea. Be aware, though, that the coast is highly unstable in places – official advice is to keep well away from the cliffs, stay on public paths, check tides times, only pick up from the beach (never dig out from cliffs), always leave some behind for others, and tell the experts if you find a stunner.

soldier immortalised in the 1962 David Lean epic *Lawrence of Arabia*.

The **Purbeck tourist office** (☎ 01929-552740; www.purbeck.gov.uk; Holy Trinity Church, South St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) is opposite the library.

## SIGHTS

TE Lawrence was the British scholar, military strategist and writer made legendary for his role in helping unite Arab tribes against Turkish forces in WWI. The tiny cottage of **Clouds Hill** (NT; ☎ 01929-405616; adult/child £4/2; ☎ noon-5pm Thu-Sun Apr-Oct) was Lawrence's rural retreat and remains largely unchanged since his death in 1935. There's a small exhibition exploring his incredible life and wartime achievements, and a few relics that hint at his enduring fascination with the art and culture of the Middle East. Clouds Hill is 8 miles northeast of Wareham on an unclassified road.

The bijou **Wareham Museum** (☎ 01929-553448; East St, Wareham; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) provides a good potted history of Lawrence's life, along with press cuttings on the speculation surrounding his death.

Wareham's delightful Saxon **St Martin's Church** in North Street dates from about 1020. Inside there's a 12th-century fresco on the northern wall, and a marble effigy of Lawrence of Arabia.

Lawrence was stationed at Bovington Camp, now a **Tank Museum** (☎ 01929-405096; www.tankmuseum.org; adult/child £11/7; ☎ 10am-5pm), 6 miles east of Wareham. He died at Bovington Military Hospital six days after a motorcycle accident nearby. The museum has a collection of more than 300 armoured vehicles, from the earliest WWI prototypes to remnants from the first Gulf War.

Nearby is **Monkey World** (☎ 01929-462537; www.monkeyworld.co.uk; Longthorns; adult/child £10.50/7.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Sep-Jun, to 6pm Jul & Aug), a sanctuary for rescued chimpanzees, orang-utans, gibbons, marmosets and some ridiculously cute ring-tailed lemurs.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**our pick** **Trinity** (☎ 01929-556689; www.trinitybnb.co.uk; 32 South St; d £60, f £80) You wouldn't be surprised to meet a bloke in doublet and hose here – this 15th-century B&B oozes so much character. Bedrooms are framed by fantastic brickwork and inglenook fireplaces; the staircase is a

swirl of ancient timber; floors creak under stately rugs; and rooms are alive with nooks and crannies.

**Anglebury** (☎ 01929-552988; www.angleburyhouse.co.uk; 15 North St; mains £9-13, s/d £35/70; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Lawrence of Arabia and Thomas Hardy have, apparently, both had cups in the coffee shop attached to this 16th-century inn. Simple rooms are done out in creams, floral fabrics and pine while the restaurant dishes up hearty fare such as trout wrapped in bacon, and lamb in Pernod.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Wareham is on the main railway line from London Waterloo to Weymouth (2½ hours); trains run hourly.

Buses 142 and 143 run hourly between Poole (35 minutes) and Swanage via Wareham (every two hours on Sunday).

## Corfe Castle

The massive, shattered ruins of Corfe Castle loom so dramatically from the landscape it's like blundering into a film set. The defensive fragments tower over an equally photogenic village, which bears the castle's name, and makes for a romantic spot for a meal or an overnight stay.

**Corfe Castle** (NT; ☎ 01929-481294; adult/child £5.10/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Feb, Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Jan) was the ancestral home of Sir John Banks, right-hand man and attorney general to Charles I, and was besieged by Cromwellian forces during the Civil War. Following a six-week defence directed by the plucky Lady Banks, the castle was eventually betrayed from within and gunpowdered to pieces by the Roundheads. The Banks family established its new family seat at Kingston Lacy (p302).

The 450-year-old **Banks Hotel** (☎ 01929-481288; www.dorset-hotel.co.uk; East St; mains £8-14, s £50-75, d £60-90; ☎ lunch & dinner) is an atmospheric place for a pint and quality pub grub. The bedrooms are a mass of mullioned windows, creaking floors and slightly worn bathrooms.

Buses 142 and 143 run to Corfe Castle hourly from Poole (50 minutes) via Wareham (15 minutes), before going on to Swanage (20 minutes).

The **Swanage Steam Railway** (☎ 01929-425800; www.swanagerailway.co.uk; Day Rover adult/child £12/10; ☎ hourly Apr-Oct plus many weekends Nov, Dec, Feb & Mar) runs between Swanage and Norden (20 minutes) and stops at Corfe Castle.

## ELIZABETHAN EXTRAVAGANCE

**Morton's House Hotel** (☎ 01929-480988; www.mortonshouse.co.uk; East St, Corfe Castle; r £149-249; (P))

This heart-meltingly beautiful 16th-century manor was built in the shape of an 'E' in honour of Queen Elizabeth, and it certainly makes an impressive tribute. Built from solid grey Purbeck stone, the house is crammed with Elizabethan and Jacobean character. Stone fireplaces and wood-panelled friezes adorn the downstairs drawing room, and the luxuriant heritage feel runs into the upstairs bedrooms – bag the Elizabethan-themed suite, if you can. It's a place to languish in front of a crackling fire or stuff yourself silly with a rich Sunday roast – traditional, classic and very, very English. Some rooms are in a more modern annexe.

## Blue Pool

Sometimes green, sometimes turquoise, the **Blue Pool** (☎ 01929-551408; www.bluepooluk.com; Furzebrook; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Nov) is a former clay pit that has an extraordinary knack of changing colour in different conditions – it's all down to tiny particles refracting light through the water. The surrounding woods are home to green sand lizards and shy Dartford warblers. The pool is 4 miles northwest of Corfe Castle, signposted from the A351; buses 142 and 143 from Wareham (10 minutes) stop nearby.

## Lulworth Cove & the Coast

South of Corfe Castle the coast steals the show. For millions of years the elements have been creating an intricate shoreline of curved bays, caves, stacks and weirdly wonderful rock formations – most notably the massive natural arch at Durdle Door.

At **Lulworth Cove**, a pleasing jumble of thatched cottages and fishing gear leads down to a perfect circle of white cliffs. It's a charismatic place to stay; inevitably, it draws coach party crowds in the height of summer.

The coast's iconic feature is **Durdle Door**, an immense, 150-million-year-old Portland stone arch that plunges into the sea 3 miles west of Lulworth Cove. Part of the Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, p303), it was created by a combination of massive earth movements and then erosion. Today it's framed by shimmering bays – bring a swimsuit and head down the hundreds of steps for an unforgettable dip. There's a car park at the top of the cliffs, but its best to hike along the coast from Lulworth Cove (1 mile); this route takes you past the delightfully named **Lulworth Crumple**, where layers of rock have been forced into dramatically zigzagging folds.

Creamy, dreamy-white, **Lulworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 01929-400352; www.lulworth.com; East Lulworth; admis-

sion £7; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Sun-Fri Apr-Oct, to 4pm Sun-Fri Nov-Mar) looks more like a French chateau than a traditional English castle. Built in 1608 as a hunting lodge, it's survived extravagant owners, extensive remodelling and a disastrous fire in 1929. It has now been sumptuously restored. Check out the massive four-poster bed, and the suits of armour in the basement.

**Jurassic Kayak Tours** (☎ 01305-835301; www.jurassic-kayaking.com; Lulworth Cove Visitor Centre, Main St) offers a seal's-eye view of the cliffs on a paddle from Lulworth Cove to Durdle Door, on sit-aboard kayaks (£40, three hours). Weather dependent, they run most weekends in summer.

The bedrooms at the cool **Bishops Bistro** (☎ 01929-400880; www.bishopscottage.co.uk; Main St, Lulworth Cove; s £35-45, d £60-100, f £160, mains £3-8; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep) throw together antique furniture and slinky modern fabrics – and make it work. The funky cafe serves up spicy seafood or ploughman's with cider.

**Rose Cottage** (☎ 01929-400150; www.rosecottage.fsworld.co.uk; Main St, Lulworth Cove; s £35-50, d £70-80) is an archetypal thatched cottage with flowers winding around the door, thick walls, low lintels and rooms full of rustic charm.

**Lulworth Beach** (☎ 01929-400404; www.lulworthbeachhotel.com; Lulworth Cove; d £80-95) is an oh-so-stylish hotel 180m from the beach with rooms finished in blondwood, coconut matting and flashes of leather and lime – the best room has its own private sea-view deck.

There's a basic single-storey **YHA** (☎ 0870 770 5940; www.yha.org.uk; School Lane; dm £14; ☎ Mar-Oct), in West Lulworth, and a great clifftop campsite at **Durdle Door Holiday Park** (☎ 01929-400200; www.lulworth.com; sites per tent £10-20; ☎ Mar-Oct).

## DORCHESTER

pop 16,171

With Dorchester, you get two towns in one: a real-life, bustling county town, and Thomas Hardy's fictional Casterbridge. The writer

was born just outside Dorchester and clearly used it to add authenticity to his writing – so much so that his literary locations can still be found amid the town's white Georgian terraces and red-brick buildings. You can also visit his former homes here and see his original manuscripts. Incredibly varied museums (teddy bears, terracotta warriors and Tutankhamen) and some attractive places at which to sleep and eat combine to make an appealing base for a night or two.

## Orientation & Information

Most of Dorchester's action takes place along South St, which runs north into pedestrianised Cornhill and then emerges at High St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01305-267992; www.westdorset.com; Antelope Walk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) brims over with Hardy information, and sells 'location' guides to the places in his novels.

## Sights

### THOMAS HARDY SITES

The Hardy collection in the **Dorset County Museum** (☎ 01305-262735; www.dorsetcountymuseum.org; High West St; adult/child £6/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Jul-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun) is the biggest in the world. It offers extraordinary insight into his creative process – reading his cramped handwriting, it's often possible to spot where he's crossed out one word and substituted another. There's also a wonderful reconstruction of his study at Max Gate (see below), and a letter from Siegfried Sassoon, asking Hardy if Sassoon can dedicate his first book of poems to him.

A trained architect, Hardy designed **Max Gate** (NT; ☎ 01305-262538; Alington Ave; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, Wed & Sun Apr-Sep), where he lived from 1885 until his death in 1928. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* were both written here, and the house contains several pieces of original furniture, but otherwise it's a little slim on sights. The house is a mile east of Dorchester on the A352.

The small cob-and-thatch **Hardy's Cottage** (NT; ☎ 01305-262366; admission £3.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Oct), where the author was born, is again short on attractions, but it makes an evocative stop for Hardy completists. It's in Higher Bockhampton, 3 miles northeast of Dorchester.

Track down Hardy's statue at the top of High West St in Dorchester and what's thought to be the red and grey brick inspi-

ration for the house of the mayor (of the book *The Mayor of Casterbridge*). The house is now a Barclays Bank in South Street. The Maumbury Rings (below) are the location of Henchard's secret meetings in the same novel.

## OTHER SIGHTS

Dorchester was once a thriving Roman settlement: you can see evidence of this in the remains of a 1st-century **Roman villa** – look out for the foundations and remarkable mosaic floors behind the town hall. The steep-sided ridges of the **Maumbury Rings** (admission free, ☎ 24hr), just south of town, were a neolithic henge before the Romans turned them into an amphitheatre.

As well as its superb Hardy exhibits, the **Dorset County Museum** (left) has some impressive fossils from the Jurassic Coast, including a huge ichthyosaur on one wall, and a 1m dinosaur skull hanging over the stairs. Reflecting the area's rich Bronze and Iron Age past, there are also archaeological finds from Maiden Castle (opposite) and a treasure trove of gold neck rings and bronze coins.

At the **Tutankhamen Exhibition** (☎ 01305-269571; www.tutankhamun-exhibition.co.uk; High West St; adult/child £7/5.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) you get to experience the sights, sounds and smells of ancient Egypt in a fake-gold mock-up of the pharaoh's tomb. The **Terracotta Warriors Museum** (☎ 01305-266040; www.terraccottawarriors.co.uk; East Gate, East High St; adult/child £5.75/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) whisks you off to 8th century China for a reconstruction of the famous figures. The **Teddy Bear Museum** (☎ 01305-266040; East Gate, East High St; adult/child £5.75/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) rounds off this surreal exhibition combo – it's populated by historical and famous bears, as well as a rather disturbing family of human-sized teddies.

On the northern side of town is **Poundbury**, a cod-Georgian town dreamt up by Prince Charles as a model housing development for the 21st century.

## Sleeping

**Our pick** **Beggars Knap** (☎ 01305-268191; beggarsknapp@hotmail.co.uk; 2 Weymouth Ave; s £45, d £65-75) Fabulous and far from impoverished, this vaguely decadent guest house spins the clock back to the Victorian era. Opulent, raspberry-red rooms drip with chandeliers and gold brocade, while beds (ranging from four-poster to French



sleigh) are draped in fine cottons. The breakfast room, with its towering plants and a huge harp, is gorgeous.

**Slades Farm** (☎ 01305-264032; www.bandbdorset.org.uk; Charminster; s £45 d£70-90) Barn conversions don't come much more stylish than this – oatmeal and cream walls meeting ceilings in gentle curves. The riverside paddock is perfect to laze in after a breakfast full of local delicacies. You'll find this place 2 miles north of Dorchester on the Cerne Abbas road (it's on the latter bus route).

**Casterbridge Hotel** (☎ 01305-264043; www.casterbridgehotel.co.uk; 49 High East St; s £60-65, d £70-125, f £110-155) In the 1780s this hotel was the town jail. Now marble fireplaces, rucked furnishings and Thomas Hardy books in the rooms make it worth spending a night in an old prison. Six bedrooms are in a 1980s annexe.

Also recommended:

**Aquila Heights B&B** (☎ 01305-267145; www.aquilaheights.co.uk; 44 Maiden Castle Rd; s £34, d £66-75, f £90-110) Pine and photo-placemat-style B&B with fabulous breakfast choices.

**Westwood House** (☎ 01305-268018; www.westwoodhouse.co.uk; 29 High West St; s £45-50, d £60-85, f £120) Elegant Georgian B&B with prettily painted wicker chairs.

## Eating

**Prezzo** (☎ 01305-259678; 6 High West St; mains £8-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) A reliable outpost of this Italian chain. The baroque interior is filled with black-leather sofas and twisted willow – top-notch pizzas and pastas are on the menu.

**Sienna** (☎ 01305-250022; 36 High West St; 2-course set lunch/dinner £19.50/30.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This smart little bistro is home to some fine pan-European flavour combos. Roast pollack with crab gnocchi, asparagus risotto with parmesan ice cream and Dorset lamb with shepherd's pie, all sit cosily on the same menu.

## Getting There & Around

There's a direct daily National Express coach to London (£19.80, four hours).

Bus 31 travels from Dorchester to Weymouth (30 minutes, hourly), and to Lyme Regis (1¼ hours). Bus 10 travels to Weymouth (35 minutes, three per hour Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday), and bus 387 goes to Poole (1¼ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday).

There are two train stations – Dorchester South and Dorchester West. Trains run at least hourly from Weymouth (11 minutes)

to London Waterloo (£41.30, 2½ hours) via Dorchester South, Bournemouth (£9, 45 minutes) and Southampton (£18.60, 1¼ hours).

Dorchester West has connections to Bath (£13, 1¼ hours) and Bristol (£13, two hours); trains run every two hours.

**Dorchester Cycles** (☎ 01305-268787; 31 Great Western Rd) hires out bikes for £15 per day.

## AROUND DORCHESTER Maiden Castle

Occupying a massive slab of horizon on the southern fringes of Dorchester, **Maiden Castle** (EH; admission free; ☎ 24hr) is the largest and most complex Iron Age hill fort in Britain. The huge, steep-sided chalk ramparts flow along the contour lines of the hill and surround 48 hectares – the equivalent of 50 football pitches. The first hill fort was built on the site around 500 BC and in its heyday was densely populated with clusters of roundhouses and a network of roads. The Romans besieged and captured it in AD 43 – an ancient Briton skeleton with a Roman crossbow bolt in the spine was found at the site. The sheer scale of the ramparts is awe-inspiring, especially from the ditches immediately below, and the winding complexity of the west entrance reveals just how hard it would be to storm. Finds from the site are displayed at Dorset County Museum (opposite). Maiden Castle is 1½ miles southwest of Dorchester.

## Cerne Abbas & the Cerne Giant

If you had to describe an archetypal sleepy Dorset village, you'd come up with something a lot like Cerne Abbas: its houses run the gamut of England's historical architectural styles, roses climb countless doorways, and half-timbered houses frame a honey-coloured, 12th-century church.

But this village also packs one heck of a surprise – a real nudge-nudge, wink-wink tourist attraction in the form of the **Cerne Giant**. Nude, full frontal and notoriously well endowed, this chalk figure is revealed in all his glory on a hill on the edge of town. And he's in the kind of stage of excitement that wouldn't be allowed in most magazines. The giant is around 60m high and 51m wide and his age remains a mystery; some claim he's Roman but the first historical reference comes in 1694, when three shillings were set aside for his repair. The Victorians found it all deeply embarrassing and allowed grass to grow over his most outstanding feature. Today the hill is grazed on by sheep and

cattle – though only the sheep are allowed to do their nibbling over the giant – the cows would do too much damage to his lines.

The village has the not-so-new **New Inn** (☎ 01300-341274; www.newinncerneabbas.co.uk; 14 Long St; d from £90; (P)), a 13th-century pub with rustic, comfy rooms (avoid the newer extension), and an excellent menu of bar food. For top-notch dining head for the ivy-smothered, thatched **Royal Oak** (☎ 01300-341797; Long St; mains from £7; ☺ lunch & dinner) and its menu of whole crab or lobster salad, Dartmouth smokehouse eels and Lyme Bay scallops in lemon butter.

Dorchester, 8 miles to the south, is reached on bus D12 (20 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

## WEYMOUTH & AROUND

As the venues for the sailing events in Britain's 2012 Olympics, Weymouth and neighbouring Portland are in the middle of a multimillion-pound building spree. But despite the bustle and the waterfront spruce-up, evidence of their core characters remains. Weymouth's billowing deckchairs, candy-striped beach kiosks and Punch and Judy stands are the epitome of a faded Georgian kiss-me-quick resort, while Portland's pock-marked central plateau and remote cliffs still proudly proclaim a rugged, quarrying past.

### Weymouth

pop 48,279

Weymouth has been a popular seaside spot since King George III (the one who suffered from a nervous disorder) took an impromptu dip here in 1789. Some 2½ centuries later, it's still popular with beachgoers.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Weymouth is strung out along its seafont. To the west the rejuvenated old harbour is a vibrant jumble of brightly painted Georgian town houses, restaurants and pubs. The Isle of Portland, really a 4-mile-long peninsula, lies a few miles south.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01305-785747; www.visitweymouth.co.uk; The Esplanade; ☺ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) sells discounted tickets to many local attractions and can, for a fee, help arrange local accommodation.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The fine sandy **beach** is a place to surrender to your inner kitsch and rent a deckchair,

sun-lounger or pedalo (each £5 per hour). Alternatively, go all Californian and join a volleyball game. For sailing, kitesurfing, diving and windsurfing lessons, see the boxed text, opposite.

The 19th-century **Nothe Fort** (☎ 01305-766626; www.fortressweymouth.co.uk; Barrack Rd; adult/child £4.50/1; ☺ 10.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, 2.30-4.30pm Sun Oct-Apr) is full of cannons, rifles, searchlights and 12-inch coastal guns. It also details the Roman invasion of Dorset, a Victorian soldier's drill, and Weymouth in WWII. Commanding an armoured car and clambering around the magazine prove popular with regiments of children.

Beside the old harbour, Brewer's Quay has a shopping centre and plentiful attractions, including **Timewalk** (☎ 01305-777622; Hope Sq; adult/child £4.50/3.25; ☺ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct), which explores various key events in Weymouth's history. These include the Black Death, the Spanish Armada and the town's transition from fishing harbour to tourist resort. **Weymouth Museum** (☎ 01305-777622; admission free; ☺ 10am-4.30pm), alongside, has displays on smuggling, paddle steamers and shipwrecks. Nearby, **Tudor House** (☎ 01305-779711; 3 Trinity St; adult/child £4/1; ☺ 1-3.45pm Tue-Fri Jun-Sep, 2-4pm 1st Sun of month Oct-May) is one of the few 17th-century buildings left in Weymouth and is furnished in period style.

Seals, otters and seahorses entertain you at the 3-hectare aquatic park at **Sea Life** (☎ 01305-761070; www.sealife.co.uk; Lodmoor Country Park; adult/child £15/10.50; ☺ 10am-4pm).

**White Motor Boats** (☎ 01305-785000; www.white-motorboat.freeuk.com; return adult/child £7/5; ☺ Apr-Oct) runs a cracking 35-minute jaunt across to Portland Castle (p310) from Cove Row on the harbour (three to four daily).

### SLEEPING

There are also plenty of campsites near Chesil Beach and Weymouth Bay.

**Chatsworth** (☎ 01305-785012; www.thechatsworth.co.uk; 14 The Esplanade; s£35-45, d£80-108) Watery views are everywhere at this supertrendy B&B – the terrace is just a yardarm from yacht berths, while bedrooms overlook the seafont or the harbour. Inside, the views are of purple satins, vanilla candles and worn wood.

**our pick Harbourside** (☎ 01305-777150; www.harbourside2let.co.uk, 5 Trinity Rd; 2-/4-person apt £80/125) This stylish two-bedroom Regency apartment is elegance personified. Antique chairs, brass

## WATER SPORTS IN WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND

Stunning to look at, the seas round Weymouth and Portland are also a massive watery playground. So good, they're to host the sailing events for the 2012 Olympics. In part it's due to Portland Harbour – 890 hectares of sheltered water created by breakwaters begun by convict labour in the mid-1800s.

You can beat the Olympians to it by learning to sail at the new **Weymouth & Portland National Sailing Academy** (☎ 0845 337 3214; www.sail-laser.com; Portland Harbour; per 2/4 days £175/315). **Windtek** (☎ 01305-787900; www.windtek.co.uk; 109 Portland Rd, Wyke Regis) offers windsurfing lessons (£90/150 per one/two days), and hires out gear (£15 per hour) if you have a Royal Yachting Association card. Staff can teach you to kitesurf, too (£95 per day).

There's a huge variety of depths, seascapes and wrecks for divers – sunken ships range from paddle steamers and East Indiamen to WWII vessels. For experienced divers **Scimitar Diving** (☎ 07765 326728; www.scimitardiving.co.uk) sets off from Weymouth Harbour for off-shore dives (from £40 per diver, per day). It also rents out a range of gear, from £25. **Fathom and Blues** (☎ 01305-826789; www.fathomandblues.co.uk; Boscawen Centre, Castletown, Portland) runs training courses for divers, from £95 per day.

bedsteads and fine Egyptian cotton fill a bedroom and lounge that look out directly onto the bustling harbour. It's often rented out as a weekly let (£300 to £700), but the nightly rates are a bargain.

**Old Harbour View** (☎ 01305-774633; fax 750828; 12 Trinity Rd; d £75-85) A few doors down from Harbourside, fresh, suitably nautical bedrooms are tucked away in a pretty Georgian terrace.

## EATING

**King Edward's** (☎ 01305-786924; 100 The Esplanade; mains £6; ☺ lunch & dinner) It has to be done: sitting on Weymouth seafront and scoffing fish 'n' chips. King Edward's is a classic chippy – all burgundy tiles and wrought iron. You can eat inside or out, and then chase it down with an ice cream from the kiosks dotting the prom. For a waterside drink, head off to the pubs and bars lining the old harbour.

**La Baroque** (☎ 01305-750666; 19 Trinity Rd; tapas £4, mains £13; ☺ lunch & dinner) Baroque by name, baroque by nature: munch tapas surrounded by raspberry walls and heavy gilt pictures in the wine bar, or pop upstairs to Toulouse Lautrec prints and classy dining.

**ourpick Perry's** (☎ 01305-785799; 4 Trinity Rd; mains £12-18; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Effortlessly stylish, but also relaxed, this Georgian town house is a study of snowy white tablecloths and flashes of pink. You won't be able to resist the Lyme Bay scallops, twice baked Dorset Blue Vinny cheese soufflé or crab soup. Weymouth's cognoscenti book the window table on the 1st floor (it has a fabulous harbour view) for a two-course lunch – a bargain at £15.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Bus

There's one direct National Express coach to London (£19.80, 4¼ hours) each day.

Bus 10 is the quickest to Dorchester (30 minutes, three per hour Monday to Saturday, six buses on Sunday). The hourly bus 31 also stops in Dorchester en route to Lyme Regis (two hours) and Axminster. The X53 travels from Weymouth to Wareham (50 minutes, six daily) and Poole (1¼ hours), and to Abbotsbury (35 minutes), Lyme Regis (1½ hours) and Exeter (three hours) in the opposite direction. Bus 1 travels regularly over to Portland (30 minutes).

### Train

Trains run hourly to London (£43, 2¾ hours) via Dorchester South (11 minutes) and Bournemouth (£11.40, one hour), and every two hours to Dorchester West, Bath (£13.20, two hours) and Bristol (£13.80, 2¼ hours).

## Portland

The multimillion-pound pre-Olympic building boom is hugely apparent on the Isle of Portland. Waterside waste ground is being transformed into restaurants, a shiny new sailing centre, glitzy apartment blocks and a hotel. But inland on Portland's 500ft central plateau, the peninsula's quarrying past still holds sway – evidenced by the huge craters and large slabs of limestone still littering the landscape. Proud, and at times bleak and rough around the edges, it's decidedly different from the rest of Dorset, but it's also

curiously compelling. The water sports on offer, the rich birdlife and the stark beauty of its wind-whipped coasts make it worthy of at least a day trip.

Portland is a comma-shaped rock peninsula, fused to the mainland by the ridge of Chesil Beach (see below). Its unique white limestone has been quarried here for centuries, and has been used in some of the world's finest buildings – including the British Museum, St Paul's Cathedral and the UN headquarters in New York. One abandoned quarry, **Tout Quarry**, has been transformed into a sculpture park where snaking footpaths lead past 50 works of art that have been carved into the rock in situ. The *Philosopher's Stone*, *Fallen Fossil* and *Green Man* are particularly worth hunting out. Tout Quarry is signed off the main road, just south of Fortuneswell.

The sea views from Portland's rugged cliff tops are breathtaking, especially around the red-and-white-striped **lighthouse** (☎ 01305-820495; ☹ 11am–5pm Apr–Sep) on Portland Bill – climb to the top of its 12m tower (adult/child £2.50/1.50) and look down at The Race, a surging vortex of conflicting tides. A summer-only **tourist office** (☎ 01305-861233; ☹ 11am–5pm Apr–Sep) sits alongside.

Sturdy **Portland Castle** (EH; ☎ 01305-820539; adult/child £4/2; ☹ 10am–6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Apr–Jun & Sep, to 4pm Oct) is one of the finest examples of the defensive forts constructed during Henry VIII's castle-building spree. You can try on period armour while enjoying great views over Portland harbour.

Housed in two thatched cottages, **Portland Museum** (☎ 01305-821804; 217 Wakeham St; adult/child £2.50/free; ☹ 10.30am–5pm Fri–Tue Easter–Oct) explores Portland's history of smuggling and shipwrecks, and also has some huge fossils and ammonites collected from the Jurassic Coast.

Bus 1 runs to Portland from Weymouth every half-hour, and it goes onto Portland Bill between June and September. For the ferry from Weymouth, see White Motor Boats, p308.

## Chesil Beach

One of the most breathtaking beaches in Britain, Chesil is 17 miles long, 15m high and moving inland at the rate of 5m a year. This mind-boggling, 100-million-tonne pebble ridge is the baby of the Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, p303); a mere 6000 years old, its

stones range from pea-sized in the west to hand-sized in the east. More recently it became famous as the setting for Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*.

**Chesil Beach Centre** (☎ 01305-760579; Ferrybridge; ☹ 10am–5pm Apr–Sep, 11am–4pm Oct–Mar), just over the bridge to Portland, is a good place to get onto the ridge. It also provides information, and organises talks and guided walks.

## LYME REGIS

pop 4406

Fantastically fossiliferous, Lyme Regis packs a heavyweight historical punch. Rock-hard relics of the past pop out repeatedly from the surrounding cliffs – exposed by the landslides of a retreating shoreline. Now a pivot point of the World Heritage Site Jurassic Coast (see boxed text, p303), fossil fever is definitely in the air and everyone, from proper palaeontologists to those out for a bit of fun, can engage in a spot of coastal rummaging.

Lyme was also famously the setting for *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – starring Meryl Streep, the film version immortalised the iconic Cobb harbour defences in movie history. Add sandy beaches and some delightful places at which to stay and dine, and you get a charming base for explorations.

## Information

Lyme Regis' **tourist office** (☎ 01297-442138; lyme.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Guildhall Cottage, Church St; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, to 4pm Sun Apr–Oct, to 3pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar) is on the corner of Church and Bridge Sts.

### FOSSIL FEVER

In Lyme, fossil fever is catching. The town sits in one of the most unstable sections of Britain's coast and regular landslips mean nuggets of prehistory are constantly popping out of the cliffs. If you are bitten by the bug, the best cure is one of the regular **fossil walks** run by Dinosaurland Fossil Museum (see opposite). Alternatively, meet **Dr Colin Dawes** (☎ 01297-443758; ☹ tours 1pm Sun year-round, plus Wed & Fri May–Sep) at the Old Forge Fossil Shop in Broad St. Walks cost from £8 for adults, £5 for children. For the best chances of a find, time your trip to Lyme to within two hours of low tide.

## Sights & Activities

Mary Anning found the first full ichthyosaur skeleton near Lyme in 1814, and the site of her former home is now the excellent **Lyme Regis Philpot Museum** (☎ 01297-443370; www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk; Bridge St; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, from 11am Sun Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Easter). An incredibly famous fossilist in her day, Miss Anning did much to pioneer the science of modern-day palaeontology; the museum exhibits her story along with spectacular fossils and other prehistoric finds.

The **Dinosaurland Fossil Museum** (☎ 01297-443541; www.dinosaurland.co.uk; Coombe St; adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed some weekdays Nov-Feb) is a mini, indoor Jurassic Park – packed with the remains of belemnites and the graceful plesiosaurus. Lifelike dinosaur models will thrill youngsters – the fossilised tyrannosaurus eggs and 73kg dinosaur dung will have them in raptures.

The **Cobb**, a curling harbour wall-cum-sea defence, was first built in the 13th century. It's been strengthened and extended over the years so it doesn't present the elegant line it once did, but it's still hard to resist wandering its length for a wistful, sea-gazing Meryl moment at the tip.

## Sleeping

**Old Lyme Guest House** (☎ 01297-442929; www.oldlymeguesthouse.co.uk; 29 Coombe St; s from £40, d £70; (P)) Once home to Lyme's old post office, this stone-fronted house is now an award-winning B&B. It has several frilly rooms finished in pale creams and soft hues, topped off by patterned curtains and china trinkets.

**ourpick Coombe House** (☎ 01297-443849; www.coombe-house.co.uk; 41 Coombe St; d £52-58) Easygoing and stylish, this is a fabulous-value B&B of airy rooms, bay windows, wicker and white

wood. There's also a self-contained, ground-floor studio flat, complete with minikitchen. Breakfast is delivered to your door on a trolley, complete with toaster – perfect for a lazy lie-in in Lyme.

**Alexandra** (☎ 01297-442010; www.hotelalexandra.co.uk; Pound St; s £65, d £105-165; ☎ lunch & dinner) This grand 18th-century hotel was once home to a countess; today, it's all dignified calm and murmured chatter. Rooms are scattered with antique chairs and fine drapes and most have captivating views of the Cobb and the sea. The glorious terrace prompts urges to peruse the *Telegraph* in a panama hat.

## Eating

**Jurassic Seafood** (☎ 01297-444345; 47 Silver St; mains £10-15; ☎ dinner) Bright and buzzy in blue and orange, this bistro revels in its prehistoric theme: fossil maps, hunting tips and replica dinosaur remains abound. A tasty, eclectic menu includes crab sushi, mussels and chips and local mackerel, as well as salads and steaks.

**ourpick Broad Street** (☎ 01297-445792; 57 Broad St; 3 courses £27; ☎ dinner Thu-Sat, plus Tue, Wed & Sun in high season). Whitewashed walls, crisp white linen and old chapel chairs dot the interior of this innovative restaurant. The food has flair, too: confit of duck, roast tomato and beetroot purée sit alongside pot roast pollock with spinach and leeks. The ingredients' local credentials are outlined on the menu, and include wild garlic gathered from the woods. Bookings are essential.

The pubs clustered at the foot of the Cobb are great for harbourside bustle. The **Harbour Inn** (☎ 01297-442299; Marine Pde; mains £5-10; ☎ lunch & dinner), with stone walls and wooden settles, pips the others for atmosphere and

### DETOUR: ABBOTSBURY SWANNERY

Every May some 600 free-flying swans choose to nest at the **Abbotsbury Swannery** (☎ 01305-871858; New Barn Rd, Abbotsbury; adult/child £8.50/5.50; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct), which is protected by the pebble banks of Chesil Beach. The swannery was founded by the monks of Abbotsbury's monastery about 600 years ago, and feathers from the Abbotsbury swans are still used in the helmets of the Gentlemen At Arms (the Queen's official bodyguard). Wandering the network of trails that wind between their nests is an awe-inspiring experience that is often punctuated by occasional territorial displays (think snuffling cough and stand-up flapping), ensuring even the liveliest children are stilled. A few isolated cases of bird flu were reported here in early 2008, but they didn't affect opening.

sheer range of pub grub. Alongside, the **Cobb Arms** (☎ 01297-443242; Marine Pde) pulls a good pint.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 31 runs to Dorchester (1¼ hours, hourly) and Weymouth (1¼ hours). Bus X53 goes west to Exeter (1¼ hours, six daily) and east to Weymouth (1½ hours).

## AROUND LYME REGIS

### Forde Abbey

A former Cistercian monastery, **Forde Abbey** (☎ 01460-221290; www.fordeabbey.co.uk; abbey & gardens adult/child £9/free, gardens only £7.20/free; ☎ abbey noon-4pm Tue-Fri & Sun Apr-Oct, gardens 10am-4.30pm) was built in the 12th century, updated in the 17th century, and has been a private home since 1649. The building boasts magnificent plasterwork ceilings and fine tapestries but it's the gardens that are the main attraction: 12 hectares of lawns, ponds, shrubberies and flower beds with many rare and beautiful species. It's 10 miles north of Lyme Regis; public transport is a nonstarter.

## SHERBORNE

pop 9350

Sherborne gleams with a mellow, orange-yellow stone – it's been used to build a central cluster of 15th-century buildings and the impressive abbey church at their core. This serene town exudes wealth. The five local fee-paying schools include the famous Sherborne School, and its pupils are a frequent sight as they head off to lessons from boarding houses scattered around the town. The number of boutique shops and convertibles in the car parks reinforces the well-heeled feel. Evidence of splashing the cash 16th- and 18th-century style lies on the edge of town: two castles, one a crumbling ruin, the other a marvellous manor house, complete with a Capability Brown lake.

Sherborne's **tourist office** (☎ 01935-815341; sherborne.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Digby Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) stocks the free *All About Sherborne* leaflet, which has a map and town trail. There are **walking tours** (£3; ☎ 11am Fri May-Sep) that depart from the tourist office and last 1½ hours.

**Sherborne Museum** (☎ 01935-812252; www.sherbornemuseum.co.uk; Church Lane; adult/child £2/free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct) has a digital version of the *Sherborne Missal*,

the most exquisite illuminated manuscript to survive from the Middle Ages. With this high-tech copy you can turn the virtual pages and zoom in on sections of text.

## Sights

### SHERBORNE ABBEY

At the height of its influence, the magnificent **Abbey Church of St Mary the Virgin** (☎ 01935-812452; suggested donation £2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm late Mar-late Oct, to 4pm Nov-mid-Mar) was the central cathedral of the 26 Saxon bishops of Wessex. Established early in the 8th century, it became a Benedictine abbey in 998 and functioned as a cathedral until 1075. The church boasts the oldest fan vaulting in the country, and there are several intriguing tombs – it's worth tracking down the elaborate marble effigy marking the one belonging to John Lord Digby, Earl of Bristol, flanked by his two wives. Ethelred and Ethelbert are buried in the corner of the abbey.

On the edge of the abbey lie the beautiful 15th-century **St John's Almshouses** (admission £1.50; ☎ 2-4pm Tue & Thu-Sat May-Sep); look out, too, for the six-sided **conduit** now at the foot of Cheap St. This arched structure used to be the monks' lavatorium (washhouse), but was moved to provide the townsfolk with water when the abbey was disbanded.

### OLD CASTLE

These days the epitome of a picturesque ruin, Sherborne's **Old Castle** (EH; ☎ 01935-812730; adult/child £2.50/1.30; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 4pm Oct) was built by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury in around 1120. Queen Elizabeth gave it to her one-time favourite Sir Walter Raleigh in the late 16th century. He spent large sums of money modernising it before opting for a new-build instead – moving across the River Yeo to start work on the next Sherborne Castle. The old one became a Royalist stronghold during the English Civil War, but Cromwell reduced the 'malicious and mischievous castle' to rubble after a 16-day siege in 1645.

### SHERBORNE CASTLE

Having had enough of the then 400-year-old Old Castle, Sir Walter Raleigh began building **New Castle** (☎ 01935-813182; www.sherborne-castle.com; castle & gardens adult/child £9/free, gardens only £4.50/free; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 2-4.30pm Sat Apr-Oct), really a splendid manor house, in

1594. Raleigh got as far as the central block before falling out of favour with the royals and ending up back in prison – this time at the hands of James I. In 1617 James sold the castle to Sir John Digby, Earl of Bristol, who added the wings we see today. In 1753, the grounds received a mega-makeover at the hands of landscape-gardener extraordinaire Capability Brown – visit today and marvel at the massive lake he added, along with a remarkable 12 hectares of waterside gardens.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Cumberland House** (☎ 01935-817554; sandie@bandb.dorset.co.uk; Green Hill; s £45, d £64-74) There are few straight lines in this 17th-century B&B; instead, walls undulate towards each other in charming rooms finished in white, beige and tiny bursts of vivid pink. Breakfast is either Continental (complete with chocolate croissants) or full English – either way, there's freshly squeezed orange juice.

**Eastbury Hotel** (☎ 01935-813131; www.theeastburyhotel.co.uk; Long St; s £68, d £120-160) The best rooms here have real 'wow' factor – black and gold lacquer screens frame minimalist free-standing baths, and shimmering fabrics swathe French sleigh beds. The standard rooms are much more standard, but are still elegant with stripy furnishings and pared-down wicker chairs.

Also recommended:

**Antelope** (☎ 01935-812077; www.theantelopehotel.co.uk; Green Hill; s £54-60, d £60-85) A creaking old coaching inn with simple rooms at the top of town.

**Stoneleigh Barn** (☎ 01935-815964; www.stoneleighbarn.com; North Wootton; s/d/f £56/80/95) A flower-smothered, tastefully converted 18th-century barn, 2 miles southeast of town.

## Eating

**Pear Tree Deli** (☎ 01935-812828; Half Moon St; mains £4-8; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Full of mouth-watering aromas, this delectable deli is packed with gourmet picnic supplies. Spinach and feta pie, homemade soups and a wealth of local cheeses are coupled with irresistible cakes and puddings.

**Paprika** (☎ 01935-816429; Half Moon St; mains £7-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Expect excellent, well-spiced food in this Indian restaurant. The menu is a mix of the usual fare and some surprises: honey and cashew chicken, garlic masala and Thai prawn risotto.

**Green** (☎ 01935-813821; 3 The Green; 2/3 courses £25/30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Local food features

strongly at this intimate, cream and green restaurant at the top of Cheap St. Tempting flavour combos include Dorset venison with butternut squash, or local crab with tarragon and avocado.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 57 runs from Yeovil (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday), as does bus 58 (15 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, six buses on Sunday), which sometimes continues to Shaftesbury (1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday). Buses D12 and D13 run to Dorchester (one hour, three to six daily Monday to Saturday).

Hourly trains go to Exeter (£14.50, 1¼ hours), London (£38.40, 2½ hours) and Salisbury (£10.10, 45 minutes).

## SHAFTESBURY & AROUND

pop 6665

Perched on an idyllic hilltop overlooking a panorama of pastoral meadows and hog-backed hills, the village of Shaftesbury was home to the largest community of nuns in England until 1539, when Henry VIII came knocking during the Dissolution. These days its attractions are rather more prosaic; the town's best-known landmark is Gold Hill. This cobbled slope, lined by chocolate-box cottages, graces many a local postcard and also starred in a famous TV advert for Hovis bread.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01747-853514; www.shaftesburydorset.com; 8 Bell St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is by the Bleke St car park.

## Sights

Sitting on a terrace with sweeping views across the hills, **Shaftesbury Abbey** (☎ 01747-852910; www.shaftesburyabbey.org.uk; Park Walk; adult/child £4/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) was at one time England's largest and richest nunnery. It was founded in 888 by King Alfred the Great, and was the first religious house in Britain built solely for women; Alfred's daughter, Aethelgifu, was its first abbess. St Edward is thought to have been buried here, and King Knut died at the abbey in 1035. Most of the buildings were dismantled by Henry VIII and his cronies, but you can still wander around its foundations with a well-devised audio guide, and you can visit the intriguing museum.

The small **Gold Hill Museum** (☎ 01747-852157; Sun & Moon Cottage, Gold Hill; adult/child £4/1;

☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Thu-Tue) is worth visiting for its 18th-century fire engine, a collection of Dorset decorative buttons, and the ornamental Byzant, used during the town's ancient water ceremony.

### Old Wardour Castle

The six-sided **Old Wardour Castle** (EH; ☎ 01747-870487; adult/child £3.50/1.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 4pm Oct, to 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) was built around 1393 and suffered severe damage during the English Civil War, leaving the magnificent remains you see today. It's an ideal spot for a picnic and there are fantastic views from the upper levels. Bus 26 runs from Shaftesbury (four daily Monday to Friday), 4 miles west.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Retreat** (☎ 01747-850372; www.the-retreat.org.uk; 47 Bell St; s/d/f £45/84/78; (P)) The rooms in this Georgian town house are large and stately, if a little staid – all moulded ceilings, antique chairs and pieces of 19th-century china. Two minutes' walk from town.

**Cobwebbs** (☎ 01747-853505; www.cobwebbs.me.uk; 14 Gold Hill; d £70-75) If it's a picturesque setting you're after, head for this miniature whitewashed cottage halfway up Gold Hill. Unsurprisingly, it's on the snug side but you get a sitting room as well as double bedroom, and the patio doors lead onto the lovely rear terrace.

**Fleur de Lys** (☎ 01747-853717; www.lafleurdelys.co.uk; Bleke St; s £80, d £110-145, f £175, 2/3 courses £24/29, mains £24; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) For a lovely dollop of luxury, immerse yourself in the world of Fleur de Lys. Fluffy bathrobes, minifridges and laptops ensure you click into pamper mode; the elegant restaurant rustles up quail with raspberry and smoked salmon with samphire.

**our pick** **Bell Street Cafe** (☎ 01747-850022; 17 Bell St; mains £10-15; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) The flavours in this chilled bistro are from Lombardy, Gascony and Burgundy but the ingredients are often local, seasonal and organic. Ancient wooden stairs and whitewashed walls give it a funky feel – helped by regular live bands that play flamenco and swing.

**Mitre Inn** (☎ 01747-852549; 23 The High St; mains £6-10; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) For a good pint, imaginative pub grub and a deck with stunning hill views, pop into this atmospheric pub.

### Getting There & Away

Bus 58 goes to Sherborne (1½ hours) and on to Yeovil (two hours, four daily Monday to Saturday). Buses 26 and 27 go to Salisbury (1¼ hours, five to seven Monday to Saturday).

One National Express bus (£17.20, 3¼ hours) a day runs from Shaftesbury to London Victoria, via Heathrow.

## WILTSHIRE

With Wiltshire you get the very best of ancient England. This verdant landscape is rich with the reminders of ritual and is littered with more ancient barrows, processional avenues and mysterious stone rings than anywhere else in Britain. It's a place that teases and tantalises the imagination – here you'll find the prehistoric majesty of Stonehenge, atmospheric Avebury and, in soaring Silbury Hill, the largest constructed earth mound in Europe. Then there's the serene 800-year-old cathedral at Salisbury – a relatively modern religious monument. Add the supremely stately homes at Stourhead and Longleat and the impossibly pretty villages of Castle Combe and Lacock, and you have a county crammed full of English charm waiting to be explored.

### Information

The **Visit Wiltshire** (www.visitwiltshire.co.uk) website is a good source of info.

### Activities

#### WALKING

Wiltshire is great walking country, much of it flat or rolling farmland, cut by steep-sided valleys, edged with grassy hills and downs providing stunning views, and dotted with a wealth of ancient monuments.

The 87-mile **Ridgeway National Trail** starts near Avebury (p328), but there are plenty of shorter walks, including hikes around Stonehenge (p320), Old Sarum (p319) and the Stourhead Estate (p322).

The *Walking in Wiltshire* booklet (£3) details 10 easy strolls, while the *White Horse Trail* leaflet (£6) covers a 90-mile route, taking in all of Wiltshire's eight chalk horses. Both are available from tourist offices. The Visit Wiltshire website also has some useful downloadable walking routes, ranging from 2 to 10 miles.



**Foot Trails** (☎ 01747-861851; www.foottrails.co.uk) leads guided walks and can help you plan your own self-guided route.

## CYCLING

Cyclists should pick up the *Wiltshire Cycleway* leaflet (£3) in tourist offices, which includes a detailed route guide and lists handy cycle shops. The waterproof *Off-Road Cycling in Wiltshire* (£6) includes trail maps for mountain-bikers. The Visit Wiltshire website has five downloadable cycling routes, ranging from 16 to 33 miles.

Dedicated cycling tours are offered by several operators, including **History on Your Handlebars** (☎ 01249-730013; www.historyonyourhandlebars.co.uk; Lacock).

## CANAL TRIPS

The 87-mile-long **Kennet & Avon Canal** runs all the way from Bristol to Reading. If you fancy getting out on the water, contact **Sally Boats** (☎ 01225-864923; www.sallyboats.ltd.uk; Bradford-on-Avon) or **Foxhangers** (☎ 01380-828795; www.foxhangers.co.uk, Devizes), which both have narrowboats for hire. Weekly rates start at around £630 for four people in winter, rising to about £1500 for a 10-berth boat in high summer.

## Getting Around

### BUS

The bus coverage in Wiltshire can be patchy, especially in the northwest of the county. The two main operators:

**First** (☎ 0871 200 22 33; www.firstgroup.com) Serves the far west of the county.

**Wilts & Dorset Buses** (☎ 01722-336855; www.wdbs.co.uk) Covers most destinations; its Explorer ticket is valid for a day (adult/child £7.50/4.50).

### TRAIN

Rail lines run from London to Salisbury and beyond to Exeter and Plymouth, branching off north to Bradford-on-Avon, Bath and Bristol, but most of the smaller towns and villages aren't served by trains.

## SALISBURY

pop 43,335

Centred on a majestic cathedral that's topped by the tallest spire in England, the gracious city of Salisbury makes a charming base from which to explore the rest of Wiltshire. It's been an important provincial city for more than 1000 years, and its

## TOP FIVE ANCIENT SITES

- Avebury (p326) Bigger than Stonehenge in atmosphere and acreage, this huge stone ring encases an entire village.
- Stonehenge (p320) The world's most famous collection of megaliths – shame no one has a clue what it was for.
- Maiden Castle (p307) Massive and rampart-ringed, this is the biggest Iron Age hill fort in Britain.
- Glastonbury Tor (p356) Myth-rich and mighty hard to climb, this iconic mound looks down onto the Vale of Avalon.
- Old Sarum (p319) A stunning Iron Age stronghold on Salisbury Plain.

streets form an architectural timeline ranging from medieval walls and half-timbered Tudor town houses to Georgian mansions and Victorian villas. Salisbury is also a lively, modern place, boasting plenty of bars, restaurants and terraced cafes, as well as a concentrated cluster of excellent museums.

## Orientation

From miles around, Salisbury Cathedral's soaring spire points you towards the centre of town, which stretches north to Market Sq, an expanse dominated by its impressive Guildhall. The train station is a 10-minute walk to the west of the market, while the bus station is 90m north up Endless St.

## Information

**Library** (☎ 01722-324145; Market Pl; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm Thu & Sat) Provides 30 minutes of internet access for free.

**Post office** (cnr Castle St & Chipper Lane)

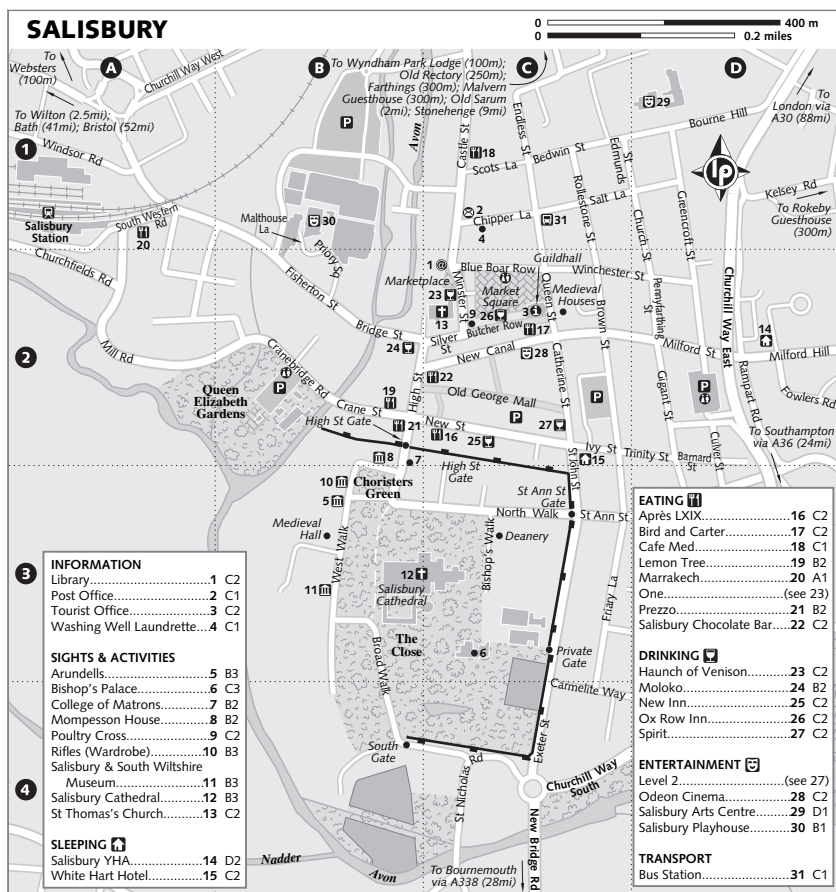
**Tourist office** (☎ 01722-334956; www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/salisbury; Fish Row, Market Sq; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun May, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr)

**Washing Well Laundrette** (☎ 01722-421874; 28 Chipper Lane; ☎ 8am-9pm)

## Sights

### SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

England is endowed with countless stunning churches, but few can hold a candle to the grandeur and sheer spectacle of **Salisbury Cathedral** (☎ 01722-555120; www.salisburycathedral.org.uk;



requested donation adult/child £5/3; ☎ 7.15am-6.15pm Sep-May, to 7.15pm Jun-Aug). Built between 1220 and 1258, the cathedral bears all the hallmarks of the early English Gothic style, with an elaborate exterior decorated with pointed arches and flying buttresses, and a sombre, austere interior designed to keep its congregation suitably pious.

Beyond the highly decorative **West Front**, a small passageway leads into the 70m-long nave, lined with handsome pillars of Purbeck stone. In the north aisle look out for a fascinating **clock** dating from 1386, probably the oldest working timepiece in the world. At the eastern end of the ambulatory the glorious **Prisoners of Conscience** stained-glass window (1980) hovers above the ornate tomb

of Edward Seymour (1539–1621) and Lady Catherine Grey. Other monuments and tombs line the sides of the nave, including that of **William Longespée**, son of Henry II and half-brother of King John. When the tomb was excavated a well-preserved rat was found inside Longespée's skull.

The splendid **spire** was added in the mid-14th century. At 123m, it's the highest in Britain, and represented an enormous technical challenge for its medieval builders; it weighs around 6500 tons and required an elaborate system of cross-bracing, scissor arches and supporting buttresses to keep it upright. Look closely and you'll see that the additional weight has buckled the four central piers of the nave.

Sir Christopher Wren surveyed the cathedral in 1668 and calculated that the spire was leaning by 75cm. A **brass plate** in the floor of the nave is used to measure any shift, but no further lean was recorded in 1951 or 1970. Despite this, reinforcement of the notoriously 'wonky spire' continues to this day.

There are 1½-hour tower **tours** (adult/child £5.50/4.50; ☎ 2.15pm year-round, plus 11.15am Mar-Oct & Dec, plus 3.15pm Apr-Sep, plus 5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug), which climb up 332 vertigo-inducing steps to the base of the spire. From here there are jaw-dropping views across the city and the surrounding countryside.

One of the four surviving copies of the **Magna Carta**, the historic agreement made between King John and his barons in 1215, is kept in the cathedral's **Chapter House** (☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mar–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–Oct, to 6.45pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–4.30pm Nov-Feb).

### CATHEDRAL CLOSE

The medieval cathedral close, a tranquil enclave surrounded by beautiful houses, has an other-worldly feel. Many of the buildings date from the same period as the cathedral, although the area was heavily restored during an 18th-century clean-up by James Wyatt. The close is encircled by a sturdy outer wall, constructed in 1333; the stout gates leading into the complex are still locked every night.

The highlight of the **Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum** (☎ 01722-332151; www.salisburymuseum.org.uk; 65 The Close; adult/child £5/2; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun, 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 2–5pm Sun Jul & Aug) is the interactive Stonehenge gallery. There are also archaeological finds recovered from Old Sarum (p319) and lots of ceramics, historical artefacts and paintings, including a dreamy watercolour of Stonehenge by JMW Turner.

You can have a nose around **Arundells** (☎ 01722-326546; www.arundells.org.uk; 59 The Close; admission £8; ☎ tours 1–4pm Sat–Tue late Mar–Sep), the fine, grey-stone home of late British prime minister Edward Heath (1916–2005). Look out for the paintings by Winston Churchill that nestle amid sailing memorabilia and political cartoons. The house is open for guided tours only, which have to be prebooked.

Built in 1701, **Mompesson House** (NT; ☎ 01722-335659; The Close; adult/child £4.50/2.20; ☎ 11am–5pm Sat–Wed Mar–Oct) is a fine Queen Anne building with magnificent plasterwork ceilings, exceptional period furnishings and a wonderful carved

staircase. All that made it the perfect location for the 1995 film *Sense and Sensibility*.

Military buffs will revel in the **Rifles** (☎ 01722-419419; www.thewardrobe.org.uk; 58 The Close; adult/child £3.25/1; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar). Also referred to as the Wardrobe, this museum is home to detailed displays about the Royal Berkshire, Wiltshire and Duke of Edinburgh regiments.

Just inside narrow High St Gate is the **College of Matrons**, founded in 1682 for widows and unmarried daughters of clergymen. South of the cathedral is the **Bishop's Palace**, now the private Cathedral School, parts of which date back to 1220.

### ST THOMAS'S CHURCH

This elegant **church** (Minster St) was built for cathedral workmen in 1219 and named after St Thomas Becket. Modified in the 15th century, its most famous feature is the amazing **doom painting** above the chancel arch, painted in 1475. This depicts Christ on the day of judgment, sitting astride a rainbow flanked by visions of Heaven and Hell; on the Hell side, look out for two naked kings and a nude bishop, a miser with his moneybags, and a female alehouse owner, the only person allowed to hang on to her clothes.

### MARKET SQUARE

Markets were first held here in 1219, and the square still bustles with traders every Tuesday and Saturday. On these days you can pick up anything from fresh fish to discount digital watches. The narrow lanes surrounding the square reveal their medieval specialities: Oatmeal Row, Fish Row and Silver St. The 15th-century **Poultry Cross** is the last of four market crosses that once stood on the square.

### Tours

**Salisbury City Guides** (☎ 01722-320349; www.salisburycityguides.co.uk; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 11am Apr–Oct, 11am Sat & Sun Nov–Mar) leads 1½-hour tours from the tourist office. There is also an 8pm ghost walk on Fridays from May to September.

### Festivals & Events

The **Salisbury Festival** (☎ 01722-332977; www.salisburyfestival.co.uk) is a prestigious, wide-ranging arts event that encompasses classical, world and pop music, plus theatre, literature and art. It runs over three weeks from late May to early June.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Salisbury YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9537; www.yha.org.uk; Milford Hill; dm £17.50; **P**) A real gem: a rambling, welcoming hostel in a listed 19th-century building. Rooms range from doubles to dorms, while a cafe-bar, laundry and dappled gardens add to the appeal.

### MIDRANGE

**Old Rectory** (☎ 01722-502702; www.theoldrectory-bb.co.uk; 75 Belle Vue Rd; s £35-50, d £55-80; **P**) This serene, airy B&B is full of spick-and-span rooms decked out in cream and shades of blue. The delightful enclosed garden has views of St Edmund's Church – you can even cook up a storm on the B&B's BBQ.

**Websters** (☎ 01722-339779; www.websters-bed-breakfast.com; 11 Hartington Rd; s £40-45, d £55-58; **P** **Q**) Websters' exterior charms include quaint blue shutters and dinky arched windows. Inside it's all flowery wallpaper, patterned duvets, extra tea-tray treats and a genuinely warm welcome.

**Wyndham Park Lodge** (☎ 01722-416517; www.wyndhamparklodge.co.uk; 51 Wyndham Rd; s £40-45, d £55-60; **P** **Q** wi-fi) The best rooms in this tall, red-brick B&B are the huge 1st-floor family suite and the stylish garden double (which leads onto a private patio). Extras include kippers or pancakes for breakfast.

**Rokey Guesthouse** (☎ 01722-329800; www.rokeyguesthouse.co.uk; 3 Wain-a-long Rd; s/d from £45/55; **P** **Q** wi-fi) Fancy furnishings, free-standing baths and lovely bay windows make this cheerful B&B stand out from the crowd. The decking overlooking the lawn and the mini-gym help, too.

Also recommended:

**Farthings** (☎ 01722-330749; www.farthingsbandb.co.uk; 9 Swaynes Close; s/d £35/60; **P**) Victorian-era B&B with quilted beds and a pleasant garden; the cheaper rooms share facilities.

**Malvern Guesthouse** (☎ 01722-327995; www.malvernguesthouse.com; 31 Hulse Rd; d from £55; **P**) Family-run guest house with floral-themed rooms and homemade marmalade.

### TOP END

**White Hart Hotel** (☎ 01722-327476; St John St; www.mercurie-uk.com; s from £90, d £120; **P** **Q**) For a bit of pomp and pampering, duck under the porticos of this 17th-century hotel. Standing right opposite the cathedral close, the service is appropriately attentive and rooms are suitably

swish – the wood-rich four-poster bedrooms are positively opulent.

## Eating

### BUDGET

**Salisbury Chocolate Bar** (☎ 01722-327422; 33 High St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10.15am-5pm Mon) With a scattering of tables that hug counters brim-full of handmade chocs and sweet pastries, there is no better place to blow a diet.

**our pick** **Bird and Carter** (☎ 01722-417908; 3 Fish Row, Market Sq; snacks from £4; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Nestling amid 15th-century beams, this deli-cum-cafe blends old-world charm with a tempting array of antipasti, charcuterie and local goodies. Grab a goats' cheese and aubergine panini to go, or duck upstairs to eat alongside weathered wood, stained glass and old church pews.

### MIDRANGE

**Prezzo** (☎ 01722-341333; 52-54 High St; mains £8-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Housed in a decidedly wonky half-timbered house, this sleek Italian does all the standard pizza and pasta dishes fantastically well, plus Sicilian chicken and a delicious red-pesto burger.

**Lemon Tree** (☎ 01722-333471; 92 Crane St; mains £8-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The menu at this tiny bistro is packed with character – how about crispy duck with cherry sauce, pear and brie toast or roasted mozzarella wrapped in Parma ham? The patio-garden makes warm weather dining a delight.

**One** (☎ 01722-411313; 1-5 Minster St; mains £8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sloping floors, slanting beams and fake pony-hide chairs surround you in this quirky restaurant, located above the Haunch of Venison pub (opposite). The menu is equally eclectic, featuring hot smoked mackerel salad, grilled bratwurst and good old English cottage pie.

**Cafe Med** (☎ 01722-328402; 68 Castle St; mains £9-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Bringing some Mediterranean vim to Salisbury's streets, this breezy bistro blends British classics with sun-kissed flavours – think sirloin steak with grilled vine tomatoes, or roast cod with pancetta.

**Marrakech** (☎ 01722-411112; 129-133 South Western Rd; mains £9; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner daily) For a taste of Casablanca without leaving Wiltshire, dive into this funky little restaurant's terracotta-coloured dining room, where five-vegetable couscous, marinated chicken

*tagine*, falafel and meze all end up on tiled Moroccan tables.

**Après LXIX** (☎ 01722-340000; 69 New St; mains £10-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) With artfully soft lighting and whitewashed walls, this Soho-style bistro is ideal for a romantic meal. Dishes reflect Italian, French and British influences – try the wild-boar sausages with red-wine jus or the seared tuna salad.

## Drinking

**Haunch of Venison** (☎ 01722-322024; 1-5 Minster St) Featuring wood-panelled snugs, spiral staircases and wonky ceilings, this 14th-century pub is packed with atmosphere – and ghosts. One is a cheating whist player whose hand was severed in a game (track down his mummified bones inside).

**Spirit** (☎ 01722-330053; 46 Catherine St; 🍷 4pm-midnight Tue-Sat) This hip hang-out is packed with the young and beautiful, who enjoy the banging tunes on the decks and a choice of multicoloured cocktails.

**Moloko** (☎ 01722-507050; 5 Bridge St) Red radiators, red banquets and red Soviet stars lend this Russian-themed bar a Cold War feel. The flavoured vodkas are definitely post-1984.

Try the **Ox Row Inn** (☎ 01722-424921; 11 Ox Row, Market Sq) for local ales; the walled beer garden at the 14th-century **New Inn** (☎ 01722-326662; 41 New St) overlooks the Cathedral.

## Entertainment

**Salisbury Arts Centre** (☎ 01722-321744; www.salisburyartscentre.co.uk; Bedwin St) Housed in the converted St Edmund's church, this innovative arts centre showcases cutting-edge theatre, dance and live gigs; photography and arts exhibitions are held in the foyer.

**Salisbury Playhouse** (☎ 01722-320333; www.salisburyplayhouse.com; Malthouse Lane) The town's big arts venue, hosting top touring shows, musicals and new plays.

**Odeon Cinema** (☎ 0871 22 44 007; New Canal) Quite possibly the only cinema in the world with a heavily beamed medieval foyer.

**Level 2** (☎ 01722-330053; 48 Catherine St; 🍷 10.30pm-2am Thu-Sat) The club above Spirit (see above), Level 2 pumps out dance-floor fillers and drum and bass, and has guest DJs on Friday.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Three National Express coaches run direct to London via Heathrow each day (£14.40, 3½

hours). There's a daily coach to Bath (£8.80, 1½ hours) and Bristol (£8.80, two hours).

Buses X4 and X5 travel to Bath (two hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) via Bradford-on-Avon (1½ hours). Regular buses run to Shaftesbury, Devizes and Avebury.

Four buses leave Salisbury for Stonehenge regularly; see p322.

### TRAIN

Trains run half-hourly from London Waterloo (£27.60, 1½ hours) and hourly on to Exeter (£25.70, two hours) and the southwest. Another line runs from Portsmouth (£14.40, 1½ hours, hourly) via Southampton (£7.20, 30 minutes), with connections to Bradford-on-Avon (£9.40, 40 minutes, hourly), Bath (£8, one hour, hourly) and Bristol (£9.50, 1¼ hours, hourly).

## AROUND SALISBURY

### Old Sarum

The huge ramparts of **Old Sarum** (EH; ☎ 01722-335398; adult/child £3/1.50; 🍷 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct & Mar, 11am-3pm Nov-Feb) sit on a grassy rise about 2 miles from Salisbury. It began life as a huge hill fort during the Iron Age, and was later occupied by both the Romans and the Saxons. By the mid-11th century it was a town – one of the most important in the west of England; William the Conqueror convened one of his earliest councils here, with the first cathedral being built in 1092, snatching the bishopric from nearby Sherborne Abbey. But Old Sarum always had problems: it was short on water and exposed to the elements, and in 1219 the bishop was given permission to move the cathedral to a new location beside the River Avon, founding the modern-day city of Salisbury. By 1331 the cathedral had been demolished for building material and Old Sarum was practically abandoned; a scale model in Salisbury Cathedral (p315) illustrates how the site once looked.

There are free guided tours at 3pm in June, July and August, and medieval tournaments, open-air plays and mock battles are held on selected days.

Between them, buses 5, 6 and 9 run four times an hour from Salisbury to Old Sarum (hourly on Sundays).

### Wilton House

For an insight into the exquisite, rarefied world of the British aristocracy, head to

**Wilton House** (☎ 01722-746714; www.wiltonhouse.com; house & gardens adult/child £12/6.50, gardens only £5/3.50; 🕒 house noon-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Aug, noon-5pm Tue-Thu Sep, gardens 11am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), one of the finest stately homes in England. The Earls of Pembroke have lived here since 1542, and it's been expanded, improved and embellished by successive generations since a devastating fire in 1647. The result is quite staggering and provides a whistle-stop tour of the history of English art and architecture: magnificent period furniture, frescoed ceilings and elaborate plasterwork frame paintings by Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Joshua Reynolds. Highlights are the Single and Double Cube Rooms, designed by the pioneering 17th-century architect Inigo Jones. The fine landscaped grounds were largely laid out by Capability Brown.

All that architectural eye candy makes the house a favoured film location: *The Madness of King George*, *Sense and Sensibility* and a recent version of *Pride and Prejudice* were all shot here. But Wilton was serving as an artistic haven long before the movies – famous guests include Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe and John Donne, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was performed here in 1603, shortly after the bard had written it.

Wilton House is 2½ miles west of Salisbury; buses 60, 60A and 61 run from Salisbury (10 minutes, four hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday).

## STONEHENGE

**Stonehenge** (EH/NT; ☎ 01980-624715; adult/child £6.50/3.30; 🕒 9am-7pm Jun & Aug, 9.30am-6pm mid-Mar-May & Sep-mid-Oct, 9.30am-4pm mid-Oct-mid-Mar) is Britain's most iconic archaeological site. This

compelling ring of monolithic stones has been attracting a steady stream of pilgrims, poets and philosophers for the last 5000 years.

Despite the constant flow of traffic from the main road beside the monument, and the huge numbers of visitors who traipse around the perimeter on a daily basis, Stonehenge still manages to be a mystical, ethereal place – a haunting echo from Britain's forgotten past, and a reminder of the people who once walked the many ceremonial avenues across Salisbury Plain. Even more intriguingly, it's still one of Britain's great archaeological mysteries: despite countless theories about what the site was used for, ranging from a sacrificial centre to a celestial timepiece, in truth, no one really knows what drove prehistoric Britons to expend so much time and effort on its construction.

You can't stroll around the centre of the site during normal opening hours, but unforgettable evening and early-morning **Stone Circle Access Visits** (☎ 01722-343834; adult/child £13/6) can be arranged. Each visit only takes up to 26 people, so you'll need to book well in advance.

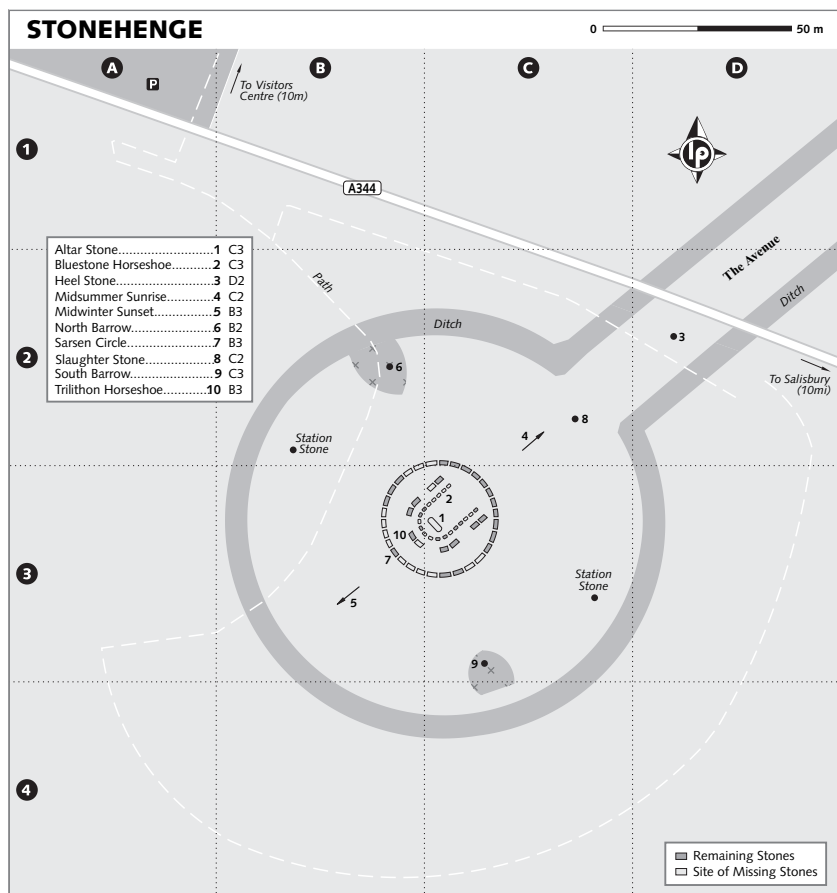
## The Site

The first phase of construction at Stonehenge started around 3000 BC, when the outer circular bank and ditch were erected. A thousand years later, an inner circle of granite stones, known as bluestones, was added. It's thought that these mammoth 4-ton blocks were hauled from the Preseli Mountains in South Wales, some 250 miles away – an almost inexplicable feat for Stone Age builders equipped with only the simplest of tools. Although no one is entirely sure how the builders transported the stones so far, it's thought they probably

### MYSTERIOUS PAST, MYSTERIOUS FUTURE

For such a celebrated site, Stonehenge has seen a surprising amount of upheaval. While the reasons behind its creation have provoked debate, how the site is used today has proved equally controversial. The tense stand-offs between solstice-goers and police that marked the 1980s and '90s have been replaced by fresh controversy about the impact the modern world has on the jewel in Britain's archaeological crown. This World Heritage Site is hemmed in by busy roads and wire barricades; jammed with visitors throughout the summer; and underscored by a cacophony of traffic. It's a long way from the haven of peace and spiritual tranquillity many expect to find.

Ambitious plans to tunnel the A303 under the monument, to turn the surrounding arable fields back into chalk downland and to bus people in from 2 miles away have now been rejected. English Heritage has to come up with other, smaller scale, changes – set to be in place by 2012, these will still feature a new visitor centre and may include closing the quieter A344, but the wider future of this supremely mystical site looks as mysterious as its past.



used a system of ropes, sledges and rollers fashioned from tree trunks – Salisbury Plain was still covered by forest during Stonehenge’s construction.

Around 1500 BC, Stonehenge’s main stones were dragged to the site, erected in a circle and crowned by massive lintels to make the trilithons (two vertical stones topped by a horizontal one). The sarsen (sandstone) stones were cut from an extremely hard rock found on the Marlborough Downs 20 miles from the site. It’s estimated dragging one of these 50-ton stones across the countryside would require about 600 people.

Also around this time, the bluestones from 500 years earlier were rearranged as an inner **bluestone horseshoe** with an **altar stone** at the

centre. Outside this the **trilithon horseshoe** of five massive sets of stones was erected. Three of these are intact; the other two have just a single upright. Then came the major **sarsen circle** of 30 massive vertical stones, of which 17 uprights and six lintels remain.

Much further out, another circle was delineated by the 58 **Aubrey Holes**, named after John Aubrey, who discovered them in the 1600s. Just inside this circle are the **South and North Barrows**, each originally topped by a stone. Like many stone circles in Britain (including Avebury, p327), the inner horseshoes are aligned to coincide with sunrise at the midsummer solstice, which some claim supports the theory that the site was some kind of astronomical calendar.

Prehistoric pilgrims would have entered the site via the **Avenue**, whose entrance to the circle is marked by the **Slaughter Stone** and the **Heel Stone**, located slightly further out on one side.

A marked pathway leads around the site, and although you can't walk freely in the circle itself, it's possible to see the stones fairly close up. An audio guide is included in the admission price.

### Getting There & Away

The **Stonehenge Tour** (☎ 01722-336855; return adult/child £11/5) leaves Salisbury's railway and bus stations half-hourly in June and August, and hourly between September and May. Tickets last all day, so you can hop off at Old Sarum (p319) on the way back.

Taxis charge £35 to go to the site – they wait for an hour and then come back.

Several companies offer organised tours:

**Salisbury Guided Tours** (☎ 01722-337960; www.salisburyguidedtours.com)

**Wessex Tourist Guides** (☎ 01980-623463)

### AROUND STONEHENGE

Stonehenge actually forms part of a huge complex of ancient monuments, a fact that's often overlooked by visitors. Leaflets available from the Stonehenge visitor centre detail walking routes around the main sites; most are accessible to the public although a few are on private land.

North of Stonehenge and running roughly east–west is the **Cursus**, an elongated embanked oval; the slightly smaller **Lesser Cursus** is nearby. Theories abound as to what these sites were used for, ranging from ancient sporting arenas to processional avenues for the dead.

Other prehistoric sites around Stonehenge include a number of burial mounds, such as the **New King Barrows**, and **Vespasian's Camp**, an Iron Age hill fort.

Just north of Amesbury and 1½ miles east of Stonehenge is **Woodhenge**, a series of concentric rings that would once have been marked by wooden posts. It's thought there might be some correlation between the use of wood and stone in both structures, but it's unclear what the materials would have meant to ancient Britons. Excavations in the 1970s at Woodhenge revealed the skeleton of a child with a cloven skull, buried near the centre.

### STOURHEAD

Overflowing with vistas, temples and follies, **Stourhead** (NT; ☎ 01747-841152; Stourton; house or garden adult/child £6.30/3.80, house & garden £10.50/5.80; ☎ house 11.30am–4.30pm Fri–Tue mid–Mar–Oct, garden 9am–7pm or sunset year-round) is landscape gardening at its finest. The Palladian house has some fine Chippendale furniture and paintings by Claude and Gaspard Poussin, but it's a sideshow to the magnificent 18th-century gardens, which spread out across the valley. A lovely 2-mile circuit takes you past the most ornate follies, around the lake and to the **Temple of Apollo**; a 3½-mile side trip can be made from near the **Pantheon** to **King Alfred's Tower** (adult/child £2.20/1.20; ☎ 11.30am–4.30pm mid–Mar–Oct), a 50m-high folly with wonderful views.

Stourhead is off the B3092, 8 miles south of Frome (in Somerset).

### LONGLEAT

Half ancestral mansion and half safari park, **Longleat** (☎ 01985-844400; www.longleat.co.uk; house & grounds adult/child £10/6, safari park £11/8, all-inclusive passport £22/16; ☎ house 10am–5pm year-round, safari park 10am–4pm Apr–Nov, other attractions 11am–5pm Apr–Nov) became the first stately home in England to open its doors to the public, in 1946. It was prompted by finance: heavy taxes and mounting bills after WWII meant the house had to earn its keep. Britain's first safari park opened on the estate in 1966, and soon Capability Brown's landscaped grounds had been transformed into an amazing drive-through zoo, populated by a menagerie of animals more at home in an African wilderness than the fields of Wiltshire. These days the zoo is backed up by a throng of tourist attractions, including a narrow-gauge railway, Dr Who exhibit, Postman Pat village, pets' corner and butterfly garden. Under all these tourist trimmings it's easy to forget the house itself, which contains fine tapestries, furniture and decorated ceilings, as well as seven libraries containing around 40,000 tomes. The highlight, though, is an extraordinary series of paintings and psychedelic murals by the present-day marquess, who trained as an art student in the '60s and upholds the long-standing tradition of eccentricity among the English aristocracy – check out his website at www.lordbath.co.uk.

Longleat is just off the A362, 3 miles from both Frome and Warminster.



## BRADFORD-ON-AVON

pop 8800

Tumbling down the slopes of a wooded hillside towards the banks of the River Avon, the beautiful amber-coloured town of Bradford is one of Wiltshire's prettiest – a handsome jumble of Georgian town houses and riverside buildings that makes a pleasant day trip from Bath, just 8 miles away.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01225-865797; www.bradfordonavon.co.uk; 50 St Margaret's St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Nov-Mar) stocks leaflets on rambles around the town and can help with accommodation.

### Sights & Activities

Bradford grew rich in the 17th and 18th centuries as a thriving centre for the weaving industry, and the town's elegant architecture is a reminder of its former wealth – some of the best examples are along **Middle Rank** and **Tory**, northwest of the town centre. But the town's most important building dates back to the early 11th century: the tiny **Church of St Laurence** (Church St) is one of the last surviving Saxon churches in Britain, and is particularly noted for the twin angels carved above the chancel arch.

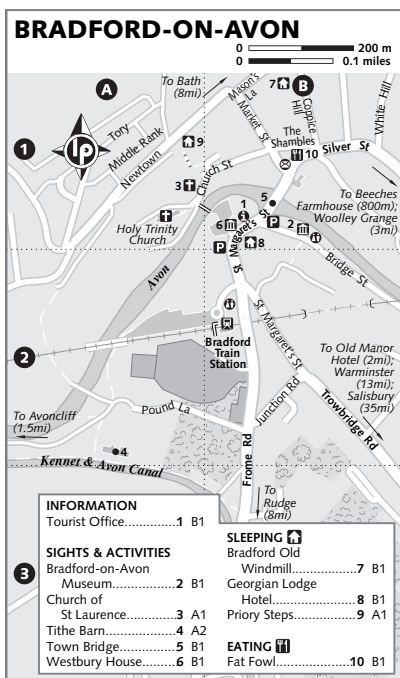
Near the river is **Westbury House** (St Margaret's St), where a riot against the introduction of factory machinery in 1791 led to three deaths. The machinery in question was subsequently burned on **Town Bridge**. The unusual room jutting out from the bridge was originally a chapel but was later used as a jail.

Across the river, a waterside path leads to the 14th-century **Tithe Barn** (EH; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4pm) on the bank of the Kennet & Avon Canal. The barn originally belonged to monks from nearby Shaftesbury Abbey, and was used to store tithes (a 10% tax made on local landowners) during the Middle Ages. It's worth visiting for its wood-vaulted interior and stone-tiled roof.

The tiny **Bradford-on-Avon Museum** (☎ 01225-863280; Bridge St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-4pm Wed-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Easter-Oct) is above the library.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Georgian Lodge Hotel** (☎ 01225-862268; www.georgianlodgehotel.com; 25 Bridge St; s/d £40/80) Shutters, ornate fireplaces and Georgian architectural plans dot the rooms of this old town-centre coaching inn. The supersmooth restaurant



(mains £10 to £18; open lunch and dinner) rustles up generous portions of classic British fare.

**Priory Steps** (☎ 01225-862230; www.priorysteps.co.uk; Newtown; s £68, d £84-92) This cosy little hillside hideaway has been created by knocking six weavers' cottages together. Now the charming rooms house antique wooden furniture and sparkling new bathrooms – the views down onto the River Avon are lovely.

**Bradford Old Windmill** (☎ 01225-866842; www.bradfordoldwindmill.co.uk; 4 Masons Lane; s £59-99, d £89-109; (P)) One for the 'places-I-have-stayed' photo album: a circular, three-storey former windmill boasting eyebrow-raising features. Queen-sized waterbeds and satin sheets cosy up to conical ceilings and spiral staircases. The whole slightly saucy affair clings to a hill overlooking town.

**Fat Fowl** (☎ 01225-863111; Silver St; dinner mains £15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed dinner Sun) Catering to all your needs, this French-inspired bistro tempts you with crumbly breakfast pastries, leisurely lunches (mains from £6), tasty tapas (£4) and classy dinners. Sometimes live jazz and blues are laid on, too.

Other options:

**Beeches Farmhouse** (☎ 01225-865170; www.beeches-farmhouse.co.uk; Holt Rd; s £50-85, d £70-85; (P)) Exposed beams, rustic charm and a dollop of luxury in a honey-coloured, converted barn.

**Old Manor Hotel** (☎ 01225-777393; Trowle Common; s £75-95, d £95-140; (P)) Rambling, regal rooms in a beautiful Georgian manor house 2 miles from town.

## Getting There & Away

Buses 264 and 265 run from Bath (30 minutes, hourly, two hourly on Sunday) en route to Warminster (40 minutes). Trains go roughly half-hourly to Bath (£3, 15 minutes), and hourly to Warminster (£4.30, 20 minutes) and Salisbury (£9.40, 45 minutes).

## MALMESBURY ABBEY

A wonderful blend of ruin and living church, **Malmesbury Abbey** (☎ 01666-826666; www.malmesburyabbey.com; suggestion donation £2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-mid-Mar) has had a somewhat turbulent history.

It began life as a 7th-century monastery, which was later replaced by a Norman church. By the mid-15th century the abbey had been embellished with a spire and twin towers, but in 1479 a storm toppled the east tower and spire, destroying the eastern end of the church. The west tower followed suit in 1662, destroying much of the nave. The present-day church is about a third of its original size, and is flanked by ruins at either end. Notable features include the Norman doorway decorated with biblical carvings, the Romanesque **Apostle** carvings and a four-volume illuminated bible dating from 1407. A window at the western end of the church depicts Elmer the Flying Monk, who in 1010 strapped on wings and jumped from the tower. Although he broke both legs during this leap of faith, he survived and became a local hero.

Just below the abbey are the **Abbey House Gardens** (☎ 01666-822212; www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/2.50; ☎ 11am-5.30pm mid-Mar-Oct), which include a herb garden, river, waterfall and 2 hectares of colourful blooms.

Bus 31 runs to Swindon (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), while £10 92 heads to Chippenham (35 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

## CASTLE COMBE

Proudly trumpeting itself as the 'prettiest village in England', the little hamlet of Castle

Combe presents a picture-perfect image of English countryside – its quiet streets and stone-walled cottages doubled as the fictional village of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh in the 1967 film of *Doctor Dolittle*. The village grew up around a medieval castle and later became an important centre for the local wool trade: old weavers' cottages are huddled around the medieval packhorse bridge, and the riverbanks were once lined with more than 20 clattering mills. In the centre of the village is a 13th-century **market cross**, and nearby, the medieval **church of St Andrew** contains the carved tomb of Sir Walter de Dunstanville, the 13th-century lord of the manor who fought in the Crusades and was killed in battle in 1270.

The best place to stay in the village is the 12th-century **Castle Inn** (☎ 01249-783030; www.castle-inn.info; s £85-95, d £110-175), where rich fabrics cover wooden-framed beds, and soft lights illuminate worn beams and whirlpool baths. The restaurant (mains £11 to £18), which is open for lunch and dinner, serves up classic British fare including tenderloin of pork, rack of lamb and a smashing Sunday lunch.

Head to the **White Hart** (☎ 01249-782295; mains £6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) for real ales, cheap eats and country atmosphere.

Bus 35 runs to Chippenham bus station (30 minutes) six times daily Monday to Friday, and four times on Saturday. There's also a direct bus to Bath on Wednesday (one hour).

## LACOCK

With its geranium-covered cottages, higgledy-piggledy rooftops and idyllic location next to a rushing brook, pockets of the medieval village of Lacock seem to have been preserved in aspic since the mid-19th century. The village has been in the hands of the National Trust since 1944, and in many places is remarkably free of modern development – there are no telephone poles or electric street lights, and although villagers drive around the streets, the main car park on the outskirts keeps it largely traffic-free. Unsurprisingly, it's also a popular location for costume dramas and feature films – the village and its abbey pop up in the Harry Potter films, *The Other Boleyn Girl* and BBC adaptations of *Moll Flanders* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

## Sights

### LACOCK ABBEY

**Lacock Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01249-730459; abbey, museum, doisters & grounds adult/child £9/4.50, abbey, doisters & grounds

**DETOUR: WOOLLEY GRANGE**

Mixing boutique style with a refreshing family-friendly attitude, **Woolley Grange** (☎ 01225-864705; www.woolleygrangehotel.co.uk; Woolley Green; B&B & dinner per 2 people £240-440; (P)) is one of the most welcoming country-house hotels in Wiltshire. With its designer bedrooms, laid-back attitude and quietly impressive service, it's a place whose *raison d'être* seems to be keeping everyone in a state of mild euphoria throughout their stay. While the little 'uns are kept lavishly entertained with everything from giant trampolines to PlayStation 2s at the Woolley Bear Den, mum and dad can relax with a truly indulgent range of spa treatments, aromatherapy massages, gourmet meals, and sparkling-wine cocktails by the heated outdoor pool. Rooms are all individually styled, with a smattering of patchwork quilts, shiny antiques and funky fixtures. Children can share their parents' room for free; you pay only for their meals. This little oasis of family fun is on the edge of Bradford-on-Avon, and is 8 miles from Bath.

£7.20/3.60; (☎) abbey 1-5.30pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Oct, cloisters & grounds 11am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, museum 11am-5.30pm late Feb-Oct plus Sat & Sun Nov-Jan) was founded as an Augustinian nunnery in 1232 by Ela, Countess of Salisbury. After the Dissolution the abbey was sold to Sir William Sharington in 1539, who converted the nunnery into a home, demolished the church, tacked a tower onto the corner of the abbey and added a brewery. The wonderful Gothic entrance hall is lined with bizarre terracotta figures; spot the scapegoat with a lump of sugar on its nose. Some of the original 13th-century structure is evident in the cloisters and there are traces of medieval wall paintings. The recently restored botanic garden is also worth a visit.

In the early 19th century, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-77), a prolific inventor, developed the photographic negative while working at the abbey: the **Fox Talbot Museum of Photography** (NT; ☎ 01249-730459; museum, cloisters & grounds adult/child £5.50/2.70; (☎) 11am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) details his ground-breaking work and displays a fine collection of his snapshots.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**King John's Hunting Lodge** (☎ 01249-730313; king.johns@amservice.com; 21 Church St; s/d £60/90, f £115-140; (☎) tearooms 11am-5.30pm) Housed in Lacock's oldest building, this tearoom-cum-B&B is run by an ex-shepherdess, who's now a celebrity chef. Tearoom (snacks £3 to £8) specialities include 'priddy oggies' (a pastry with pork and Stilton), cheese muffins and homemade elderflower cordial. Upstairs, snug, resolutely old-fashioned rooms are crammed with creaky furniture and Tudor touches.

**our pick Sign of the Angel** (☎ 01249-730230; www.lacock.co.uk; 6 Church St; s £82, d £120-145, mains from £14; (P)) If you want to slumber amid a slice of

history, check into this 15th-century beamed bolt-hole. Crammed with antique beds, tapestries and burnished chests, comfort levels are brought up to date with free-standing sinks and slipper baths. The restaurant revels in English classics – try the 'angel plate' of cold meats and bubble and squeak, then squeeze in treacle tart with clotted cream.

Other options:

**George Inn** (☎ 01249-730263; 4 West St; mains from £8; (☎) lunch & dinner) A horse brass-hung pub dispensing grub and local ales.

**Lacock Pottery B&B** (☎ 01249-730266; www.lacockbedandbreakfast.com; s £49-59, d £76-96; (P)) An oatmeal colour scheme and antiques grace this airy former workhouse, which is overlooked by the church.

**Getting There & Away**

Bus 234 runs hourly, Monday to Saturday, from Chippenham (15 minutes).

**AROUND LACOCK****Corsham Court**

Two miles northwest of Lacock, the Elizabethan mansion of **Corsham Court** (☎ 01249-712214; www.corsham-court.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/3; (☎) 2-5.30pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun late Mar-Sep, 2-4.30pm Sat & Sun Oct, Nov & Jan-late Mar) dates from 1582, although the house and grounds were later improved by John Nash and Capability Brown. The house is renowned for its superb art collection, which features works by Reynolds, Caravaggio, Rubens and Van Dyck. It's also known for its formal gardens, which contain some stunning ornamental box hedges and a Gothic bathhouse.

**DEVIZES**

pop 14,379

The busy market town of Devizes is famous for its grand semicircular marketplace – the

largest anywhere in England – but apart from some intriguing Georgian architecture and two fine churches, there's not a huge amount to keep you entertained. Nevertheless, the town makes a handy base for exploring south-western Wiltshire and nearby Avebury.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01380-729408; ATIC@kennet.gov.uk; Cromwell House, Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat) has a couple of useful leaflets for walks around town, and can help with local accommodation.

## Sights

Between St John's St and High St, **St John's Alley** has a wonderful collection of Elizabethan houses, their upper storeys cantilevered over the street. **St John's Church**, on Market Pl, displays elements of its original Norman construction, particularly in the solid crossing tower. Other interesting buildings include the **Corn Exchange** (topped by a figure of Ceres, goddess of agriculture), and the **Old Town Hall**, built 1750 to 1752.

The **Wiltshire Heritage Museum & Gallery** (☎ 01380-727369; www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk; 41 Long St; adult/child £4/1, Sun free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun) has artefacts from Avebury, Stonehenge and other burial barrows across Wiltshire.

The **Kennet & Avon Canal Museum** (☎ 01380-729489; The Wharf; adult/child £2/75p; ☎ 10am–4pm Easter–Dec) brings to life the heritage of this historic canal. On the western outskirts of Devizes are the 29 successive locks at **Caen Hill**, which raise the water level 72m in just 2½ miles.

## Sleeping & Eating

**our pick** **Rosemundy Cottage** (☎ 01380-727122; www.rosemundycottage.co.uk; London Rd; s/d £37/60; P) (wi-fi) There can't be many B&Bs that, like this one, can boast a canal-side terrace and heated pool. The cheerful owners delight in going the extra mile, providing plunger coffee and DVD players in the airy bedrooms, and local honey, sausages and free-range duck eggs for breakfast.

**Bear Hotel** (☎ 01380-722444; www.thebearhotel.net; Market Pl; s £80, d £105–130; P) They've been putting up weary travellers at this rambling coaching inn since 1559. Smart rooms are decked out in cream and lime candy stripes; the best one has bay windows, oil paintings and a whopping four-poster bed.

**our pick** **Bistro** (☎ 01380-720043; 7 Little Brittox; mains £12; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat) Delivering a burst of fragrant, Mediterranean flavours to

market town Devizes, this lovely, two-floor eatery champions the cause of connecting local producers and communities – the owner even holds tasting sessions at nearby schools. Good intentions infuse the menu, too: try the grilled Somerset goats' cheese with pesto and chilli jam, or the risotto with Wiltshire wine and parmesan cheese.

**Eastleigh House** (☎ 01380-726918; www.eastleighhouse.co.uk; 3 Eastleigh Rd; s/d £36/65; P) A relaxed, welcoming B&B of simple colours and plain fabrics.

**Blounts Court Farm** (☎ 01380-727180; www.blountscourtfarm.co.uk; s £36–42, d £60–70; P) Bordering a village cricket ground, this is a farmhouse B&B full of rustic charm.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 49 serves Avebury (25 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday), while bus 2 runs from Salisbury (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday).

## AROUND DEVIZES

### Bowood House

Stately **Bowood House** (☎ 01249-812102; www.bowood.org; adult/child £8/6.50; ☎ 11am–5.30pm mid–Mar–Oct) was first built around 1725 and has been home to the successive earls of Shelburne (now the marquess of Lansdowne) since 1754. The house has an impressive picture gallery and a fine sculpture gallery, as well as the laboratory where Dr Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen in 1774. The grounds, designed by Capability Brown, are an attraction in themselves and include a terraced rose garden.

Bowood is 3 miles southeast of Chippenham and 6 miles northwest of Devizes.

### AVEBURY

While the tour buses usually head straight for Stonehenge, prehistoric purists make for the massive ring of stones located at **Avebury**. Though it lacks the huge slabs of rock and dramatic trilithons of its sister site across the plain, Avebury is arguably a much more rewarding place to visit. A large section of the village is actually inside the stone circle; you get much closer to the action than you do at Stonehenge; and it's bigger, older and a great deal quieter. It may also have been a more important ceremonial site, judging by its massive scale and its location at the centre of a complex of barrows, burial chambers and processional avenues.

## Orientation & Information

Two main roads bisect the village, but it's much easier to use the National Trust car park on the A4361, just a short walk from the village. The **tourist office** (☎ 01380-734669; www.visitwiltshire.co.uk; Chapel Centre, Green St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Thu-Sun Nov-Mar) is housed in a converted chapel near the centre of the village.

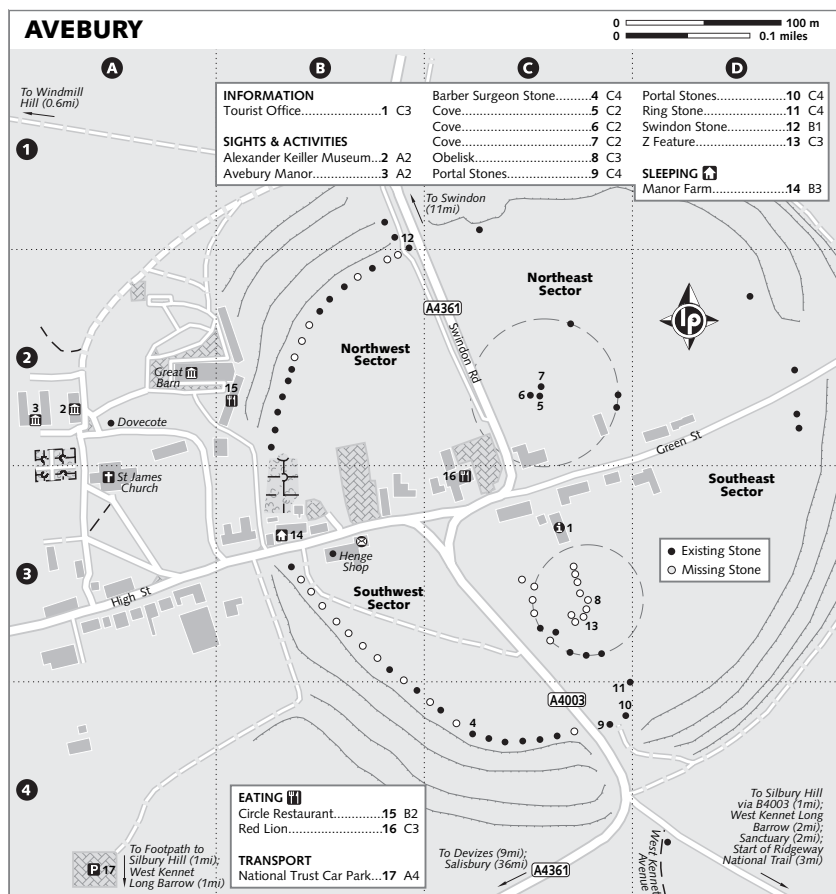
## Sights

### STONE CIRCLE

With a diameter of about 348m, Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world. It's also one of the oldest, dating from around 2500 to 2200 BC, between the first and second phase of construction at Stonehenge. The

site originally consisted of an outer circle of 98 standing stones from 3m to 6m in length, many weighing up to 20 tons, carefully selected for their size and shape. The stones were surrounded by another circle delineated by a 5.5m-high earth bank and a 6m- to 9m-deep ditch. Inside were smaller stone circles to the north (27 stones) and south (29 stones).

The present-day site represents just a fraction of the circle's original size; tragically, many of the stones were buried, removed or broken up during the Middle Ages, when Britain's pagan past became something of an embarrassment to the church. In 1934, wealthy businessman and archaeologist Alexander Keiller supervised the re-erection



of the buried stones, and planted markers to indicate those that had disappeared; he later bought the site for posterity using funds from his family's marmalade fortune.

Modern roads into Avebury neatly dissect the circle into four sectors. Start at High St, near the Henge Shop, and walk round the circle in an anticlockwise direction. There are 11 standing stones in the southwest sector, including the **Barber Surgeon Stone**, named after the skeleton of a man found under it. The equipment buried with him suggested he was a medieval travelling barber-surgeon, possibly killed when a stone accidentally fell on him.

The southeast sector starts with the huge **portal stones** marking the entry to the circle from West Kennet Ave. The **southern inner circle** stood in this sector and within this circle was the **Obelisk** and a group of stones known as the **Z Feature**. Just outside this smaller circle, only the base of the **Ring Stone** remains.

The northwest sector has the most complete collection of standing stones, including the massive 65-ton **Swindon Stone**, the first stone encountered and one of the few never to have been toppled. In the northern inner circle in the northeast sector, three sarsens remain of what would have been a rectangular **cove**.

## OTHER SITES

Avebury is surrounded by a network of ancient monuments. Lined by 100 pairs of stones, the 1.5-mile **West Kennet Avenue** linked the Avebury circle with the **Sanctuary**. Post holes indicate that a wooden building surrounded by a stone circle once stood at the Sanctuary, although no one knows quite what the site was for.

Just to the west, the huge dome of **Silbury Hill** rises abruptly from the surrounding fields. At more than 40m high, it's the largest constructed mound in Europe, and was built in stages from around 2500 BC. No significant artefacts have been found at the site, and the reason for its construction remains unclear. A massive project to stabilise the hill took place in 2008 after a combination of erosion and damaged caused by earlier excavations caused part of the top to collapse. Direct access to the hill isn't allowed, but you can view it from a car park on the A4. Hiking across the fields from Avebury (1.5 miles each way) is a more atmospheric way to arrive; the tourist office sells guides (50p).

Just east of Silbury Hill you can take the footpath half a mile further to **West Kennet Long**

**Barrow**. Set in the fields south of Silbury Hill, this is England's finest burial mound and dates from around 3500 BC. Its entrance is guarded by huge sarsens and its roof is made out of gigantic overlapping capstones. About 50 skeletons were found when it was excavated, and finds are on display at the Wiltshire Heritage Museum & Gallery in Devizes (p326).

Northwest of the Avebury circle you'll find **Windmill Hill**, a neolithic enclosure or 'camp' dating from about 3700 BC (the earliest site in the area).

The **Ridgeway National Trail** starts near Avebury and runs eastwards across Fyfield Down, where many of the sarsen stones at Avebury (and Stonehenge) were collected.

## AVEBURY MANOR

Although it dates back to the 16th century, **Avebury Manor** (NT; ☎ 01672-539250; manor & garden adult/child £4/2, garden only £3/1.50; ♿ manor 2-4.40pm Mon, Tue & Sun, gardens 11am-5pm Fri-Tue) was modified during the Edwardian era. Keiller bought the manor in 1939 and spent much of his later life here; now owned by the National Trust, the house is still used as a private residence, but it's a little scant on attractions. Entry is by timed ticket. The manor is on the western fringe of the village.

Housed in the old stables of Avebury Manor, the **Alexander Keiller Museum** (NT; ☎ 01672-539250; adult/child £4.20/2.10; ♿ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) explores the archaeological history of the circle and traces the story of the man who dedicated his life to unlocking the secret of the stones.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Our pick** **Manor Farm** (☎ 01672-539294; fax 01672-539294; High St; s/d £60/80) Your chance to sleep in style inside a stone circle – this red-brick farmhouse snuggles just inside the henge. The quietly comfy rooms blend old woods with bright furnishings; there's a splendid free-standing claw-foot bath; and the views out onto the 4000-year-old standing stones ratchet up the atmosphere.

**Red Lion** (☎ 01672-539266; redlion.avebury@whitbread.com; Swindon Rd; mains from £10, s/d £50/80; ♿ lunch & dinner; (P)) Having a pint here means downing a drink at the only pub in the world inside a stone circle. It's also haunted by Flori, who was killed during the Civil War when her husband threw her down a well –

it now forms the centrepiece of the dining room, where you can tuck into hearty pub grub of the pie 'n' mash school. The rustic rooms upstairs are peeling in places, but they do look out onto those famous stones.

**Circle Restaurant** (☎ 01672-539514; mains from £7; ☑ lunch) This veggie and wholefood cafe beside the Great Barn serves delicious sandwiches, cakes and afternoon teas.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 5 runs to Avebury from Salisbury (1¼ hours, five or six Monday to Saturday). Bus 49 serves Swindon (30 minutes) and Devizes (25 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

# BRISTOL

pop 393,300

Boom-town Bristol may not be as pretty as her older sister Bath (and really, she isn't) but she's just as interesting. After being in the doldrums for decades, this former hub of shipbuilding, manufacturing and the railways has undergone a transformative regeneration. Crumbling docks have been prettified, cutting-edge restaurants have sprung up, and hotels and designer bars occupy sites that were, until recently, derelict. But despite her new-found swagger, Bristol is also a city with a complex past; here you can explore the legacies of engineering genius Isambard Kingdom Brunel as well as those of the transatlantic slave trade. Mix in the work of guerrilla graffiti artist Banksy and a cutting-edge club scene and you get something real, and just a little rough around the edges. But there's also a sense that this little sister's time has come.

## HISTORY

A small Saxon village at the confluence of the Rivers Frome and Avon became the thriving medieval Brigstow (later Bristol) as the city began to develop a European trade in cloth and wine. Religious houses were established on high ground (now the suburb of Temple) above the marshes, and it was from here that celebrated 'local hero' John Cabot (actually a Genoese sailor called Giovanni Caboto) sailed to discover Newfoundland in 1497. Over the following centuries, Bristol became one of Britain's major ports, and grew fat on the proceeds of the transatlantic slave trade (see boxed text, p334), as well as from dealing in cocoa, sugar and tobacco.

By the 18th century the city was suffering from competition, from Liverpool in particular. With large ships having difficulty reaching the city-centre docks, some trade moved to new ports at Avonmouth and Portishead instead.

Bristol repositioned itself as an industrial centre, becoming an important hub for shipbuilding, as well as the terminus for the pioneering Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest. World War II saw Bristol become a key target for German bombing, and much of the city centre was reduced to rubble. The postwar rush for reconstruction left Bristol with plenty of concrete carbuncles, but over the last decade or so the city has undergone extensive redevelopment, especially around the dockside.

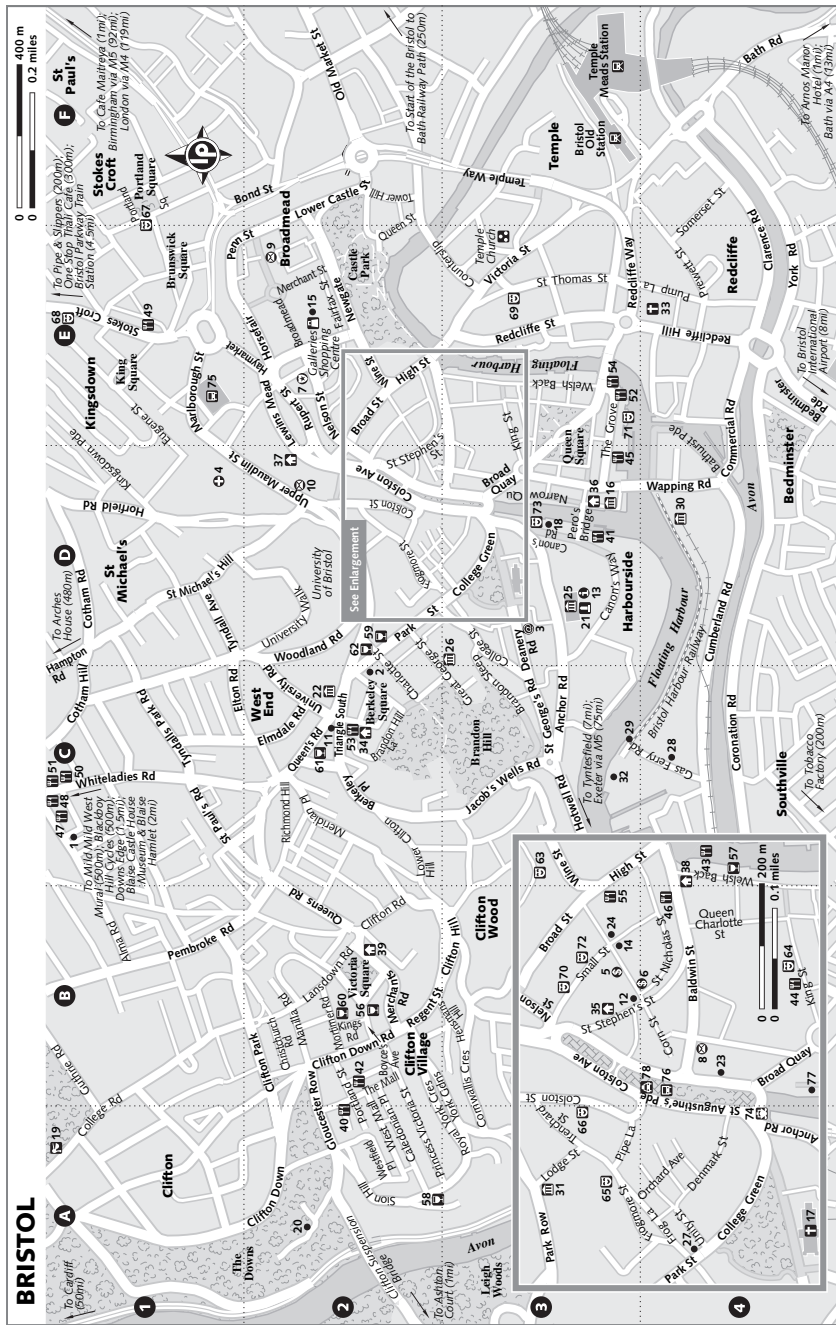
## ORIENTATION

The city centre, north of the river, is easy to get around on foot, but it's hilly. The central area centres on the narrow streets by the markets and Corn Exchange and the newly developed docklands. Park St is lined with trendy shops

### BRISTOL IN TWO DAYS

Start off with a tour around Bristol's historic dockside, taking a few hours to explore the cutting-edge **Arnolfini** (p332) and the hands-on science displays of **Explore @ Bristol** (p332). Have a sumptuous lunch at **Bordeaux Quay** (p338) before cruising down the river aboard the **Bristol Ferry Boat** (p340). Check into the **Mercure Brigstow** (p336), dine out in style at the **Glassboat** (p338) and catch an evening film at the **Watershed** (p339), if there's time.

On day two catch a bus over to Clifton, stopping at the **Georgian House** (p332) and the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (p332) en route, before taking a wander around Clifton's many shops, boutiques and cafes. Enjoy an afternoon stroll across the marvellous **suspension bridge** (p333) and around the **Clifton Downs** (p334) nearby, and finish up with a slap-up supper at **Quartier Vert** (p338) on Whiteladies Rd.





<b>INFORMATION</b>		Love Triangle Stencil.....27 A4	Sevenshed.....54 E3
Alma Laundrette.....1 C1	Maritime Heritage Centre.....28 C4	St Nicholas Market.....55 B3	
Barclays.....(see 6)	Matthew.....29 C3		<b>DRINKING ☑</b>
Blackwell's/George's.....2 C2	Museum of Bristol.....30 D4	Albion.....56 B2	Apple.....57 C4
Bristol Central Library.....3 D3	Red Lodge.....31 A3	Avon Gorge Hotel.....58 A2	Elbow Room.....59 D2
Bristol Royal Infirmary.....4 D1	SS Great Britain.....32 C3	Hophouse.....60 B2	MBargo.....(see 61)
Lloyds.....5 B3	St Mary Redcliffe.....33 E4	Park.....61 C2	Woods.....62 D2
NatWest.....6 B4			
Police Station.....7 E2	<b>SLEEPING ☑</b>		<b>ENTERTAINMENT ☑</b>
Post Office.....8 B4	Berkeley Square Hotel.....34 C2	Bierkeller.....63 C3	Bristol Old Vic.....64 B4
Post Office.....9 E2	Bristol Backpackers.....35 B3	Carling Academy.....65 A3	Colston Hall.....66 A3
Post Office.....10 D2	Bristol YHA.....36 D3	Cosies.....67 F1	Croft.....68 E1
STA Travel.....11 C2	Hotel du Vin.....37 D2	Fleece & Firkin.....69 E3	Native.....70 B3
Stanfords.....12 B3	Mercure Brigstow Hotel.....38 C4	Thekla Social.....71 E3	Timbuk2.....72 B3
Tourist Office.....13 D3	Victoria Square Hotel.....39 B2	Watershed.....73 D3	
Traillfinders.....14 B3			<b>TRANSPORT</b>
Waterstones.....15 E2			Bristol Ferry Boat Co.....74 A4
	<b>EATING ☑</b>		Bus Station.....75 E1
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	Bar Chocolat.....40 A2		Buses for Clifton Village.....76 B4
Arnolfini Arts Centre.....16 D3	Bordeaux Quay.....41 D3		Ferry Station Bike Hire.....77 B4
Bristol Cathedral.....17 A4	Clifton Sausage.....42 B2		Taxi Rank.....78 B4
Bristol Harbour Railway starting point.....(see 30)	Glassboat.....43 C4		
Bristol Packet Boat Trips.....18 D3	La Taverna Dell'Artista.....44 B4		
Bristol Zoo Gardens.....19 A1	Mud Dock.....45 D3		
Camera Obscura.....20 A2	Obento.....46 B4		
Carry Grant statue.....21 D3	Papadeli.....47 C1		
City Museum & Art Gallery.....22 C2	Picture House.....48 C1		
City Sightseeing Bus Tours.....23 B4	Pieminister.....49 E1		
Corn Exchange.....24 B3	Planet Pizza.....50 C1		
Explore @ Bristol.....25 D3	Quartier Vert.....51 C1		
Georgian House.....26 C3	riverstation.....52 E3		
	Rocotillo's.....53 C2		

and cafes, while a strip of Whiteladies Rd (northwest of Park St), is the hub of bar and restaurant life. The genteel suburb of Clifton, with its Georgian terraces and boutique shops, is on the hilltop west of the centre.

As in any big city, it pays to keep your wits about you after dark, especially around the suburb of St Paul's, just northeast of the centre. It's a run-down area with a heavy drug scene, and is best not visited alone at night.

The main train station is Temple Meads, a mile southeast of the centre. Some trains use Bristol Parkway, 5 miles to the north. The bus station is on Marlborough St, northeast of the city centre.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Blackwell's/George's** (☎ 0117-927 6602; 89 Park St)

This vast bookshop sells both second-hand and new titles.

**Stanfords** (☎ 0117-929 9966; 29 Corn St) You'll find a superb collection of maps and books at this travel specialist.

**Waterstones** (☎ 0117-925 2274; The Galleries, Broadmead) General bookshop in the Galleries shopping centre.

## Emergency

**Police station** (☎ 0845 456 7000; Nelson St)

## Internet Access

**Bristol Central Library** (☎ 0117-903 7200; College Green; access free; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 10am-5pm Wed, 9am-5pm Fri & Sat, 1-5pm Sun)

## Internet Resources

**This is Bristol** ([www.thisisbristol.com](http://www.thisisbristol.com)) Web edition of the *Bristol Evening Post*.

**Venue** ([www.venue.co.uk](http://www.venue.co.uk)) Online version of Bristol's listings guide, with reviews of clubs, bars and restaurants.

**Visit Bristol** ([www.visitbristol.co.uk](http://www.visitbristol.co.uk)) Official tourism website with info on events, accommodation, transport and exploring the city.

**What's on Bristol** ([www.whatsonbristol.co.uk](http://www.whatsonbristol.co.uk)) Useful online city guide with comprehensive listings.

## Laundry

**Alma Laundrette** (☎ 0117-973 4121; 78 Alma Rd; ☎ 7am-9pm)

## Medical Services

**Bristol Royal Infirmary** (☎ 0117-923 0000; 2 Marlborough St)

## Money

You'll find all the main banks along Corn St, including Barclays at number 40, Lloyds at 55, and NatWest at 32.

## Post

**Post office** (☎ 0845 722 3344) Baldwin St (Baldwin St); The Galleries (The Galleries, Broadmead); Upper Maudlin St (Upper Maudlin St)

## Tourist Information

Free touch-screen kiosks known as i-plus points are located around the city, providing tourist information.

**Tourist office** (☎ enquiries 0906 711 2191 per min 50p, accommodation 0845 408 0474; www.visitbristol.co.uk; Explore @ Bristol, Anchor Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) Well stocked with leaflets, transport maps and local info; books accommodation for £3.

## Travel Agencies

**STA Travel** (☎ 0871 230 8569; 43 Queen's Rd)

**Trailfinders** (☎ 0117-929 9000; 48 Corn St; ☎ 9am-6pm)

## SIGHTS

**Explore @ Bristol** (☎ 0117-9155000; www.at-bristol.org.uk; Anchor Rd; adult/child £9/7; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, Sun & school holidays) is Bristol's impressive science museum, with several zones spanning space, technology and the human brain. In the Curiosity Zone you get to walk through a tornado, spin on a human gyroscope and strum the strings of a virtual harp. It's fun, imaginative and highly interactive, and should keep kids of all ages enthralled for a few hours. A £4-million aquarium is due to open at the same site in 2009.

One of Bristol's most famous sons was Cary Grant (aka Archibald Leach), who was born here in 1904; look out for his **statue** in neighbouring Millennium Sq.

## Museums & Galleries

Housed in a stunning Edwardian baroque building, the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 0117-922 3571; Queen's Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) has an excellent collection of British and French art; galleries dedicated to ceramics and decorative arts; and archaeological, geological and natural-history wings. Look out for its best-known resident, Alfred the Gorilla.

The 18th-century **Georgian House** (☎ 0117-921 1362; 7 Great George St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sat) provides an atmospheric illustration of aristocratic life in Bristol during the Georgian era – and the city's links to the slave trade (see boxed text, p334). The six-storeyed house was home to West India merchant John Pinney,

along with his slave Pero – after whom Pero's Bridge across the harbour is named. It's still decorated throughout in period style, typified by the huge kitchen (complete with cast-iron roasting spit) and the grand drawing rooms.

The Elizabethan **Red Lodge** (☎ 0117-921 1360; Park Row; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sat) was built in 1590 but was much remodelled in 1730, and its architecture reflects both periods. The highlight is the Elizabethan Oak Room, which still features its original oak panelling, plaster-work ceiling and carved chimneypiece.

In the northern suburb of Henbury lies **Blaise Castle House Museum** (☎ 0117-903 9818; Henbury Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sat), a late-18th-century house and social-history museum. Displays include vintage toys, costumes and other Victorian ephemera. Across the road is **Blaise Hamlet**, a cluster of picturesque thatched cottages designed for estate servants by John Nash in 1811. Bus 43 (45 minutes, every 15 minutes) passes the castle from Colston Ave; bus 1 (20 minutes, every 10 minutes) from St Augustine's Pde doesn't stop quite as close, but is quicker and more frequent.

The massive avant-garde **Arnolfini Arts Centre** (☎ 0117-917 2300; www.arnolfini.org.uk; 16 Narrow Quay; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has had an impressive facelift, and remains the top venue in town for exhibitions of dance, photography and art.

A £25-million scheme to turn the city's old Industrial Museum into a flagship **Museum of Bristol** is due to be completed by 2011. Sited on the Harbourside inside huge 1950s transit sheds, displays will include historic working cranes, boats and trains. A steam railway runs from the site along to Brunel's SS *Great Britain*, below.

The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum closed in autumn 2008 ahead of a planned relocation to London.

## SS Great Britain

In 1843 Brunel designed the mighty **SS Great Britain** (☎ 0117-926 0680; www.ssgreatbritain.org; Great Western Dockyard; adult/child £11/5.65; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar), the first transatlantic steamship to be driven by a screw propeller. For 43 years the ship served as a luxury ocean-going liner and cargo vessel, before being damaged in 1886 near the Falkland Islands. The cost of repairs proved unenormous and the ship's owners sold her off as a coal hulk, an ignominious fate for such a

## BRISTOL & BRUNEL

Bristol is packed with reminders of one of its towering figures: the extravagantly named **Isambard Kingdom Brunel** (1806–59) – industrial genius, visionary engineer, and general all-round Renaissance man.

The precocious young Isambard was educated at the Lycée Henri-IV in Paris and the University of Caen in Normandy, and was barely 20 years old when he was appointed chief engineer of the pioneering Thames Tunnel between Rotherhithe and Wapping in London. The project was fraught with technical difficulties and considerable danger, including explosive gases and floods; in one such flood Brunel was almost drowned while trying to rescue trapped workers. While recovering, he entered a competition to design a bridge over the Avon at Clifton, eventually winning first prize with his vision for a suspension bridge (below).

During his 30-year career Brunel was responsible for many of the landmark projects of Victorian engineering, including the construction of the first rail bridge over the River Tamar; the foundation of the Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest; and the design of the ground-breaking transatlantic vessels *Great Western* and *Great Eastern*, as well as the first iron-hulled, screw-propeller steamship, *SS Great Britain* (opposite), now in Bristol. He also modernised the docks at Bristol, Plymouth and Cardiff; designed the first prefabricated field hospital for use during the Crimean War; and worked on railway projects everywhere from India to Italy.

Despite surviving on a diet of four hours' sleep and 40 cigars a day, Brunel's closest shave came when he nearly choked to death having accidentally swallowed a coin while performing a conjuring trick for his children. His eventual end was rather more prosaic; he suffered a stroke in 1859, just before the *Great Eastern* made its first voyage to New York, and he died 10 days later at the age of 53.

grand vessel. By 1937 she was no longer watertight and was abandoned near Port Stanley in the Falklands. There she remained, forgotten and rusted, before finally being towed back to Bristol in 1970.

Since then a massive 30-year program of restoration costing £11.3 million has allowed the ship to rediscover her former splendour. The ship's rooms have been refurbished in impeccable detail, including the ship's galley, surgeon's quarters, mess hall, and the great engine room; but the highlight is the amazing 'glass sea' on which the ship sits, enclosing an airtight dry dock that preserves the delicate hull and allows visitors to see the ground-breaking screw propeller up close. Moored nearby is a replica of John Cabot's ship **Matthew**, which sailed from Bristol to Newfoundland in 1497.

Tickets to the *SS Great Britain* also allow access to the neighbouring **Maritime Heritage Centre** (☎ 0117-927 9856; Great Western Dockyard, Gas Ferry Rd; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Apr–Oct, to 4.30pm Nov–Mar), which has various exhibits relating to the ship's illustrious past, and the city's boat-building heritage.

The steam-powered **Bristol Harbour Railway** (single/return £2/3; ☎ Sat & Sun late-May–early-Sep) runs along the dock from the site of the new

Museum of Bristol to the *SS Great Britain* and the maritime centre.

## Clifton & the Suspension Bridge

During the 18th and 19th centuries, wealthy Bristol merchants transformed the former spa resort of Clifton into an elegant hilltop suburb packed with town houses and porticoed mansions – especially around **Cornwallis Cres** and **Royal York Cres**. These days, Clifton is still the poshest postcode in Bristol, with a wealth of streetside cafes and designer shops, and a village atmosphere that's far removed from the rest of the city.

Clifton's most famous (and photographed) landmark is another Brunel masterpiece, the 76m-high **Clifton Suspension Bridge** ([www.clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk](http://www.clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk)), which spans the Avon Gorge from Clifton over to Leigh Woods in northern Somerset. Undoubtedly one of Britain's most elegant bridges, initial construction began in 1836, but, sadly, Brunel died before the bridge's completion in 1864. It was mainly designed to carry light horse-drawn traffic and foot passengers, but these days around 12,000 cars cross it every day – testament to the quality of the construction and the vision of Brunel's design. It's also become a magnet for stunt artists and suicides; in 1885 Sarah Ann Hedley

## HUMAN CARGO

It's a sobering thought that some of Bristol's 18th-century wealth and splendour was fuelled by brutality and human exploitation. In the late 1600s, the first slave ship set sail from Bristol harbour, kick-starting the city's connections with the so-called 'triangular trade'. Africans were kidnapped from their homes, shipped across the Atlantic to America and the Caribbean and sold into a life of slavery. Conditions on the boats were unimaginably horrific; it was expected that one in 10 of those captured would die en route – in reality, many more did. The enslaved people who survived endured a lifetime of brutal, inhuman conditions, often being forced to work on sugar plantations. Meanwhile, the merchants stocked their vessels with luxury goods such as sugar, rum, indigo, tobacco and cotton, and sailed back to Britain.

Bristol, London and Liverpool (see International Slavery Museum, p681) were the three main British ports engaged in the practice. By the time the slave trade (not slavery itself) was finally abolished in the British Empire in 1807, it's thought that 500,000 Africans were enslaved by Bristol merchants – one-fifth of all people sold into slavery by British vessels.

The financial profits for Bristol's traders were immense, and that legacy lingers. Many of the grand houses in Clifton were built on the proceeds of the 'trade', and several of the city's most elegant edifices – such as the Bristol Old Vic theatre – were partly financed by slave-trading investors.

There are many more connections – for further insights, download the MP3 audio tour from the **Visit Bristol** ([www.visitbristol.co.uk](http://www.visitbristol.co.uk)) website, or pick up the *Slave Trade Trail* leaflet (£3) from the tourist office.

jumped from the bridge after a lovers' tiff, but her voluminous petticoats parachuted her safely to earth and she lived to be 85.

It's free to walk or cycle across the bridge; car drivers pay a 30p toll. There's a **visitor information point** (☎ 0117-974 4665; [visitinfo@clifton-suspension-bridge.org](mailto:visitinfo@clifton-suspension-bridge.org); ☎ 10am-5pm) near the tower on the Leigh Woods side. Free guided tours of the bridge take place at 3pm on Sundays between Easter and mid-September.

The grassy parks of Clifton Down and Durdham Down (often referred to as just the **Downs**) beside the bridge make a fine spot for a picnic. Nearby, a well-worn observatory houses Britain's only **camera obscura** (☎ 0117-974 1242; adult/child £2/1; ☎ from 10.30am Easter-Oct, from 10.30am Sat & Sun Nov-Easter), which offers incredible views of the suspension bridge. Hours are weather dependent – it closes when there's reduced visibility.

**Bristol Zoo Gardens** (☎ 0117-974 7399; [www.bristolzoo.org.uk](http://www.bristolzoo.org.uk); College Rd, Clifton; adult/child £12/7.40; ☎ 9am-5.30pm high season, to 5pm low season) is renowned as much for its conservation work as for its exotic residents. Attractions include a group of West African gorillas, underwater walkways for viewing seals and penguins, and a Brazilian rainforest where you can get up close and personal with agouti, capybara and golden lion tamarins.

See p340 for details of buses to Clifton and the zoo.

## Bristol Cathedral

Originally founded as the church of an Augustinian monastery in 1140, **Bristol Cathedral** (☎ 0117-926 4879; [www.bristol-cathedral.co.uk](http://www.bristol-cathedral.co.uk); College Green; donations requested; ☎ 8am-6pm) has a remarkably fine Norman chapter house and gate, while the attractive chapels have eccentric carvings and beautiful heraldic glass. Although much of the nave and the west towers date from the 19th century, the 14th-century choir has fascinating misericords depicting apes in hell, quarrelling couples and dancing bears. The south transept shelters a rare Saxon carving of the *Harrowing of Hell*, discovered under the chapter-house floor after a 19th-century fire.

## St Mary Redcliffe

**St Mary Redcliffe** (☎ 0117-929 1487; [www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk](http://www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk); Redcliffe Way; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7.30pm Sun) boasts a soaring 89m-high spire, a grand hexagonal porch and a vaulted ceiling decorated with gilt bosses. At the entrance to the America Chapel is a whale rib presented to the church by John Cabot as a souvenir of his trip to Newfoundland in 1497.

## BRISTOL FOR CHILDREN

There's no shortage of things to keep kids happy in Bristol, with loads of hands-on activities and interesting events. Most hotels and some B&Bs can rustle up a baby cot or heat up a bottle; confirm that when you book.

Baby-changing facilities are available in most supermarkets, department stores, shopping centres and major attractions.

The brilliant **Bristol Zoo Gardens** (opposite) has enough hairy apes and even hairier spiders to keep whippersnappers entertained for hours, and there are plenty of hands-on exhibits at the **Explore @ Bristol** (p332) science museum on the old Harbourside. Chug along the dockside on the steam **Bristol Harbour Railway** (p333) to the **SS Great Britain** (p332), where kids can join a detective trail in search of the missing ship's cat, Sinbad.

At the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (p332), Alfred the Gorilla guides youngsters through a world of dinosaurs, Egyptology and archaeology; there are also self-led trails, an activity program and a touch-the-artefact zone for children aged zero to five. Seadogs, meanwhile, can trawl for treasure on a **Pirate Walk** (right). In August, look to the skies for Bristol's **balloon and kite festivals** (right).

**Bristol Babysitting Agency** (☎ 07791-478028; www.bristolbabysitting.co.uk) can recommend accredited local childminders.

## TOURS

The **Bristol Highlights Walk** (☎ 0870 444 0654; www.bristolvisitor.co.uk; adult/under 12yr £3.50/free; ☽ 11am Sat-Apr-Sep) tours the old town, city centre and Harbourside. It's run every Saturday; just turn up outside the tourist office. Themed tours exploring Clifton, Brunel and the history of Bristol traders are run on request.

**MP3 Tours** (www.visitbristol.co.uk/site/sightseeing-and-tours; free), which can be downloaded

from the Visit Bristol website, cover Brunel, the slave trade, pirates, churches and general heritage.

**City Sightseeing** (☎ 0870 444 0654; www.city-sightseeing.com; 24hr ticket adult/child £10/5, single trips £1/50p; ☽ 10am-4pm Easter-Sep) has an open-topped hop-on, hop-off bus visiting all the major attractions. Buses leave Broad Quay hourly (every 30 minutes from July to September).

**Bristol Packet Boat Trips** (☎ 0117-927 3416; www.bristolpacket.co.uk; 24hr ticket adult/child £4.75/2.75; ☽ Mar-Oct) offers cruises around the harbour area, as well as weekend day trips to Avon Gorge (return adult/child £12/8.75, May to October) and Bath (single adult/child £22.50/15, Sunday late May to September).

**Pirate Walk** (☎ 07950 566483; adult/child/family £5/3.50/12.50; ☽ tours 6.15pm Apr-Sep, 2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is a child-friendly, swashbuckling two-hour trail of pirates, smugglers and other ne'er-do-wells, which leaves from the tourist office.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bristol has an ever-expanding program of annual events; the tourist office can advise on dates and details.

**Bristol Shakespeare Festival** (www.bristolshakespeare.org.uk) Between May and September, venues across the city host this festival, the largest open-air event of its type in Britain.

**St Paul's Carnival** (☎ 0117-944 1478) This giant street party takes place on the first Saturday of July.

**Bristol Harbour Festival** (☎ 0117-922 3719) The city's biggest waterside event is held in early August – expect bands, theatre and circus entertainment to a backdrop of tall ships and maritime displays.

## AEROSOL ANTIHERO

Bristol brings you closer to a man who specialises in stencils, subverted art and stunts: the guerilla graffiti artist **Banksy** (www.banksy.co.uk). Banksy's true identity is a closely guarded secret, but it's rumoured he was born in 1974 in Yate (near Chipping Sodbury), 12 miles from Bristol, and cut his teeth in a city graffiti outfit. Headline-grabbing works include issuing spoof British £10 notes (with Princess Diana's head on them instead of the Queen's); replacing 500 copies of Paris Hilton's debut album in record shops with remixes (featuring tracks titled *Why Am I Famous?* and *What Have I Done?*); painting an image of a ladder going up and over the Israeli West Bank Barrier; and covertly inserting his own version of a primitive cave painting (with a human hunter-gatherer pushing a shopping trolley) into the British Museum in London.

His works feature in the streets of Bristol, too. Look out for his notorious **love triangle** stencil (featuring an angry husband, a two-timing wife, and a naked man dangling from a window) at the bottom of Park St. Banksy's ghostly take on Charion, the River Styx boatman, graces the side of the **Thekla Social** (p339), and there's a large mural called **Mild Mild West** featuring a Molotov cocktail-wielding teddy bear on Cheltenham Rd, opposite the junction with Jamaica St.

For more, check out www.banksy.co.uk; the tourist office has produced a free miniguide.

**International Balloon Fiesta** (☎ 0117-953 5884; www.bristolfiesta.co.uk) Held in August at Ashton Court, over the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

**International Kite Festival** (☎ 0117-977 2002; www.kite-festival.org.uk) Held in September, also at Ashton Court.

**Encounters** (☎ 0117-929 9188; www.encounters-festival.org.uk) This film festival is held at the Watershed every November.

**Christmas market** Held in evenings in late November and December, at St Nicholas Market.

## SLEEPING

### Budget

**Bristol Backpackers** (☎ 0117-925 7900; www.bristolbackpackers.co.uk; 17 St Stephen's St; dm/tw £15/36; 📺) This long-standing travellers' friend is a decent budget option, although the dorms and doubles are cramped, and crowded in summer. There's no curfew, so prepare to join in the noise at weekends.

**Bristol YHA** (☎ 0870 770 5726; www.yha.org.uk; 14 Narrow Quay; dm £18-20, s £25-35, d £40-45; 📺) You can pay through the nose for a location like this, in the heart of the Harbourside action, just steps away from the water. Facilities are superb: modern four-bed dorms and doubles, a cycle store, games room and the excellent Grainshed coffee lounge.

### Midrange

**Arches House** (☎ 0117-924 7398; www.arches-hotel.co.uk; 132 Cotham Brow; s £29-45, d £52-63) Vegetarians will love this Victorian guest house – breakfasts are meat-free and packed with organic, fair-trade treats. The rooms are traditional but the thinking is very modern: electricity comes from renewable sources; cleaning products are ecofriendly; and the owners could run classes in recycling and composting.

**Downs Edge** (☎ 0117-968 3264; www.downsedge.com; Saville Rd; s £55-59, d £75-80; 📺 📺 wi-fi) A few miles from the centre of town and surrounded by botanical gardens, this double-gabled B&B provides a soothing slice of rural life. Elegant, antique-filled rooms create a country house atmosphere, reinforced by breakfasts full of compotes, overnight porridge and softly poached eggs.

**Victoria Square Hotel** (☎ 0117-973 9058; www.vicsquare.com; Victoria Sq; s £59-95, d £75-115, f £85-125; 📺 📺 wi-fi) Split across two Victorian town houses overlooking a tree-shrouded Clifton square, this hotel is owned by Best Western, so function takes precedence over flair, but

most rooms have traces of Victorian character and soft beds.

### Top End

**Berkeley Square Hotel** (☎ 0117-925 4000; www.cliftonhotels.com; 15 Berkeley Sq; s £79-137, d £115-180; 📺 📺 wi-fi) In the middle of the kind of leafy square in which a nightingale would sing, this hip hotel brings baroque imagination to a Georgian town house. Painted gazelle heads, Day-Glo settees and rococo mirrors dot the lobby, while the bedrooms mix DVD players and gratis sherry with classic finishes.

**Amos Manor Hotel** (☎ 0117-971 1461; www.amosmanorhotel.co.uk; 470 Bath Rd; s/d from £105/125; 📺 📺 wi-fi) Built for the Bristol magnate William Reeve in 1760, this smart hotel has an original crenellated chateau plus an extension tacked on the side. The poshest rooms are in the old building, and boast half-tester beds, spa baths and bags of space; the annexe rooms are more corporate, but still have rubber ducks in the bath.

**Mercure Brigstow Hotel** (☎ 0117-929 1030; www.mercure.com; Welsh Back; r midweek £149-250, weekend £99-250; 📺 wi-fi) Despite an ugly concrete-and-glass facade, this is one of Bristol's funkier, freshest places to stay. Bedrooms boast trendy floating beds, curved wood-panel walls and tiny TVs set into bathroom tiles. Make sure you bag a room with a river view.

**ourpick Hotel du Vin** (☎ 0117-925 5577; www.hotelduvin.com; Narrow Lewins Mead; d £145-160, ste £195-215; 📺 📺 wi-fi) This enclave of stylish, sexy luxury is housed in converted sugar warehouses, neatly signalling the sweet indulgence found within. Fabulous futon beds, claw-foot baths, frying-pan showerheads and a mix of chic furniture, industrial beams and iron pillars grace sumptuous rooms. The stunning double-height loft suites may make you weep when you have to leave.

### EATING

Eating out in Bristol is a real highlight – the city is jammed with restaurants of every description, ranging from classic British 'caffs' to designer dining emporiums.

### Budget

#### CAFES & QUICK EATS

**Bar Chocolat** (☎ 0117-974 7000; 19 The Mall; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Don't even try to resist this holy temple to the cocoa bean – it'll get

you anyway, so succumb with a smile. Hot chocolates, chocolate-flavoured coffees and chocolate with a fair-trade conscience are all on offer at this cosy cafe – just remember to leave room for some handmade chocolates before you leave.

**Pieminister** (☎ 0117-942 9500; 24 Stokes Croft; pies £3; ☎ 10am-7pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Offering so much more than just steak 'n' kidney, Pieminister drags the good old British pie into the 21st century. Try the wittily named Poussin Boots (red wine, chicken and pancetta) or the veggie Bush pie (cheddar cheese, cabbage, mushroom and onion).

**Rocotillo's** (☎ 0117-929 7207; 1 Queens Row; mains from £4; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Bristol's version of a traditional American diner, complete with bar stools, leather booths and an open grill kitchen, serves gourmet burgers and the best milkshakes in town (including dubious concoctions such as Crunchie and mint choc-chip).

## RESTAURANTS

**Obento** (☎ 0117-929 7392; 69 Baldwin St; mains £4-9; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Somewhere to satisfy those wasabi cravings, this minimalist Japanese restaurant finds diners tucking into teriyaki chicken, fresh sushi and hot noodles at sleek bench tables. Its neatly packaged, three-course bento lunch boxes are practically works of art.

**One Stop Thali Cafe** (☎ 0117-942 6687; 12A York Rd; set meal £6.95; ☎ lunch) The bustle and buzz of an Indian street market comes to this cute Montpelier diner, which serves traditional thalis (multicourse Indian dishes) that change depending on what the chef's picked up. It's fresh, spicy and authentic, and the six-course £6.95 menu is ridiculously cheap.

## SELF-CATERING

**Papadeli** (☎ 0117-973 6569; 84 Alma Rd) This Italian deli is stocked with the kind of zesty flavours and sweet treats you'd normally only find in a Tuscan street market. Fresh pasta salads, salami sandwiches and goats' cheese tarts are served in the main cafe, or you can load up with picnic supplies and Italian cakes at the counter.

**St Nicholas Market** (Corn St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The city's lively street market has a bevy of food stalls selling everything from artisan bread to cheese toasts. Look out for local farmers markets on Wednesdays, and a slow-food market on the first Sunday of each month.

## Midrange

**riverstation** (☎ 0117-914 4434; The Grove; mains £8-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) Yet another riverside restaurant that satisfies Bristol's style-conscious gourmants – this one is a split-level eatery with a fabulous barrelled roof. The downstairs cafe rustles up light lunches, coffee and feather-light pastries, while up on the 1st floor it's all effortless elegance and European cuisine.

**Planet Pizza** (☎ 0117-907 7112; 83 Whiteladies Rd; pizzas from £10; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎ wi-fi) A top option for huge, freshly made pizzas, this brightly coloured eatery serves a huge choice of 12-inch specials, all named after astronomical bodies and big enough to share.

**Clifton Sausage** (☎ 0117-973 1192; 7-9 Portland St; mains £10-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Hog heaven for sausage lovers, this groovy Clifton gastropub serves up no fewer than eight types of bangers 'n' mash, including Gloucester Old Spot and a veggie-friendly cheddar, leak and mustard. Worn wooden floorboards and tables complement the comfort eating – while the rhubarb crumble and sorbet round things off nicely.

## DETOUR: WHATLEY MANOR

If you happen to be a holidaying film star or celebrity supermodel, then it's time to whip out a platinum card and book a suite at the jaw-dropping **Whatley Manor** (☎ 01666-822888; www.whatleymanor.com; Easton Grey; d £285-485, ste £650-850; ☎), which takes luxury and designer pampering to a whole new level. Housed in a stunningly restored Cotswold manor house in the village of Easton Grey, 25 miles northeast of Bristol (3 miles west of Malmesbury), it's quite simply one of the poshest, plushiest hotels in Britain, blending period architecture and a glorious country setting with a razor-sharp eye for interior design. Underfloor heating, Bang & Olufsen stereo, presidential beds and massive bathroom suites feature in the rooms; there are also two award-winning restaurants, nearly 5 hectares of landscaped gardens, and a futuristic spa that's been voted the best in Europe. Oh, and there's a private cinema, too, just in case you need somewhere to screen your latest directorial creations.

**Picture House** (☎ 0117-973 9302; 44 Whiteladies Rd; mains £11-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) The whir of a projector has been replaced by dining room chatter at this former cinema, now one of the best midrange options on the Whiteladies strip. The menu mixes Albion classics (slow-cooked mutton, pig-in-a-blanket, Eton Mess) with fancier fare (smoked eel, wild boar, squirrel).

**Quartier Vert** (☎ 0117-973 4482; 84 Whiteladies Rd; mains £11.50-18.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) The QV has been a Whiteladies staple for two decades, and after several revamps has settled on Spanish and southern Med flavours, supplemented with designer cheeses, sausages, tapas and home-baked bread. Wine-tasting and slow-food courses will knock that philistine palate into shape.

**Sewernshed** (☎ 0117-925 1212; The Grove; mains from £12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Typifying 'new-Bristol', this former boathouse was built by Brunel – now it's home to a designer bar, bistro and water-side cafe. The renovation is a beautiful blend of industrial trappings and contemporary chrome, while the food is a winning fusion of flavours – try the beef with oyster mushrooms, spicy Thai monkfish or the bouillabaisse. The 977 menu (served before 7pm) features two courses for £9.77.

Other recommendations:

**Mud Dock** (☎ 0117-934 9734; 40 The Grove; mains £9-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Ultratrendy combo of bar, bistro and bike shop, in a brick warehouse by the harbour.

**La Taverna Dell'Artista** (☎ 0117-929 7712; 33 King St; mains £13-25; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) This chaotic, cramped Italian is an old fave with the post-theatre crowd.

## Top End

**Cafe Maitreya** (☎ 0117-951 0100; 89 St Marks Rd; 3 courses £20.95; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Regularly notching up awards and rave reviews, the Maitreya has firmly established itself as one of the city's most inventive eateries. The seasonal menu is renowned for its culinary creativity, and dabbles in everything from red onion *tartelette* to cashew-nut roulade.

**Glassboat** (☎ 0117-929 0704; Welsh Back; lunch mains £7-8, dinner mains £16; ☎ closed Sun) With its floor-to-ceiling glass windows, this double-decked barge has some of the most romantic tables in the city. The fine wood-panelled interior is lit by soft globe lanterns, the menu is a happy marriage of British and French country dishes, and the views across the water are dreamy.

**ourpick Bordeaux Quay** (☎ 0117-943 1200; Canons Way; brasserie mains £10, restaurant mains £17-21; ☎ lunch & dinner) Funky, friendly, Bordeaux Quay neatly fulfils all your food needs in one: it's a restaurant, brasserie, bar, deli, bakery and cookery school. Its efforts to shrink the food-miles map have produced a menu bursting with organic, seasonal, regionally sourced ingredients, and proves 'sustainable' can equal 'delectable'. Settle down at a sanded wooden table in the cool, calm interior and tuck into the squash and rocket linguini or the roast sea bass with *beurre rouge* (a butter and red-wine sauce). Great, green, guilt-free food.

## DRINKING

The fortnightly listings magazine *Venue* ([www.venue.co.uk](http://www.venue.co.uk), £1.50) contains the latest info on what's hot and what's not. The freebie mag *Folio* is published monthly.

**Elbow Room** (☎ 0117-930 0242; 64 Park St; ☎ noon-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) Part dimly lit bar, part hustler's pool hall, this is a favourite hang-out for Bristol's style-conscious crowd. Rack up the balls and knock back the bourbons to a soundtrack of jazz and funk – for budding Fast Eddies, there's a pool competition every Monday.

**Woods** (☎ 0117-925 0890; 1 Park St Ave; ☎ 4pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri, to 6am Sat) Cultured and cool, this is another haunt for Bristol's beautiful people, crammed with glitter balls, refectory benches and Victoriana sofas, plus 50 whiskies behind the bar.

**Apple** (☎ 0117-925 3500; Welsh Back; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) Bristol's legendary cider boat stocks an impressive 40 varieties of the golden elixir and specialises in organic and craft-produced varieties – staff even offer taster samples (try a tippie of the raspberry and strawberry varieties). You can sip your scrumpy on the covered deck, or at tables that spill over onto the quayside.

**Park** (☎ 0117-940 6101; Triangle St West; ☎ 4.30pm-1am Sun-Wed, to 2am Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) This place has got the metropolitan bar aesthetic nailed – stripped wood, banquette seats and moody lighting abound. Funk and hip hop on Wednesday and Thursday give way to classic beats at weekends.

**Avon Gorge Hotel** (☎ 0117-973 8955; Sion Hill; [www.avongorge-hotel-bristol.com](http://www.avongorge-hotel-bristol.com); ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-10.30pm Sun) The golden age of this huge Victorian hotel has long since passed, but its panoramic drinks terrace is still the top place to watch the sun set over the Avon Gorge.



**MBargo** (☎ 0117-925 3256; 30 Triangle St West; ☎ noon-2am) Marble and leather set the scene for a swanky bar with a huge cocktail list – the soundtrack ranges from 1970s and '80s crowd-pleasers to uberhip hip hop.

**Hophouse** (☎ 0117-923 7390; 16 King's Rd) Lime and chocolate candy stripes, (presumably) ironic flock wallpaper and oh-so-polished wood make this Clifton bar a trendy spot to sip a designer beer and watch the neighbourhood's media types stroll on by.

**Pipe & Slippers** (☎ 0117-942 7711; 118 Cheltenham Rd) Bath Ales on tap and a menu of Pieminister pies make this unpretentious pub a reliable bet for late-night drinking, as well as for Sunday lunch.

**Albion** (☎ 0117-975 3522; Boyce's Ave) Another venerable pub packed with evening drinkers from Clifton's well-heeled streets.

## ENTERTAINMENT Cinemas

**Watershed** (☎ 0117-927 5100; www.watershed.co.uk; 1 Canon's Rd) This is the city's leading art-house cinema and digital media centre, specialising in new indie releases and the occasional silver-screen classic.

## Nightclubs

The Bristol club scene moves fast, so check the latest listings to see where the big nights are happening.

**Timbuk2** (☎ 0117-945 8459; 22 Small St; admission £5-10; ☎ 9am-2pm) A scruffy-chic club-venue, crammed underneath the arches off Corn St. It hosts a mixed bag of breaks, house, drum and bass and jungle.

**Native** (☎ 0117-930 4217; www.nativebristol.co.uk; 15 Small St; admission £5-8; ☎ 10pm-4am) Bristol's top ticket, this tiny 200-cover club is right on the cutting edge, with drum and bass, Latin, jungle, dubstep, hip hop and jazz all making the playlist, along with a revolving line-up of guest DJs.

**Thekla Social** (☎ 0117-929 3301; www.thekla.co.uk; The Grove; admission £5-7; ☎ 9pm-2am) After a hefty refit, Bristol's venerable club-boat is back with nights to cater for all tastes: electro-punk, indie, disco and new wave, plus live gigs and, once a month, legendary leftfield night Blowpop.

**Carling Academy** (☎ 0117-927 9227; Frogmore St; admission £6-10; ☎ 10pm-3am Fri & Mon, 7-11pm gig nights) Bristol's original superclub can hold a 2000-strong crowd on its biggest nights, but it's practically never that busy. There's indie and

R&B during the week, and big house nights on weekends.

**Cosies** (☎ 0117-942 4110; www.cosies.co.uk; 34 Portland Sq; admission after 9pm £2; ☎ 10am-2am Thu & Fri, 8pm-2am Sat & Sun, 10am-10pm Mon-Wed) This diminutive club is a real gem, especially if you're sick of the big beats and designer attitude of some of Bristol's larger venues. Upstairs there's a bistro and wine bar, but it's the weekend reggae nights that draw in the crowds.

## Theatre

**Tobacco Factory** (☎ 0117-902 0344; www.tobaccofactory.com; Raleigh Rd) This small-scale theatre venue stages cutting-edge drama and dance. Catch bus 24 or 25 from Broadmead to the Raleigh Rd stop.

The **Bristol Old Vic** (King St) pulled down the curtain and launched a £9 million refurbishment appeal in 2007, to save it from permanent closure. For the latest see www.bristol-old-vic.co.uk.

## Live Music

Big names play at the **Carling Academy** (see left), while a host of smaller venues feature emerging acts.

**Fleece & Firkin** (☎ 0117-945 0996; www.fleecegigs.co.uk; St Thomas St) A small, intimate venue, much favoured by indie artists and breaking names on the local scene.

**Colston Hall** (☎ 0117-922 3686; www.colstonhall.org; Colston St) Bristol's biggest concert hall hosts everything from big-name comedy to touring bands. A £20-million refit will see a swanky glass and recycled-copper foyer tacked onto the old red-brick building.

**Croft** (☎ 0117-987 4144; www.the-croft.com; 117-119 Stokes Croft) Chilled venue with a policy of supporting new names and Bristol-based artists. There's usually no cover charge if you arrive by 10pm Sunday to Thursday.

**Bierkeller** (☎ 0117-926 8514; www.bristolbierkeller.co.uk; All Saints St) A legendary place that has played host to plenty of rock stars down the years, and still gets packed out on weekends.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

**Bristol International Airport** (☎ 0871 334 4344; www.bristolairport.co.uk) is 8 miles southwest of the city. Many flights are holiday charters but there are also scheduled flights to European destinations.

**Air Southwest** (☎ 0870 043 4553; www.airsouthwest.com) Several UK destinations including Jersey, Leeds, Manchester, Newquay and Plymouth.

**easyJet** (☎ 0871 244 2366, per min 10p; www.easyjet.com) Budget flights to UK destinations including Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and Inverness, as well as numerous European cities.

**Ryanair** (☎ 0871 246 0000, per min 10p; www.ryanair.com) Flights to Irish airports including Derry, Dublin and Shannon, as well as European destinations.

## Bus

National Express coaches go to Birmingham (£17, two hours, nine daily), London (£18, 2½ hours, at least hourly), Cardiff (£7, 1¼ hours, nine daily) and Exeter (£12.40, two hours, four daily). There's also a direct daily bus to Nottingham (£26, five hours) and Oxford (£13.80, three hours).

Bus X39 (one hour, several per hour) runs to Bath. Buses 375 and 376 go to Wells (one hour) and Glastonbury (1¼ hours) every half-hour (hourly on Sunday). There are buses to most destinations around Somerset and Wiltshire from Bath and Wells.

## Train

Bristol is an important rail hub, with regular connections to London (£62, 1¼ hours) and the southwest, including Exeter (£19, 1¼ hours), Plymouth (£44, 2½ hours) and Penzance (£60, four hours). **Cross Country** (www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk) trains travel north to Glasgow (£101, 5¾ hours, five direct daily) via Birmingham (£31, 1½ hours, eight direct daily). Most main-line trains arrive at Temple Meads.

Bath makes for an easy day trip (single £5.50, 11 minutes, four per hour).

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bristol International Flyer runs bus services to the airport (single/return adult £7/8, child

£6/7, 30 minutes, half-hourly 5am to 11pm) from Marlborough St bus station and Temple Meads train station. A taxi to the airport costs around £25.

## Bicycle

To hire a bike, try the **Ferry Station** (☎ 0117-376 3942; Narrow Quay; half-/full day £7/12; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) on the waterfront or **Blackboy Hill Cycles** (☎ 0117-973 1420; 180 Whiteladies Rd; per day £10; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat). The 13-mile off-road **Bristol to Bath Railway Path** (www.bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk) follows the course of an old train track between the two cities. In Bristol pick it up around half a mile northeast of Temple Meads Train Station.

## Boat

The most scenic way to travel around the city is with the **Bristol Ferry Boat Co** (☎ 0117-927 3416; www.bristolofferry.com), which runs two routes. One is from the city centre to Temple Meads (40 minutes, six to 10 daily April to September, weekends only October to March), stopping at Welsh Back, Bristol Bridge and Castle Park (for Broadmead shopping centre). The other route goes from the city centre to Hotwells (40 minutes, 12 to 16 daily year-round), stopping at the SS *Great Britain* and Mardyke. An adult single fare is £1.60 (child £1.30), or you can pay £7 for a day's unlimited travel (child/family £5/20).

## Bus

Every 15 minutes, bus 73 runs from Parkway Station to the centre (30 minutes). Buses 8 and 9 run every 15 minutes from St Augustine's Pde to Clifton (10 minutes), the foot of Whiteladies Rd and Bristol Zoo Gardens; add another 10 minutes from Temple Meads.

**FirstDay tickets** (adult/child £4/2.80) are valid on all buses for one day in zones one and two, which contain all the key sites. The **FirstFamily**

### DETOUR: TYNTESFIELD

Formerly the aristocratic home of the Gibbs family, gorgeously Gothic **Tyntesfield** (NT; ☎ 01275-461900; Wraxall; adult/child £9.45/4.75; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed mid-Mar-Oct) is an ornate Victorian pile that prickles with spiky turrets and towers. The house was built in grand Gothic Revival style by the architect John Norton, and is crammed with Victorian decorative arts, a working kitchen garden and a magnificent private chapel. The house is undergoing extensive renovation (due to finish in 2012); until then, some facilities are a little basic, but you do get an insight into the conservation process. Call the info line (☎ 0844 800 4986) for updates. Tyntesfield is 7 miles southwest of Bristol, off the B3128.

**ticket** (£7.30) buys one days' travel for two adults and three children, but is only valid after 9am Monday to Friday.

## Car & Motorcycle

Bristol has a seriously confusing one-way system and very heavy traffic – it's best to avoid driving altogether and instead use public transport or the **park-and-ride** (☎ 0117-922 2910; before 10am return Mon-Fri £3, after 10am Mon-Fri £2.50, Sat £2), which runs every 10 minutes (Monday to Saturday) from Portway, Bath Rd and Long Ashton. Park-and-ride car parks are well signed on routes into the city.

## Taxi

The taxi rank on St Augustine's Pde is a central but rowdy place on weekend nights. There are plenty of companies; try **Streamline Taxis** (☎ 0117-926 4001).

# BATH

pop 90,144

If you only explore one English city outside London, make it Bath. Tucked into the folds of seven grassy hills and blessed by healing thermal springs, this romantic city of honey-coloured stone blends past and present with imagination and ease. Here you'll find one of the finest Roman bathhouses in the world, extensive, exquisite Regency architecture and a chic new spa that lets you swim alfresco in a heated rooftop pool after a mud wrap and full body massage. With its grand Georgian terraces, Palladian parades and lofty town houses, Bath boasts so many listed buildings that the whole city has been named a World Heritage Site by Unesco. Yes, it can be expensive and too busy for its own good, but add hip hotels, excellent eateries and an absorbing collection of museums and you have one of Britain's most appealing cities. The Romans never had it so good.

## HISTORY

Prehistoric peoples probably knew about the hot springs; legend has it King Bladud, a Trojan refugee and father of King Lear, founded Bath some 2800 years ago and was cured of leprosy by a dip in the muddy swamps. The Romans established the town

of Aquae Sulis in AD 44 and built the extensive baths complex and a temple to the goddess Sulis-Minerva.

Long after the Romans decamped, the Anglo-Saxons arrived, and in 944 a monastery was founded on the site of the present abbey. Throughout the Middle Ages, Bath was an ecclesiastical centre and a wool-trading town, and it wasn't until the early 18th century that Ralph Allen and Richard 'Beau' Nash (see boxed text, p345) made Bath the centre of fashionable society. Allen developed the quarries at Coombe Down, constructed Prior Park (p350) and employed the two John Woods (father and son) to create the glorious buildings you see today.

As the 18th century wore on, Beau Nash lost his influence, and sea bathing started to draw visitors away from Bath. By the mid-19th century the city was thoroughly out of fashion and in 1970 what was then the last spa closed. But fast forward to the 21st century and Bath is experiencing a rebirth: you can once again soak in style in those soothing waters, thanks to Thermae Bath Spa (see boxed text, p344); the refurbished Milsom Place is set to be home to a celebrity chef; and the £360-million mock-Georgian SouthGate development will add 60 new shops and 100 apartments to the mix.

## ORIENTATION

Like Rome, Bath is famed for its seven hills, and although the city centre is compact it will test your legs. Most street signs are carved into the golden stone of the buildings.

The most obvious landmark is the abbey, across from the Roman Baths and Pump Room. Just under £20 million is being spent on jazzing up Bath's public transport stations – after two years in a temporary home on Avon St, by mid-2009 the bus station will be alongside the train station.

## INFORMATION

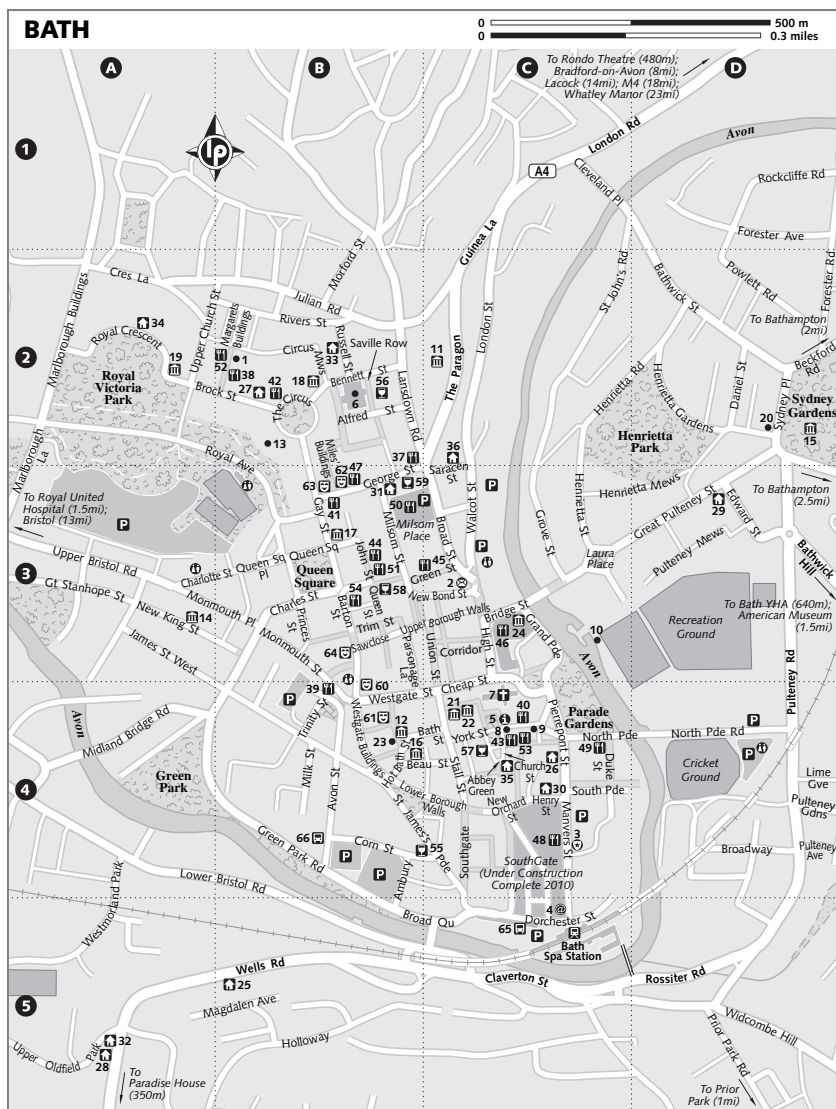
Scattered around the city you'll find i-plus points, which are free touch-screen kiosks providing tourist information.

**Bath Quarterly** ([www.bathquarterly.com](http://www.bathquarterly.com)) Guide to sights, accommodation, restaurants and events.

**Laundrette** (4 Margarets Bldgs; per load £2; ☎ 6am-9pm)

**Main post office** (☎ 0845 722 3344; 27 Northgate St)

**Police station** (☎ 0845-456700; Manvers St; ☎ 7am-midnight)



**Retailer Internet** (☎ 01225-443181; 13 Manvers St; per 20 min £1; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun)

**Royal United Hospital** (☎ 01225-428331; Combe Park)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0906 711 2000, per min 50p; www.visitbath.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

**What's On** (www.whatsonbath.co.uk) Up-to-date listing of the city's events and nightlife.

## SIGHTS

### Baths

Ever since the Romans arrived in Bath, life in the city has revolved around the three natural springs that bubble up near the abbey. In typically ostentatious style, the Romans constructed a glorious complex of bathhouses above these thermal waters, to take advan-

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Temple of Sulis-Minerva.....(see 21)	Guildhall Market.....46 C3
Laundrette.....1 B2		Thermae Bath Spa.....23 B4	Hole in the Wall.....47 B3
Main Post Office.....2 C3		Victoria Art Gallery.....24 C3	Number 8 Manvers St.....48 C4
Police Station.....3 C4			Olive Tree Restaurant.....(see 33)
Retailer Internet.....4 C5		<b>SLEEPING</b>	Onfishtwofish.....49 C4
Tourist Office.....5 C4		Abbey Rise.....25 B5	Parisienne.....50 B3
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Bath Backpackers' Hostel.....26 C4	Paxton & Whitfield.....51 B3
Assembly Rooms.....6 B2		Brocks.....27 B2	Pinch.....52 B2
Bath Abbey.....7 C4		Dorian House.....28 A5	Sally Lunn's.....53 C4
Bath Festivals Box Office.....8 C4		Dukes.....29 D3	Walrus & the Carpenter.....54 B3
Bizarre Bath Comedy Walk		Henry Guest House.....30 C4	
Starting Point.....9 C4		Milsons.....31 B3	<b>DRINKING</b>
Boat Trips.....10 C3		Oldfields.....32 A5	Bath Tap.....55 C4
Building of Bath Museum.....11 C2		Queensberry Hotel.....33 B2	Common Room.....56 B2
Cross Bath.....12 B4		Royal Crescent Hotel.....34 A2	Crystal Palace.....57 C4
Fashion Museum.....(see 6)		Three Abbey Green.....35 C4	Porter.....(see 62)
Georgian Garden.....13 B2		YMCA.....36 C2	Raven.....58 B3
Heritage Vaults Museum.....(see 7)			Revolution.....59 B3
Herschel Museum of		<b>EATING</b>	
Astronomy.....14 A3		Adventure Cafe.....37 B2	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>
Holburne Museum.....15 D2		Bistro Papillon.....38 B2	Delfter Krug.....60 B4
Hot Bath.....16 B4		Boston Tea Party.....39 B4	Little Theatre.....61 B4
Jane Austen Centre.....17 B3		Cafe Retro.....40 C4	Moles.....62 B3
Museum of East Asian		Chandos Deli.....41 B3	Porter Cellar Bar.....63 B3
Art.....18 B2		Circus.....42 B2	Theatre Royal.....64 B3
No 1 Royal Crescent.....19 A2		Deli Shush.....(see 46)	
No 4 Sydney Pl.....20 D2		Demuth's.....43 C4	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
Pump Room.....21 C4		Firehouse Rotisserie.....44 B3	New Bus Station (opening mid-2009).....65 C5
Roman Baths Museum.....22 C4		FishWorks.....45 C3	Temporary Bus Station.....66 B4

tage of their natural temperature – a constant 46°C. The buildings were left to decay after the Romans departed and, apart from a few leprous souls who came looking for a cure in the Middle Ages, it wasn't until the end of the 17th century that Bath's restorative waters again became fashionable. It's no longer possible to take a dip in the Roman Baths themselves; for modern-day dunks head for the sparkling new **Thermae Bath Spa** (see boxed text, p344).

The 2000-year-old baths now form one of the best-preserved ancient Roman spas in the world. The **Roman Baths Museum** ( 01225-477785; www.romanbaths.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; adult/child £11/6.80, incl Fashion Museum £14/8.30; 9am-6pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-10pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Nov-Feb) gets very, very busy in summer; you can usually dodge the worst crowds by visiting early on a midweek morning, or by avoiding July and August. An audio guide (read by the bestselling author Bill Bryson) is included in the admission price.

The first sight inside the complex is the **Great Bath**. Head down to water level and along the raised walkway to see the Roman paving and lead base. A series of excavated passages and chambers beneath street level leads off in several directions and lets you inspect the remains of other smaller baths and hypocaust (heating) systems.

One of the most picturesque corners of the complex is the 12th-century **King's Bath**, built around the original sacred spring; 1.5 million litres of hot water still pour into the pool every day. You can see the ruins of the vast **Temple of Sulis-Minerva** under the **Pump Room**, and recent excavations of the **East Baths** give an insight into its 4th-century form.

## Bath Abbey

King Edgar was crowned in a church in Abbey Courtyard in 973 – though he had ruled since 959 – but the present **Bath Abbey** ( 01225-422462; www.bathabbey.org; requested donation £2.50; 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Easter, 1-2.30pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun year-round) was built between 1499 and 1616, making it the last great medieval church raised in England. The nave's wonderful fan vaulting was erected in the 19th century.

Outside, the most striking feature is the west facade, where angels climb up and down stone ladders, commemorating a dream of the founder, Bishop Oliver King. The abbey boasts the second-largest collection of wall monuments after Westminster Abbey. Among those buried here are Sir Isaac Pitman, who devised the Pitman method of shorthand, and Beau Nash.

On the abbey's southern side, the steps lead down to the small **Heritage Vaults Museum**

(admission free; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Sat), which explores the abbey's history and its links with the nearby baths. It also contains fine stone bosses, archaeological artefacts and a weird model of the 10th-century monk Aelfric, dressed in his traditional black Benedictine habit.

### Royal Crescent & The Circus

The crowning glory of Georgian Bath and the city's most prestigious address is Royal Crescent, a semicircular terrace of majestic houses overlooking a private lawn and the green sweep of Royal Victoria Park. Designed by John Wood the Younger (1728-82) and built between 1767 and 1775, the houses would have originally been rented for the season by wealthy socialites. These days flats on the crescent are still keenly sought after, and entire houses almost never come up for sale.

For a glimpse into the splendour and razzle-dazzle of Georgian life, head for **No 1 Royal Crescent** (☎ 01225-428126; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct, to 4pm Tue-Sun Nov), which contains an astonishing amount of period furniture. Only materials available during the 18th century were used in its refurbishment, so it's about as authentically Georgian as you can get; the same can't be said for the endearingly hammy staff dressed in period costume.

A walk east along Brock St from the Royal Crescent leads to the **Circus**, a magnificent ring of 30 houses. Plaques on the houses commemorate famous residents such as Thomas Gainsborough, Clive of India and David Livingstone. To the south is the restored 18th-century **Georgian Garden**, where gravel replaces grass (to protect women's long dresses from unsightly stains).

### Assembly Rooms & Fashion Museum

Opened in 1771, the city's glorious **Assembly Rooms** (☎ 01225-477789; Bennett St; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb) were where fashionable Bath socialites once gathered to waltz, play cards and listen to the latest chamber music. You're free to wander around the rooms, as long as they haven't been reserved for a special function. Highlights include the card room, tearoom and the truly splendid ballroom, all of which are lit by their original 18th-century chandeliers.

In the basement, the **Fashion Museum** (☎ 01225-477173; www.fashionmuseum.co.uk; adult/child £7/5, incl Roman Baths Museum £14/8.30; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) displays costumes worn from the 16th to late-20th centuries, including some alarming crinolines that would have forced women to approach doorways side on.

### Jane Austen Centre

Bath is known to many as a location in Jane Austen's novels. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were both largely set in the city; the writer visited it many times and lived here from 1801 to 1806 (a plaque marks one of her former houses at **No 4 Sydney Pl**, opposite the Holburne Museum). The author's connections with the city are explored at the **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 01225-443000; www.janeausten.co.uk; 40 Gay St; adult/child £6.50/3.50; ☎ hours vary), where displays also include period costume and contemporary prints of Bath.

### Other Museums

Housed in an 18th-century Gothic chapel, the **Building of Bath Museum** (☎ 01225-333895; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; The Vineyards, The

#### BATH'S REBIRTH

Larking about in the Roman Baths might be off the agenda, but thankfully you can still sample the city's curative waters at **Thermae Bath Spa** (☎ 0844 888 0844; www.thermaebathspa.com; Hot Bath St; New Royal Bath spa session per 2hr/4hr/day £22/32/52, spa packages from £65; ☎ New Royal Bath 9am-10pm). Here the old **Cross Bath**, incorporated into an ultramodern shell of local stone and plate glass, is now the setting for a variety of spa packages. The New Royal Bath ticket includes steam rooms, waterfall shower and a choice of bathing venues – including the jaw-dropping open-air rooftop pool, where you can swim in the thermal waters in front of a backdrop of Bath's stunning cityscape. Other exotic treatments include peat baths, body cocoons, Vichy showers and the ominous-sounding 'Kraxen stove' (an Alpine hay chamber, apparently).

Across the street are treatment rooms above the old **Hot Bath**, while the Hetling Pump Room, opposite, houses a **visitor centre** (☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun) that explores the history of bathing in Bath.

## QUITE A BEAU

If Ralph Allen, John Wood the Elder and John Wood the Younger were responsible for the physical construction of Georgian Bath, Richard 'Beau' Nash was the force that shaped its high-society heyday. Dandy, gambler and womaniser, Nash was purportedly charming, friendly, witty, influential and (at least to some degree) philanthropic.

Born in Wales in 1674, Richard Nash was an Oxford scholar and ex-soldier and in 1705 was appointed Master of Ceremonies in Bath. By revitalising spa culture and providing entertainment for the rich, Nash effectively created a prestigious social milieu over which he would rule, imposing strict regulations on behaviour and dress, for almost 50 years. But by the 1750s Nash's influence was waning and he died in poverty in 1761. Yet Bath had been changed irrevocably by his presence – it simply wouldn't be what it is without his legacy.

Paragon; admission £4; ☎ 10.30am–5pm Tue–Sun mid-Feb–Nov) details how Bath's Georgian splendour came into being, tracing the city's evolution from a sleepy spa town to one of the centres of Georgian society. There are some intriguing displays on contemporary construction methods, and the museum also explores the way in which social class and interior decor were intimately linked during the Georgian era; heaven forbid should you use a wallpaper that outstripped your station...

The 18th-century **Holburne Museum** (☎ 01225-466669; Great Pulteney St; adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun) houses the booty of Sir William Holburne, a 19th-century Bath resident who brought together an outstanding collection of porcelain, antiques, and paintings by great 18th-century artists such as Gainsborough, Turner and Guardi.

In 1781 astronomer William Herschel discovered Uranus from the garden of his home, which now houses the **Herschel Museum of Astronomy** (☎ 01225-446865; 19 New King St; adult/child £4/2.50; ☎ 1–5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun Feb–Dec). The house is decorated as it would have been in the 18th century; an astrolabe in the garden marks where Herschel would probably have placed his telescope.

The **Victoria Art Gallery** (☎ 01225-477233; www.victoriagal.org.uk; Pulteney Bridge; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, 1.30–5pm Sun) houses the city's main arts collection, with most items dating from the 15th to 20th centuries. There are some particularly fine canvases by Gainsborough, Turner and Sickert, as well as a wonderful series of Georgian caricatures from the wicked pens of artists such as James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson.

The **American Museum** (☎ 01225-460503; www.americanmuseum.org; Claverton Manor; adult/child £7.50/4; ☎ noon–5pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–Oct) houses a col-

lection of stateside artefacts, memorabilia and furniture dating from the 17th century. There are 15 individually decorated rooms scattered around the manor house, including a suitably sparse Shaker Room and a New Orleans room, decked out in the lavish style of a plantation villa. Even the trees and plants in the surrounding grounds have a Yankee provenance. The museum is 2 miles southeast of the city centre; bus 18 and several other buses to the university stop nearby.

The **Museum of East Asian Art** (☎ 01225-464640; www.meaa.org.uk; 12 Bennett St; adult/child £4/1.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, noon–5pm Sun) contains more than 500 jade, bamboo, porcelain and bronze objects from Cambodia, Korea and Thailand, and substantial Chinese and Japanese carvings, ceramics and lacquerware.

## TOURS

### Guided Tours

The most popular, and daftest, guided stroll around the city is the **Bizarre Bath Comedy Walk** (☎ 01225-335124; www.bizarrebath.co.uk; adult/student £8/5; ☎ 8pm Mar–Sep), a chaotic and frequently hilarious blend of street theatre, live performance and guided tour. Wallflowers be warned – you'll probably find yourself being roped into the act whether you like it or not. Tours leave from outside the Huntsman Inn on North Parade Passage (south of York St) and last about 1½ hours.

**Jane Austen's Bath** (☎ 01225-443000; adult/child £5/4) focuses on the Georgian city and sites associated with the author. Tours leave from the Abbey Churchyard at 11am on Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays.

The free, two-hour **Mayor's Guide walking tour** (☎ 01225-477411; www.thecityofbath.co.uk), a good all-round introduction to Bath, sets off from outside the Pump Room at 10.30am

and 2pm Sunday to Friday, and at 10.30am Saturday. From May to September there are additional tours at 7pm on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.

**Bath City Sightseeing** (☎ 01225-330444; www.city-sightseeing.com) provides a hop-on hop-off **city tour** (adult/child £10/6; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mar-May, Oct & Nov, to 6.30pm Jun-Sep) on an open-topped bus. Commentary is in seven languages. Buses stop every 20 minutes or so at various points around town. There's also a second route, the **Skyline tour** that runs year-round and travels out to Prior Park (p350); the same tickets are valid on both routes.

There are also minibuses to some of the attractions around Bath:

**Mad Max Tours** (☎ 07990 505970; www.madmax-tours.co.uk) One-day tours to Stonehenge, Avebury, Lacock and Castle Combe (£27.50), and half-day tours to Stonehenge and Lacock (£15).

**Scarpier Tours** (☎ 07739 644155; www.scarpertours.com) Twice-daily tour to Stonehenge (adult/child £14/8).

## Boat Trips

Various cruise operators offer boat trips up and down the River Avon; try **Bath City Boat Trips** (☎ 07974 560197; www.bathcityboattrips.com; adult/child £7/5; 🕒 11am-5pm) or the **Pulteney Princess** (☎ 07791 910650; www.pulteneyprincess.co.uk; adult/child £7/3; 🕒 11.30am-5pm). Trips for both companies leave from the landing stage just to the east of Pulteney Bridge.

For cruises to Bristol, see Tours, p335.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The annual events calendar in Bath would keep even the most demanding Georgian socialite busy, with a varied program of music, arts and theatre throughout the year. **Bath Festivals** (☎ 01225-463362; www.bathfestivals.org.uk; 2 Church St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has an overview and handles all bookings.

**Bath Literature Festival** (www.bathlitfest.org.uk) This annual festival takes place in late February or early March, and attracts bookworms and big-name authors alike.

**Bath International Music Festival** (www.bathmusicfest.org.uk) From mid-May to early June this festival takes over the city, with a main program of classical music and opera, as well as jazz, world and folk gigs in the city's smaller venues.

**Bath Fringe Festival** (www.bathfringe.co.uk) Hits town around mid-May to early June; it's the biggest fringe festival in Britain after Edinburgh, with all kinds of theatre shows and street acts dotted around town.

**Jane Austen Festival** (www.janeausten.co.uk/festival) Held in September, the highlight of this festival is a grand Georgian costumed parade through the city's streets, all the way to the Royal Crescent.

**Mozartfest** (www.bathmozartfest.org.uk) Takes place annually in mid-October.

**Bath Film Festival** (www.bathfilmfestival.org.uk) Held in early November.

## SLEEPING

Bath gets incredibly busy; the tourist office books rooms for a £3 fee, and sells the brochure *Bath & Beyond* (£1; free through the website). If you can, avoid weekends, when room prices can rise dramatically.

## Budget

**Bath Backpackers' Hostel** (☎ 01225-446787; bath@hostels.co.uk; 13 Pierrepont St; dm £12-13; 📺) It may be grungy (expect peeling paint, worn carpets and saggy beds), but Bath's indie hostel is a friendly affair and slap-bang in the middle of town. There's a party 'dungeon' in the cellar, no curfew and a fair bit of noise at night.

**Bath YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9303; www.yha.org.uk; dm £14, d from £35; 📺) Hostels don't come much grander than this Italianate mansion, a steep climb (or a short hop on bus 18) from the city centre. The refurbished rooms are surprisingly modern and many look out across the private tree-lined gardens; book early if you're after a double.

**YMCA** (☎ 01225-325900; www.bathymca.co.uk; International House, Broad St Pl; dm £14-16, s £26-30, d & tw £40-48; 📺) Despite bright fabrics in the dorms and funky sofas in the lounge, this huge hostel has an institutional feel. But with its excellent facilities (a health suite and on-site cafe), a super-central location and knock-down prices, do you care?

## Midrange

There's a wide range of midrange options; generally you'll get better value for money the further you head from the city centre.

**Henry Guest House** (☎ 01225-424052; www.thehenry.com; 6 Henry St; s £35-65, d £70-130, f from £105) Some of the best-value rooms in town are just five minutes' walk from the centre of Bath, at this stylish Georgian terrace. Crisp linens and a judicious scattering of cushions give the rooms a light, airy feel; the odd ornate fireplace and mock-Georgian chair help with the heritage mood.



## SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

To kick off your trip in glorious, Georgian Bath, check into one of the city's excellent hotels – try the **Queensberry** (below) for boutique chic. Then explore the city's key sights: the **Roman Baths** (p343), **Bath Abbey** (p343), the **Royal Crescent** and the **Circus** (p344). Lunch at the smart **Circus** (p348) restaurant, soak up more Georgian splendour at the **Building of Bath Museum** (p344) and the **Assembly Rooms** and **Fashion Museum** (p344), before indulging in a spot of pampering and an open-air rooftop swim at **Thermae Bath Spa** (see boxed text, p344). Laugh your socks off on the **Bizarre Bath Comedy Walk** (p345), tuck into a slap-up meal at **Onefishtwofish** (p349) – vegetarians should head to Demuth's (p349) – then round off the night with a late-night gig at **Moles** (p349), the city's top music venue.

On Sunday head east from Bath to **Bradford-on-Avon** (p323), famous for its 14th-century tithe barn, and **Lacock** (p324), with its beautiful medieval abbey. Grab a delicious country lunch at the **Sign of the Angel** (p325) before heading on to **Avebury** (p326), Britain's largest and arguably most spectacular stone circle, best seen in the light of late afternoon. And for the ultimate weekend getaway, head for **Whitley Manor** (see boxed text, p337) – one of the most luxurious night's sleep anywhere in Britain.

**Oldfields** (☎ 01225-317984; www.oldfields.co.uk; 102 Wells Rd; s £49-99, d £65-135, f from £85; (P)) This has to be one of the best deals in Bath: spacious rooms and soft beds for comfort; brass bedsteads and antique chairs for character; and Laura Ashley fabrics and Molton Brown bathstuffs for luxury. It's all wrapped up in a lemon-coloured stone house with views over Bath's rooftops.

**Three Abbey Green** (☎ 01225-428558; www.threeabbeygreen.com; 3 Abbey Green; d £85-125, f £125-175) Built when 'Beau' Nash was a teenager, this great-value B&B sits near the abbey in the kind of secluded square around which he would have strolled. It's not quite as stylish as the dandy inside, where simplicity and smartness see plain whites offset by tartan checks or colour tints.

**Paradise House** (☎ 01225-317723; www.paradise-house.co.uk; 88 Holloway; s £60-115, d £65-170; (P)) If the tourist crowds become too much for you, beat a retreat to this chimney-crowned villa and its charming walled garden. It's an old-world treat, with half-tester beds, gilded mirrors and oil paintings in the drawing room, and a lighter palette in the bedrooms (plus Jacuzzis and four-posters for the high-rollers).

**Dorian House** (☎ 01225-426336; www.dorianhouse.co.uk; 1 Upper Oldfield Park; s £65-78, d £80-155; (P) (wi-fi)) Owned by a cellist with the London Symphony Orchestra, this chic B&B is a symphony of sumptuous style. The marble bathrooms, scattered antiques, elaborate floor tiles and plush throws all chime together perfectly, with never a duff note.

**Brocks** (☎ 01225-338374; www.brocksguesthouse.com; 32 Brock St; d £87-125) Part of the Georgian terrace

linking the Circus and the Royal Crescent, Brocks nestles in the heart of elegant Bath. Teddy bears sit in lemon, cream and blue rooms – the ones to the rear have views of yet more classically architecture and the leafy hills beyond.

Also recommended:

**Abbey Rise** (☎ 01225-316177; www.abbeyrise.co.uk; 97 Wells Rd; s £48-58, d £68-78, f £75-90; (P)) Attractively refurbished, contemporary B&B whose owner trained as a housekeeper at Buckingham Palace.

**Milsoms** (☎ 01225-750128; www.milsomshotel.co.uk; 24 Milsom St; d from £85) Smooth city-chic and cocoa-bean colours above Loch Fyne Restaurant.

## Top End

**our pick** **Queensberry Hotel** (☎ 01225-447928; www.thequeensberry.co.uk; 4 Russell St; s £95-300, d £105-425; (P)) One to save your pennies for – this boutique barnstormer is sexy, swanky and super. Hidden away in four town houses, modern fabrics, muted colour schemes and funky throws meet polished wardrobes, feature fireplaces and Zenting furniture. Gleaming bathrooms house his 'n' hers sinks and posh smellies, while designer-print cushions pepper sofas and oversized beds. The walled garden is a chilled refuge from the city fizz. Prepare to be pampered.

**Dukes** (☎ 01225-787960; www.dukesbath.co.uk; Great Pulteney St; s £115, d £135-175, ste £170-215; (P)) The rooms at this Grade I-listed Palladian pile are some of the most regal you'll find in Bath. Themes include Asian finery, Italianate splendour, English botanica or French baroque – either way, you get original corning and carved plasterwork.

**Royal Crescent Hotel** (☎ 01225-823333; www.royal.crescent.co.uk; 16 Royal Cres; d £290-850; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Set right in the middle of the poshest postcode in town, this opulent hotel's ornaments and antiques would have welcomed guests in the 18th century. Expect paintings by Gainsborough, a sweeping secret garden and more chaise longues, chandeliers and sash windows than your average royal palace.

## EATING

As befits a historic watering hole, Bath has some top-notch restaurants. Look out for TV chef Jamie Oliver's new Milsom Pl eatery, **Jamie's Italian** (www.jamieoliver.com/Italian) – it wasn't yet open at the time of writing, but we expect that its quality will match that of Jamie's other restaurants.

## Budget

### CAFES & QUICK EATS

**Parisienne** (☎ 01225-447147; Milsom Pl; mains £7-13; ☺ breakfast & lunch) This delightful cafe has an air of Paris' Left Bank, thanks to its lovely courtyard terrace and an authentic menu of baguettes, croissants, *croques-monsieurs* (toasted cheese-and-ham sandwiches) and *moules marinières* (mussels cooked in white wine).

**Adventure Cafe** (☎ 01225-462038; 5 Princes Bldgs, George St; mains £4-8; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Californian bohemian mixes with urban chic at this groovy cafe-cum-hang-out, all picture windows, distressed wood and deep sofas. Cappuccinos by morning, ciabattas at noon and cocktails after dark.

**Cafe Retro** (☎ 01225-339347; 18 York St; mains £5-11; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, breakfast & lunch Mon) A place to make a stand (well, actually a laid-back 'sit') against bland, insidious global coffee-shop chains, Cafe Retro is a quirky gem. Settle down alongside Bath's boho tendencies and munch a burger, linger over brunch or sink a salad – smashing.

**Boston Tea Party** (☎ 01225-313901; 19 Kingsmead Sq; mains from £4; ☺ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, from 8.30am Sun) With a lovely outside terrace spilling onto Kingsmead Sq, the Bath outpost of this small southwest franchise is always full to bursting at lunchtime – thanks to its prodigious selection of sandwiches, homemade soups and sweet treats.

## RESTAURANTS

**Number 8 Manvers St** (☎ 01225-331888; 8 Manvers St; lunch mains £4-8, dinner mains £7-12; ☺ breakfast,

lunch & dinner Fri & Sat, 8am-7pm Mon-Thu) There's a fresh feel to the food and furnishings at this airy brasserie. Slender chairs, stripped wood and local artwork set the scene for pan-global offerings such as king prawn and coriander linguini, wild mushroom risotto and gourmet burgers.

**Sally Lunn's** (☎ 01225-461634; 4 North Parade Passage; lunch mains £5-6, dinner mains from £8; ☺ lunch & dinner) People have been taking afternoon tea here since the 1680s, and it's still high on many a tourist to-do list. The atmosphere – quintessential English chintz – makes it a genteel spot to devour the trademark Sally Lunn's bun.

**Walrus & the Carpenter** (☎ 01225-314864; 28 Barton St; mains £7-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) Another Bath classic, this bistro eschews snootiness in favour of a homelier mix of mismatched furniture, chummy service and down-home food. The menu's divided into 'before's' and 'after's' – the kebabs, moussakas and huge burgers are old faves.

## SELF-CATERING

**Deli Shush** (☎ 01225-443563; 8A Guildhall Market; ☺ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Serrano ham, antipasti, samosas and 20 types of olives fill the shelves of this designer deli that's set inside the Guildhall Market. You'll also find delicious crêpes, tangy cheeses and a wealth of other takeaway goodies at the nearby stalls.

**our pick Paxton & Whitfield** (☎ 01225 466403; 1 John St; ☺ Mon-Sat) Cheese lovers be warned – you will simply never want to leave. This upmarket fromagerie overflows with utterly oozing brie, whiffy Stilton and the kind of extra-mature cheddar that makes your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth. If they could bottle the smell they could sell that, too.

**Chandos Deli** (☎ 01225-314418; George St; ☺ Mon-Sat) Gourmet sarnies, fresh pasta and Italian cakes are the mainstays of this excellent deli – perfect for stocking up on picnic supplies.

## Midrange

**Circus** (☎ 01225-318918; 34 Brock St; lunch mains £7, dinner mains £11; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) As elegant as the architectural edifices that surround it, this bistro near the Royal Crescent plays on its superchic surrounds. The ladies who lunch like the fresh, fashionable food, too.

**FishWorks** (☎ 01225-448707; 6 Green St; mains from £13; ☺ lunch & dinner) The embodiment of the old sea-

food gag ('I'm on a seafood diet: I see food and I eat it'), FishWorks is a fishmonger, cookery school and seafood restaurant in one. Select something from the ice-packed trays, pick a treatment then enjoy the flavours of the sea.

**Firehouse Rotisserie** (☎ 01225-482070; 2 John St; mains £11-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Stateside flavours and a Californian vibe characterise this excellent American restaurant, run by a couple of ex-LA chefs. The menu evokes Mexico and the deep South, with signature dishes including rotisserie chicken, Louisiana catfish and Texan steak.

**Onefishtwofish** (☎ 01225-330236; 10A North Pde; mains £13-18; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Tables are crammed in under a barrel-brick roof, full of twinkly light in this cosy cellar restaurant. Seafood is shipped in from Devon ports, and chefs cook up everything from wonton salmon to Marseillaise bouillabaisse.

**ourpick Pinch** (☎ 01225-421251; 11 Margarets Bldgs; 2-course lunch £10, dinner mains £14-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sat) Bringing the flavours of Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Left Bank to Bath, many Brits will dearly wish there were more snug eateries like this over here. The menu is packed with duck, rabbit, langoustine and beef and is suffused with classic French flavours: garlic and thyme; cinnamon and saffron; Champagne and brandy.

**Demuth's** (☎ 01225-446059; 2 North Parade Passage; mains £11.50-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Having made Bath's vegetarians smile for more than 20 years, Demuth's still delights. Imaginative, superbly flavoured seasonal fare includes asparagus tart, spinach and chickpea curry, and a 'vitality salad'. If that sounds too healthy, finish off with the devilish apricot and calvados tart.

**Bistro Papillon** (☎ 01225-310064; 2 Margarets Bldgs; 2-course lunch £8.50, mains £11-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Rustic Mediterranean dishes dominate at this Gallic bistro, with a thoroughly French ambience of checked tablecloths, sunbaked colours and clattering pans.

## Top End

**Olive Tree Restaurant** (☎ 01225-447928; 4 Russell St; lunch/dinner mains £14/18; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sun) Break out the glad-rags – the Queensberry Hotel's (p347) restaurant is a posh, pricey extravaganza of boutique British cuisine. You'll need a gastronomic glossary – expect galantine of woodpigeon and dark chocolate *panna cotta* with griottine cherries.

**Hole in the Wall** (☎ 01225-425242; 16 George St; mains £15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This long-standing favourite with Bath's gourmands takes you on a cook's tour through Anglo-French flavours – braised pork with Puy lentils, or Chew Magna lamb with potato fondant. The cellar dining room is half country restaurant, half urbane elegance.

## DRINKING

**Common Room** (☎ 01225-425550; 2 Saville Row; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat) Next door to an anarchic antiques shop, this tiny bar is a favourite with Bath's beautiful people. It's got all the designer credentials – exposed brickwork, blondwood floors, black leather sofas – and a more chilled atmosphere than the drinking dens on George St.

**Revolution** (☎ 01225-336168; George St; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) This is a swish Manhattan-style bar with the standard-issue blend of retro lamps and chrome fixtures, and a selection of cocktails served by the jug.

**Raven** (☎ 01225-425045; Queen St) Highly respected by real ale aficionados, this fine city drinking den commands a devoted following for its well-kept beer, traditional atmosphere and blues and jazz nights.

**Porter** (☎ 01225-424104; George St) It's somehow typical of Bath that it has a vegetarian pub; this spit-and-sawdust affair is run by the folk behind Moles nightclub and it's usually jammed to the rafters on Friday and Saturday nights.

**Bath Tap** (☎ 01225-404344; 19-20 St James Pde; ☎ to 2am Thu-Sat) The classic pub hang-out for Bath's gay community, with a late weekend licence and a fun range of theme nights ranging from drag to cabaret.

**Crystal Palace** (☎ 01225-482666; Abbey Green) You couldn't ask for a nicer location for this popular pub, tucked away in the shadow of the abbey on a tree-shaded green. Local beers and a gorgeous patio garden make this a top spot for a quiet pint.

## ENTERTAINMENT

**Venue** magazine ([www.venue.co.uk](http://www.venue.co.uk); £1.50) has comprehensive listings of Bath's theatre, music and gig scenes. Pick up a copy at -any newsagency.

## Nightclubs

**Moles** (☎ 01225-404445; [www.moles.co.uk](http://www.moles.co.uk); 14 George St; admission £5-7; ☎ 9pm-2am Mon-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat,

8pm-12.30am Sun) The best venue in town goes from strength to strength, hosting a regular line-up of cutting-edge new acts and breaking bands, as well as occasional club nights.

**Porter Cellar Bar** (☎ 01225-424104; George St; ☎ 11.30am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun) Just across the street and also run by the folk at Moles, this crowded, rustic venue hosts the bands who aren't yet big enough to play at the larger venue.

**Delfter Krug** (☎ 01225-443352; Sawclose; ☎ noon-late Mon-Sat) A massive, rambling pub opposite the theatre, equipped for all eventualities – upstairs club for housey tunes and DJs, downstairs bar for dedicated drinkers, and a street terrace for when the weather's fine.

## Theatre & Cinemas

**Theatre Royal** (☎ 01225-448844; www.theatreroyal.org.uk; Sawclose) This high-class theatre features drama, opera and ballet in the main auditorium, experimental productions in the Ustinov Studio, and young people's theatre at 'the egg'.

**Rondo Theatre** (☎ 01225-463362; www.rondothatre.co.uk; St Saviours Rd, Larkhall) This small rep theatre mixes up a varied program of comedy, music, dance and drama.

**Little Theatre** (☎ 0871 704 2061; St Michael's Pl) Bath's art-house cinema, screening fringe and foreign-language flicks.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bath's bus and train stations are having a multimillion-pound revamp. By mid-2009 the bus station should have left its temporary home of Avon St and be back alongside the train station on Dorchester St.

### Bus

National Express coaches run to London (£21.25, 3½ hours, 10 daily) via Heathrow (£17.50, 2¾ hours), and to Bristol (45 minutes, every 30 minutes) for buses to the north. Services to most other cities require a change at Bristol or Heathrow.

Buses X39 and 339 (55 minutes, several per hour) and 332 (50 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday) run to Bristol. Other useful services include buses 264 and 265 to Bradford-on-Avon (30 minutes, half-hourly), X71 and X72 to Devizes (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) and 173 and 773 to Wells (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday).

## Train

There are trains to London Paddington (£60.50, 1½ hours, half-hourly) and Cardiff (£14.90, 1¼ hours, four hourly), and several each hour to Bristol (£5.50, 11 minutes), from where you can connect with the main-line trains to northern England and the southwest.

Trains travel to Oxford approximately hourly (£17.20, 1½ hours, change at Didcot Parkway); Weymouth (£12.60, two hours) every two hours via Bradford-on-Avon (15 minutes) and Dorchester West (£12.30, 1¾ hours); and Portsmouth (£29, 2½ hours) hourly via Salisbury (£13, one hour).

## GETTING AROUND Bicycle

The 13-mile **Bristol & Bath Railway Path** (www.bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk) runs along the disused track of the old Midland Railway, which was decommissioned in the late 1960s. At the time of going to press there weren't any bike-hire companies operating in Bath, so you could bring your own bike, or hire a bike in Bristol and start the ride there (for bike hire in Bristol, see p340).

## Bus

Bus 18 runs from the bus station, High St and Great Pulteney St up Bathwick Hill past the YHA to the university every 10 minutes. Bus 4 runs every 20 minutes to Bathampton from the same places. A FirstDay pass for unlimited bus travel in the city costs £4/2.70 per adult/child.

## Car & Motorcycle

Bath has serious traffic problems (especially at rush hour). **Park-and-ride** (☎ 01225-394041; ☎ 6.15am-7.30pm) services operate at Lansdown to the north, Newbridge to the west and Odd Down to the south (tickets return £2.50, 10 minutes to the centre, every 10 to 15 minutes).

## AROUND BATH

### Prior Park

Celebrated landscape gardener Capability Brown and satirical poet Alexander Pope both had a hand in the creation of **Prior Park** (NT; ☎ 01225-833422; adult/child £4.50/2.50; Ralph Allen Dr, Bath; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, 11am-dusk Sat & Sun Nov-Jan), an 18th-century ornament-

tal garden dreamt up by local entrepreneur Ralph Allen. Cascading lakes, a Gothic temple and a famous Palladian bridge can be found around the garden's winding walks, and the sweeping views of the Bath skyline are something to behold.

Prior Park is 1 mile south of Bath's centre; it can be reached on foot or by bus 2 (every 10 minutes), as well as by the City Skyline tour (p346).

## SOMERSET

Sleepy Somerset provides the type of pleasing pastoral wanderings that are reminiscent of a simpler, calmer, kinder world. Its landscape of knotted hedgerows, hummocks and russet-coloured fields is steeped in ancient rites and scattered with ancient sites. The cloistered calm of the cathedral city of Wells acts as a springboard for the spectacular limestone caves and gorges around Cheddar; hippie haven Glastonbury brings an ancient abbey, mud-drenched festival and masses of Arthurian myth; while the lyrical landscape of the Quantocks is one that inspired Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Whether you're into 'Olde Worlde' or New Age, this is a place to wander, ponder and drink in the sights at your own laid-back pace.

### Orientation & Information

Somerset hugs the coast of the Bristol Channel. The Mendip Hills (the Mendips) follow a line below Bristol, just north of Wells and Cheddar, while the Quantock Hills (the Quantocks) sit just east of Exmoor National Park (p361). Most places of interest are in northern Somerset. Bath makes a good base in the east; Glastonbury and Wells are more-central options.

Individual towns have tourist offices; the **Somerset Visitor Centre** (☎ 01934-750833; www.visit-somerset.co.uk; Sedgemoor Services M5 South, Axbridge; ☎ 9.15am-5pm daily Easter-Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) provides general information.

### Getting Around

Most buses in Somerset are operated by **First** (☎ 0845 606 4446; www.firstgroup.com), supplemented by a few smaller operators. For timetables and general travel information contact **Traveline South West** (☎ 0871 200 22 33; www.travelinesw.com).

Area timetables are available at bus stations and tourist offices.

Key train services link Bath, Bristol, Bridgwater, Taunton and Weston-Super-Mare. The M5 heads south past Bristol, to Bridgwater and Taunton, with the A39 leading west across the Quantocks to Exmoor.

### WELLS

pop 10,406

With Wells, small is beautiful. This tiny, picturesque metropolis is England's smallest city, and only qualifies for the 'city' title thanks to a magnificent medieval cathedral, which sits in the centre beside the grand Bishop's Palace. Wells has been the main seat of ecclesiastical power in this part of Britain since the 12th century, and is still the official residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Medieval buildings and cobbled streets radiate out from the cathedral green to a marketplace that has been the bustling heart of Wells for some nine centuries (Wednesday and Saturday are market days). A quiet provincial city, Wells' excellent restaurants and busy shops help make it a good launching pad for exploring the Mendips and northern Somerset.

### Information

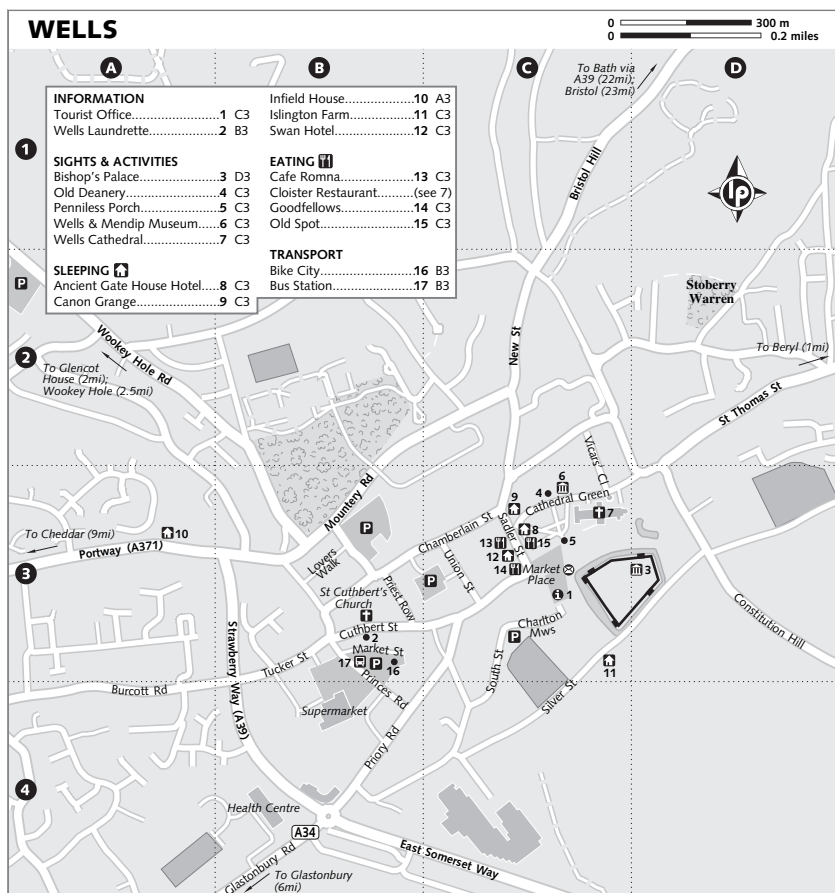
**Tourist office** (☎ 01749-672552; www.wellstourism.com; Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) Stocks the *Wells City Trail* leaflet (30p) and sells discount tickets to the nearby attractions of Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge.

**Wells Laundrette** (☎ 01458-830409; 39 St Cuthbert St; ☎ 8am-8pm) Opposite St Cuthbert's Church.

### Sights

#### WELLS CATHEDRAL

Set in a marvellous medieval close, the **Cathedral Church of St Andrew** (☎ 01749-674483; www.wellscathedral.org.uk; Chain Gate, Cathedral Green; requested donation adult/child £5.50/2.50; ☎ 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7am-dusk Oct-Mar) was built in stages between 1180 and 1508. The building incorporates several Gothic styles, but its most famous asset is the wonderful **west front**, an immense sculpture gallery decorated with more than 300 figures, built in the 13th century and restored to its original splendour in 1986. The facade would once have been painted in vivid colours, but has long since reverted to its original sandy hue. Apart from the figure of Christ, installed in 1985 in the uppermost niche, all the figures are original.



Inside, the most striking feature is the pair of **scissor arches** that separate the nave from the choir, designed to counter the subsidence of the central tower. High up in the north transept you'll come across a wonderful **mechanical clock** dating from 1392 – the second-oldest surviving in England after the one at Salisbury Cathedral (p316). The clock shows the position of the planets and the phases of the moon.

Other highlights are the elegant **Lady chapel** (1326) at the eastern end and the seven **effigies** of Anglo-Saxon bishops ringing the choir. The 15th-century **chained library** houses books and manuscripts dating back to 1472. It's only open at certain times during the year or by prior arrangement.

From the north transept follow the worn steps to the glorious **Chapter House** (1306), with its delicate ceiling ribs sprouting like a palm from a central column. Externally, look out for the **Chain Bridge** built from the northern side of the cathedral to Vicars' Close to enable clerics to reach the cathedral without getting their robes wet. The **cloisters** on the southern side surround a pretty courtyard.

**Guided tours** (🕒 Mon-Sat) of the cathedral are free, and usually take place every hour. Regular **concerts** (☎ 01749-672773) and cathedral choir **recitals** (☎ 01749-674483) are held here throughout the year. You need to buy a permit (£3) from the cathedral shop to take pictures. As you wander, keep an eye out for the cathedral cat, a ginger tabby called Louis.

## CATHEDRAL CLOSE

Wells Cathedral forms the centrepiece of a cluster of ecclesiastical buildings dating back to (and even earlier than) the Middle Ages. Facing the west front, on the left are the 15th-century **Old Deanery** and the **Wells & Mendip Museum** (☎ 01749-673477; 8 Cathedral Green; www.wellsmuseum.org.uk; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Mon Nov-Easter), with exhibits on local life, cathedral architecture and the infamous Witch of Wookey Hole.

Further along, **Vicars' Close** is a stunning cobbled street of uniform houses dating back to the 14th century, with a chapel at the end; members of the cathedral choir still live here. It is thought to be the oldest complete medieval street in Europe. Passing under the Chain Bridge, inspect the outside of the Lady chapel and a lovely medieval house called the Rib, before emerging at a main road called the Liberty.

**Penniless Porch**, a corner gate leading onto Market Sq and built by Bishop Bekynton around 1450, is so-called because beggars asked for alms here.

## BISHOP'S PALACE

Beyond the cathedral, the moated 13th-century **Bishop's Palace** (☎ 01749-678691; www.bishopspalacewells.co.uk; adult/child £5.50/1.10; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Sun-Fri, to 2pm Sat Jan-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Wed-Sun Nov & Dec) is a real delight. Purportedly the oldest inhabited building in England, ringed by water and surrounded by a huge fortified wall, the palace complex contains several fine Italian Gothic state rooms, an imposing Great Hall and beautiful tree-shaded gardens. The natural wells that gave the city its name bubble up in the palace's grounds, feeding the moat and the fountain in the market square. The swans in the moat have been trained to ring a bell outside one of the windows when they want to be fed.

## Sleeping

**Islington Farm** (☎ 01749-673445; www.islingtonfarmatwells.co.uk; Silver St; s/d £50/65; Ⓟ) Set beside a rushing stream, this ivy-clad farmhouse is two minutes' walk south of the city centre and yet still has idyllic rural views. Snug rooms have all the beams, fireplaces and old-world charm you could want. A self-catering cottage in the old stables sleeps 4 (£650 per week).

**our pick Beryl** (☎ 01749-678738; www.beryl-wells.co.uk; Hawkers Lane; s £65-75, d £85-120; Ⓟ) A mile

from the city centre, this tree-shaded, gabled Victorian mansion is set in 5 hectares of private parkland and boasts the kind of luxurious accommodation you'd normally find at double (or triple) the price. The richly furnished rooms have bags of country character, with swags, frills and elegant drapes and a smattering of veneered antiques. Wake up to views of rolling countryside, elegant lawns or Wells Cathedral, then take a dip in the heated outdoor swimming pool.

**Ancient Gate House Hotel** (☎ 01749-672029; www.ancientgatehouse.co.uk; Sadler St; s £76, d £91-105; Ⓟ) Wildly wonky walls, a stone spiral staircase and plenty of beams make this 15th-century inn a characterful place to rest your head. Firmly traditional furnishings add to the atmosphere, while a handful of rooms look out directly onto the Cathedral.

**Swan Hotel** (☎ 01749-836300; www.swanhotelwells.co.uk; Sadler St; s £82-112, d £104-180; Ⓟ) Antique furnishings and quilted fabrics help you sink into the history of this 600-year-old hotel, as do the quirky antiques and the padded armchairs in the bedrooms. Winter sees log fires blazing in the studylike lounges; in summer the red-brick walled garden is perfect for lazy, sunny afternoons.

Also recommended:

**Infield House** (☎ 01749-670989; www.infieldhouse.co.uk; 36 Portway; s/d £40/60; Ⓟ) Simple, spacious rooms in a Victorian B&B.

**Canon Grange** (☎ 01749-671800; www.canongrange.co.uk; Cathedral Green; d £70; Ⓟ) Old-fashioned B&B in a 15th-century house overlooking Cathedral Green.

## Eating

**Cloister Restaurant** (☎ 01749-676543; Wells Cathedral, Cathedral Green; mains £6; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) Tucked away under ancient stone arches inside the cathedral's west cloister, this atmospheric bistro dishes up hearty, homemade soul food: rich risottos, exquisite quiches and wicked cakes.

**Cafe Romna** (☎ 01749-670240; 13 Sadler St; mains £10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A stylish Bangladeshi fusion restaurant featuring futuristic chairs, low lighting and an unusual mix of menu options. Try the *zingha bhajee* (Bangladeshi vegetable curry) or the *chingri palack* (tiger prawns cooked with garlic and spinach).

**Goodfellows** (☎ 01749-673866; 5 Sadler St; cafe mains £7, restaurant mains £13-17; ☎ cafe lunch Mon & Tue, lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, restaurant lunch Mon, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This sophisticated eatery can satisfy

pretty much any hunger pang you have: the cafe rustles up treats like warm goats' cheese bruschetta; the in-store bakery proves there is an art to piling fresh fruit and custard onto pastry cases; and the formal dining room serves up a classy blend of Somerset produce and French-inspired cuisine.

**Old Spot** (☎ 01749-689099; 12 Sadler St; 2/3 courses £18.50/21.50; ☞ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Worn floorboards, a tiled and mirrored bar and very comfy chairs set the scene at this superstylish restaurant. The menu is imaginative, too: flavour favourites include black-pudding salad, cod with garlic purée, and warm apple and almond pud.

### Getting There & Around

The bus station is south of Cuthbert St, on Princes Rd. National Express runs direct to London once a day (£19, 4½ hours), although it's usually more convenient to travel to Bristol by local bus, and from there catch a more frequent coach to London.

Bus 173 runs from Bath to Wells (1¼ hours, hourly, seven on Sunday). Bus 376 travels to Wells from Bristol (one hour, hourly) before continuing on to Glastonbury (15 minutes) and Street (25 minutes). Bus 29 travels to Taunton (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends) via Glastonbury. Bus 126 runs to Cheddar (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday. There's no train station in Wells.

**Bike City** (☎ 01749-671711; 31 Market St; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri & Sat) charges £15 per day for bike hire.

### WOOKEY HOLE

On the southern edge of the Mendips, the River Axe has carved out a series of deep caverns collectively known as **Wookey Hole**

(☎ 01749-672243; www.wookey.co.uk; adult/child/family £15/10/45; ☞ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Mar). The caves are littered with dramatic natural features, including a subterranean lake and some fascinating stalagmites and stalactites (one of which is supposedly the legendary Witch of Wookey Hole, who was turned to stone by a local priest). The caves were inhabited by prehistoric people for some 50,000 years, but these days the deep pools and underground rivers are more often frequented by cave divers – the deepest subterranean dive ever recorded in Britain was made here in September 2004, when divers reached a depth of more than 45m.

Admission to the caves is by guided tour. The rest of the complex is taken up by an assortment of child-friendly attractions including mirror mazes, an Edwardian penny arcade and a valley stuffed with 20 giant plastic dinosaurs. You can also have a go at making your own sheet of paper in the Victorian paper-mill. Some prehistoric finds are on show at the on-site museum, but many are on display at the Wells & Mendip Museum (p353).

Bus 670 runs from Wells (10 minutes, nine daily, four on Sunday).

### CHEDDAR GORGE

If Wookey Hole is a little too touristy for your tastes, then you'd better brace yourself for **Cheddar Gorge Caves** (☎ 01934-742343; www.cheddarcaves.co.uk; Explorer Ticket adult/child £15/9.50; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sep-Jun), a spectacular series of limestone caverns that's always jammed with visitors throughout the summer months.

Despite the tourist throng, the natural wonders on display are still genuinely impressive. Although the network of caves extends deep into the surrounding rock, only a few

#### DETOUR: GLENCOT HOUSE

A breathtaking 19th-century mansion built in opulent Jacobean style, **Glencot House** (☎ 01749-677160; www.glencotthouse.co.uk; Wookey Hole; d £165-230, r with 4-poster-bed £245-260; (P)) is a place to indulge your senses and live out your lord-of-the-manor fantasies. It's surrounded by 7 hectares of private woods and riverside grounds, and even has its own cricket pitch. Walnut panelling, carved ceilings and dazzling chandeliers decorate the public rooms, while the bedrooms drip with flowing furnishings, swags and drapes and are peppered with chaise longue, country prints and antique dressers. Downstairs there's a billiard room, fire-lit drawing room, minicinema, sauna and plunge pool, as well as a wood-beamed dining hall that could have fallen straight from the pages of *The Remains of the Day*.



## A CHEESY STORY

As well as its spectacular cave system, Cheddar is also famous as the spiritual home of the nation's favourite cheese. Cheddar's strong, crumbly, tangy cheese is the essential ingredient in any self-respecting ploughman's sandwich, and has been produced in the area since at least the 12th century; Henry II boldly proclaimed cheddar to be 'the best cheese in Britain', and the king's accounts from 1170 record that he purchased 10,240lbs (around 4644kg) of the stuff. In the days before refrigeration, the Cheddar caves made the ideal cool store for the cheese, with a constant temperature of around 7°C. However, the powerful smell attracted rats and the practice was eventually abandoned.

These days most cheddar cheese is made far from the village, but if you're interested in seeing how the genuine article is made, head for the **Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company** (☎ 01934-742810; www.cheddargorgecheese.co.uk; adult £1.95, 2 accompanying children free; ♿ 10am-4pm). You can take a guided tour of the factory from Easter to October, and pick up some tangy, whiffy souvenirs at the on-site shop.

are open to the public. The most impressive are Cox's Cave and Gough's Cave, both decorated by an amazing gallery of stalactites and stalagmites, and subtly lit to bring out the spectrum of colours in the limestone rock. After the end of the last ice age, the caves were inhabited by prehistoric people; a 9000-year-old skeleton (imaginatively named 'Cheddar Man') was discovered here in 1903, and genetic tests have revealed that some of his descendants are still living in the surrounding area.

Outside the caves, the 274 steps of **Jacob's Ladder** lead up to an impressive panorama of the surrounding countryside; on a clear day you can see all the way to Glastonbury Tor and Exmoor.

Nearby, a signposted 3-mile-round walk follows the cliffs along the most spectacular parts of **Cheddar Gorge**, which cuts a mile-long swathe through the southern side of the Mendip Hills. At some points the cliff walls tower 138m above the winding narrow road that lies at its base. Most visitors only explore the first section of the path, and you can usually escape the crowds by venturing further up the valley.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01934-744071; cheddar.tic@sedgemoor.gov.uk; ♿ 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Oct, 11am-4pm Sun only Nov-Easter) is at the southern end of the gorge, and has some useful information on local walks and caving trips.

Look out for the **Big Green Gathering** (☎ 01458-834629; www.big-green-gathering.com) in late July and early August, when some 20,000 eco-aware campers descend on the fields near Cheddar for a festival of music, performance, therapies and good causes.

A mile southwest of the caves on the western side of Cheddar village is the **Cheddar YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9730; www.yha.org.uk; Hillfield; dm £14), set in an old stone house.

Bus 126 runs to Wells (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday.

## MENDIP HILLS

The Mendip Hills are a picturesque sequence of limestone ridges stretching from the coast near Weston-Super-Mare to Frome in eastern Somerset. Their highest point is Black Down (326m) to the northwest – but because they rise sharply, there are panoramic views towards Exmoor and across northwest Wiltshire.

Historically, the area has seen its share of action, and neolithic earthworks, Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age forts can be found scattered over the hills. More recently, lead and coal mining have left their mark, with remains of mines dotting the area around Radstock and Midsomer Norton. Quarrying for stone is an important (and controversial) industry to this day.

Until the Middle Ages, large tracts of land lay beneath swampy meadows, and the remaining wetlands provide an important habitat for wildlife and flora. The marshland hid relics, too, including a lake village that was excavated at the turn of the 20th century (see Lake Village Museum, p357).

The landscape is peppered with pretty hamlets and isolated pubs that once served the thirsty miners. Mendip villages are also home to some delightful timbered houses, and several have fine Perpendicular church towers.

### GOING UNDERGROUND

If a visit to the Cheddar caves piques an interest in the strange subterranean world beneath the gorge, then you might like to take a **caving trip** to explore further. **Rocksport** (☎ 01934-742343; caves@visitcheddar.co.uk) offers 1½-hour abseiling and climbing trips around the gorge (£16), as well as adventurous subterranean trips into the more-remote caverns (from £20). Needless to say, you'll get cold, wet and muddy, and you'll need to be up to the physical challenges of underground caving. If you're even vaguely claustrophobic, don't even think about it.

The one at **Chewton Mendip** (off the A37 between Bristol and Wells) is especially striking and has an impressive medieval churchyard cross. Further west, the village of **Priddy**, the highest village in the Mendips, has a massive sheep fair on the green in mid-August, while the village of **Compton Martin** has a Norman church with a 15th-century tower. A mile to the east, **West Harptree** is prettier, with two 17th-century former manor houses. Near **East Harptree** are the remains of the Norman castle of Richmond. Local tourist offices stock leaflets with information on walking and cycling in the area.

The A371 skirts the southern side of the Mendip Hills, and any of the towns along it make good touring bases, though Wells has the best range of facilities.

## GLASTONBURY

pop 8429

Realign those chakras and open that third eye – you've just touched down in England's hippie central. A bohemian haven and centre for New Age culture since the days of the Summer of Love, Glastonbury is still a favourite hang-out for festival-goers, mystics and counter-cultural types of all descriptions. Crammed with goddess temples, trance workshops and Beltane ceremonies, this is the place to answer the call of the shaman, hear the healing drum and possibly even take part in a mystical singing-bowl experience. But look past the tie-dye and through the crystals, and you'll find Glastonbury is also much more. The town claims to be the birthplace of Christianity in England, and boasts some

absorbing museums as well as fabulous places to stay and eat (including a lovely old pub where there isn't a joss stick in sight).

### Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01458-832954; www.glastonburytic.co.uk; The Tribunal, 9 High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) stocks maps and accommodation lists, and sells leaflets describing local walks and the *Glastonbury Millennium Trail* (60p).

### Sights

#### GLASTONBURY ABBEY

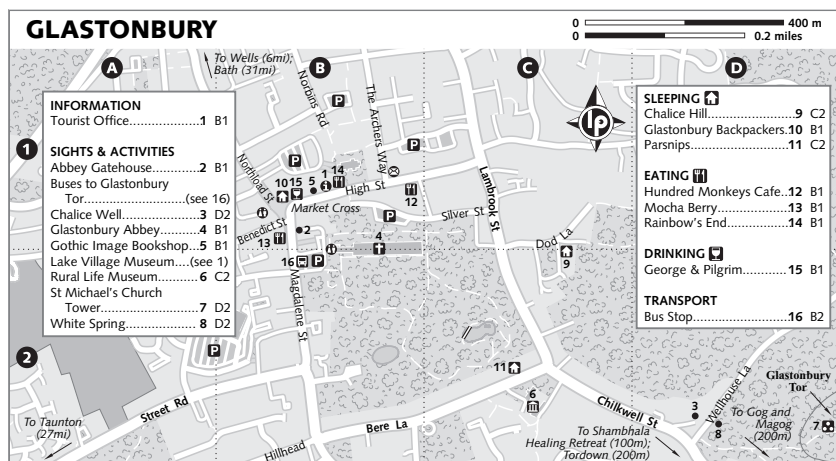
Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea, great-uncle of Jesus, owned mines in this area and returned here with the Holy Grail (the chalice from the Last Supper) after the death of Christ. Joseph supposedly founded England's first church on the site, now occupied by the ruined **abbey** (☎ 01458-832267; www.glastonburyabbey.com; Magdalene St; adult/child £5/3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm or dusk Sep-May, from 9am Jun-Aug), but the earliest proven Christian connection dates from the 7th century, when King Ine gave a charter to a monastery in Glastonbury. In 1184 the church was destroyed by fire and reconstruction began in the reign of Henry II.

In 1191, monks claimed to have had visions confirming hints in old manuscripts that the 6th-century warrior-king Arthur and his wife Guinevere were buried in the abbey grounds. Excavations uncovered a tomb containing a skeletal couple, who were reinterred in front of the high altar of the new church in 1278. The tomb survived until 1539, when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and had the last abbot hung, drawn and quartered on the tor.

The remaining ruins at Glastonbury mainly date from the church that was built after the 1184 fire. It's still possible to make out some of the nave walls, the ruins of the St Mary's chapel, and the remains of the crossing arches, which may have been scissor-shaped, like those in Wells Cathedral (p351). The site of the supposed tomb of Arthur and Guinevere is marked in the grass. The grounds also contain a small museum, cider orchard and herb garden, as well as the **Holy Thorn** tree, which supposedly sprung from Joseph's staff and mysteriously blooms twice a year, at Christmas and Easter.

#### GLASTONBURY TOR

The iconic hump of Glastonbury Tor is crowned by a ruined tower and rears steeply



from the Somerset flatlands. This 160m-high grassy mound on the edge of town provides both glorious views over the surrounding countryside, and a focal point for a bewildering array of myths. According to some it's the home of a faery king, while an old Celtic legend identifies it as the stronghold of Gwyn ap Nudd (ruler of Annwyn, the Underworld) – but the most famous legend identifies the tor as the mythic Isle of Avalon, where King Arthur was taken after being mortally wounded in battle by his nephew Mordred, and where Britain's 'once and future king' sleeps until his country calls again.

Whatever the truth of the legends, the tor has been a site of pilgrimage for many years, and was once topped by the medieval church of **St Michael**, although today only the tower remains. On the way up to the tor look out for **Gog and Magog**, two gnarled oak trees believed to be the last remains of an ancient processional avenue.

It takes 45 minutes to walk up and down the tor. Parking is not permitted nearby, but the **Tor Bus** (adult/child £2.50/1.50) leaves from Dunstan's car park near the abbey. The bus runs every 30 minutes from 10am to 7.30pm from April to September, and from 10am to 3.30pm from October to March. It also stops at Chalice Well and the Rural Life Museum.

### CHALICE WELL & GARDENS

Shaded by knotted yew trees and surrounded by peaceful paths, the **Chalice Well & Gardens** (☎ 01458-831154; www.chalicewell.org.uk; Chilkwell St;

adult/child £3.25/2.70; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) have been sites of pilgrimage since the days of the Celts. The iron-red waters from the 800-year-old well are rumoured to have healing properties, good for everything from eczema to smelly feet; some legends also identify the well as the hiding place of the Holy Grail. You can drink the water from a lion's-head spout, or rest your feet in basins surrounded by flowers.

The Chalice Well is also known as the 'Red Spring' or 'Blood Spring'; its sister, **White Spring**, surfaces across Wellhouse Lane. Spigots from both springs empty into the street, where there's often a queue to fill containers.

### RURAL LIFE MUSEUM

Somerset's agricultural heritage is explored at the **Rural Life Museum** (☎ 01458-831197; Abbey Farm, Chilkwell St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), which contains a varied collection of artefacts relating to traditional trades such as willow growing, peat digging, cider making and cheese making. There are often live displays of local skills, so if you fancy trying your hand at beekeeping, lace making and spinning, this is the place to do it. The late-14th-century tithe barn has fine carvings on the gables and porch, and an impressive timber roof; it now houses a collection of vintage agricultural machinery.

### LAKE VILLAGE MUSEUM

Upstairs from Glastonbury's tourist office, in the medieval courthouse, the **Lake Village**

**Museum** (EH; ☎ 01458-832954; The Tribunal, 9 High St; adult/child £2/1.50; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) displays finds from a prehistoric bog village discovered in nearby Godney. The houses in the village were clustered in about six groups and were built from reeds, hazel and willow. It's thought they were occupied by summer traders who lived the rest of the year at Glastonbury Tor.

## Tours

There are lots of companies offering guided tours of Glastonbury's main sights.

**Mystical Tours of Glastonbury** (☎ 01458-831453; www.gothicimagetours.co.uk; 7 High St) is based at the Gothic Image bookshop and offers a range of tours including three-hour guided trips to Wearyall Hill, Gog and Magog and Glastonbury Tor itself. Prices per person depend on group sizes and range from £12 (if there are more than four people) to £70. It also runs day tours to Stonehenge and Avebury (£140 per person).

## Sleeping

If you're a fan of wind chimes, organic brekkies and homemade muesli, then Glastonbury's B&Bs won't disappoint.

**Glastonbury Backpackers** (☎ 01458-833553; www.glastonburybackpackers.com; 4 Market Pl; dm/tw/d £14/35/40; ☐ ☑) A happy, hippie hang-out, Glastonbury's hostel is a friendly, welcoming affair, with doubles and dorms decked out jazzy colours. There's a TV lounge, kitchen and cafe-bar downstairs.

**Tordown** (☎ 01458-832287; www.tordown.com; 5 Ashwell Lane; s £36-40, d £60-64; ☐) As well as a peaceful sleep and a massive veggie breakfast, this B&B also offers a range of treatments, including higher-self sessions and rainbow massage. The downstairs rooms are a tad fuddy-duddy; the two upstairs are smarter and have grandstand views over the Vale of Avalon.

**Parsnips** (☎ 01458-835599; www.parsnips-glastonbury.co.uk; 99 Bere Lane; s/d £50/65; ☐ ☑) Swimming against the tie-dye and crystal tide, this stylish B&B has opted instead for a fresh design topped with gingham flourishes and plumped-up quilts. There's a comfy guest lounge, a bright conservatory and a refreshing lack of spiritual guidance.

**Shambhala Healing Retreat** (☎ 01458-831797; www.shambhala.co.uk; Coursing Batch; s £48-66, d £76-112) If you're not in touch with your inner goddess,

this spiritual sanctuary probably isn't for you. It's New Age through and through, from the meditation tent on the top floor to the reiki massage and colonic hydrotherapy on offer – you can even meet your guardian angel here. The 'clear energy' bedrooms are an appealing blend of airy fabric and snazzy designs in a choice of Tibetan and Egyptian themes,

**our pick** **Chalice Hill** (☎ 01458-830828; www.chalicehill.co.uk; Dod Lane; s/d £70/90; ☐) This luxurious, utterly delightful B&B is set in a rambling Georgian house. It's dripping with quirky charm – stripped wooden floors combine with a sweeping staircase, ornate mirrors and stylish modern art. The effect is deeply elegant, but also wonderfully easy-going. The fact that it's a five-minute walk into town, and is surrounded by soothing, tree-shaded grounds, adds to the appeal.

## Eating & Drinking

**Rainbow's End** (☎ 01458-833896; 17A High St; mains £4-7; ☹ 10am-4pm) The classic Glastonbury wholefood cafe, with ranks of potted plants and wooden tables and a rotating menu of organic offerings such as veggie moussaka, sweet-potato flan and fiery chilli. The carrot cake is divine.

**Mocha Berry** (☎ 01458-832149; 14 Market Pl; mains £5-8; ☹ Sun-Wed) This ever-popular cafe is the top spot in Glastonbury for a frothy latte, a fresh milkshake or a stack of breakfast pancakes.

**Hundred Monkeys Cafe** (☎ 01458-833386; 52 High St; mains £5-10; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed, to 9pm Thu-Sat, to 3.30pm Sun) A refreshingly nonalternative option with leather sofas, pine tables and a huge blackboard listing fresh pastas, salads and mains. If you've a spare half-hour ask about the origin of the name – the original 100th monkey.

**George & Pilgrim** (☎ 01458-831146; 1 High St; mains £7-10; ☹ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) The creaking timbers and stone arches in this 15th-century inn are evidence that Glastonbury's New Age incarnation is a mere blip on a very ancient timeline. The snug interior is home to a warm welcome, an excellent pint and some above-average pub grub – try the homemade beef and onion burger.

## Getting There & Away

There's one early-morning National Express service to Bath (£6.10, 1¼ hours), which goes on to London (£19, 4¼ hours).

### THE OTHER GLASTONBURY

To many people, the village of Glastonbury is synonymous with the **Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts** ([www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk](http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk)), an often mud-soaked extravaganza of music, street theatre, dance, cabaret, carnival, ecology, spirituality and general all-round weirdness that's been held on and off on farmland near Glastonbury for well over 30 years. The first event was held in 1970, when young dairy farmer Michael Eavis invited some bands to play on makeshift stages in his field; 30 years later, the festival has become the longest-running performing-arts festival in the world, attracting some of the world's biggest acts and crowds of more than 120,000 festival-goers. Glastonbury is more a way of life than a music festival, and it's a rite of passage for every self-respecting British teenager – ask about the toilets to anyone who's been to the festival, and prepare to hear some horror stories.

Bus 29 travels to Glastonbury from Taunton (50 minutes, five to seven daily). Bus 376 travels to Wells (30 minutes, hourly) and Bristol (1¼ hours), and also to Street (15 minutes). Bus 377 goes to Yeovil, while bus 375 heads to Bridgwater (both one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday).

There is no train station in Glastonbury.

### QUANTOCK HILLS

The curving, 12-mile ridge of the Quantocks forms a romantic, lyrical landscape of rolling red sandstone hills. Unsurprisingly, poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was partial to roaming around the hills during his six-year sojourn in the village of Nether Stowey. The hills are still popular with walkers today – linking the Vale of Taunton Deane with the Somerset coast, they're only 384m at their highest point. The area is designated an AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), and some of the most attractive country is owned by the National Trust – including the Beacon and Bicknoller Hills, which offer views of the Bristol Channel and Exmoor to the northwest.

The **AONB Service** (☎ 01823-451884; [www.quantockhills.com](http://www.quantockhills.com); ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) runs an excellent program of guided walks and is based at **Fyne Court** (NT; ☎ 01823-652400; admission free; ☹ 9am-6pm or dusk), a National Trust nature reserve at Broomfield, in the south Quantocks. The **tourist office** (☎ 01278-436438; King Sq; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) in Bridgwater can also advise about the area. Mountain-biking is very popular in the Quantocks.

### Nether Stowey & Holford

The pretty village of Nether Stowey is best known for its association with Coleridge, who moved to the village in 1796 with his wife Sara

and son Hartley. They lived at **Coleridge Cottage** (NT; ☎ 01278-732662; adult/child £3.90/1.90; ☹ 2-5pm Thu-Sun Apr-Sep), where the poet composed some of his great early work, including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy spent 1797 at nearby Alfoxden House in **Holford**; during that year they all worked on the poems for *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a short booklet that heralded the beginning of the British Romantic movement.

The area has a great variety of places to sleep. All wobbly walls and low lintels, **Stowey Brooke House** (☎ 01278-733356; [www.stoweybrookehouse.co.uk](http://www.stoweybrookehouse.co.uk); 18 Castle St, Nether Stowey; s £40, d £55-65) manages to combine old-world character with new-fangled comfort. An array of ancient beams sits above plump furnishings, brass bedsteads and free-standing baths, while the guest lounge has a huge inglenook fireplace to relax beside.

For even more luxury, head half a mile out of Nether Stowey to **Castle of Comfort** (☎ 01278-741264; [www.castle-of-comfort.co.uk](http://www.castle-of-comfort.co.uk); s £42-92, d £104-142; ☐), a Grade II-listed manor set in rolling fields on the northern slopes of the Quantock Hills.

Tucked away in a wooded valley, **Combe House** (☎ 01278-741382; [www.combehouse.co.uk](http://www.combehouse.co.uk); Holford Combe; s £65-95, d £95-135; ☐) is one of the most famous pamper pads in the Quantocks. The best rooms boast huge four-poster beds and views over the private wooded gardens; there's also a gorgeous indoor pool, a private sauna and a fine country restaurant (mains £15.50 to £24.50) finished in gleaming Cornish oak. You can even play croquet on the lawn.

### Crowcombe

One of the prettiest Quantock villages, Crowcombe is graced with a cluster of cottages made of stone and cob (a mixture of mud and

straw), many with thatched roofs. The ancient **Church of the Holy Ghost** has wonderful carved 16th-century bench ends with surprisingly pagan themes (the Green Man is common). Part of its spire still stands in the churchyard where it fell when lightning struck in 1725.

Crowcombe is a little short on places to stay and eat – the best option is the village inn, the **Carew Arms** (☎ 01984-618631; www.thecarewarm.co.uk; s £44-54, d £64-84; (P)) where the six upstairs bedrooms sport snazzy, polka-dot throws. The bar is all ancient atmosphere (expect huge fireplaces, high-backed wooden benches and antlers on the walls), while the chefs rustle up great pub grub (mains £11 to £16) including a tasty steak with whisky and Stilton sauce.

There's also a good campsite, the **Quantock Orchard Caravan Park** (☎ 01984-618618; www.quantockorchard.co.uk; Flaxpool; sites per tent or caravan £11-20).

## Getting There & Away

Bus services around the Quantocks can be very limited. Bus 14 travels from Bridgwater to Nether Stowey (45 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday). Buses 23A and 23B travel from Taunton to Nether Stowey (30 minutes, two to three daily Monday to Friday) en route to Bridgwater.

Half-hourly bus 28 runs from Taunton to Minehead but only stops at Crowcombe (30 minutes) once daily, Monday to Saturday.

## TAUNTON

pop 58,241

There's not much to draw visitors to Somerset's main county town and administrative capital, but it's a handy transport hub and is the main gateway to the Quantocks.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01823-336344; www.heartofsomerset.com; Paul St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in the library and has some useful leaflets on exploring the Quantocks and northern Somerset.

One of Taunton's most famous landmarks is the **Church of St Mary Magdalene** (☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat), with its 50m-high tower carved from red Quantock rock. The striking 12th-century **Taunton Castle**, on Taunton Green, is home to the **Somerset County Museum**, which is due to reopen in 2010, after a two year refit.

## Sleeping

**Bloreng House** (☎ 01823-283005; www.blorenghouse.co.uk; 57 Staple Grove Rd; s £44-55, d £68-80; (P)) An unusual B&B – this enormous Victorian villa

has 24 bedrooms and a heated outdoor pool. The decor is a blast from the past, featuring pine furniture, quilted bedspreads and a scattering of antiques. The cheaper rooms share bathrooms.

**Salisbury House Hotel** (☎ 01823-272083; 14 Billetfield; s/d from £58/66; (P)) Probably the most comfortable place to stay in town, this large detached town house near Vivary Park has traces of country-club atmosphere: large heritage-style bedrooms, pocket-sprung beds and snug sitting areas.

## Getting There & Away

National Express coaches run to London (£16.70, four hours, six daily), Bristol (£6.60, 1½ hours, four daily) and Exeter (£6.10, one hour, six daily).

Bus 28 (hourly Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday) crosses the Quantocks to Minehead (1¼ hours). Bus 29 travels to Wells (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends) via Glastonbury (one hour).

Trains run to London (£39.50, two hours, every one to two hours), to Exeter (£9, 30 minutes, half-hourly) and to Plymouth (£23, 1½ hours, half-hourly).

## AROUND TAUNTON

### Montacute House

Elizabethan **Montacute House** (NT; ☎ 01935-823289; house & garden adult/child £8.50/4, garden only £5.10/2.50; ☎; house 11am-5pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar–Oct, garden 11am-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar–Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov–mid-Mar) was built in the 1590s for Sir Edward Phelips, a Speaker of the House of Commons, and contains some of the finest 16th- and 17th-century interiors in the country. The house is particularly renowned for its remarkable plasterwork, fine chimneypieces and magnificent tapestries, but the highlight is the Long Gallery, decorated with Elizabethan-era portraits borrowed from the National Portrait Gallery (p115) in London.

Bus 81 from Yeovil (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday) to South Petherton passes close by.

### Haynes Motor Museum

The 300-strong car collection at **Haynes Motor Museum** (☎ 01963-440804; www.haynesmotormuseum.com; Sparkford; adult/child £7.50/4; ☎; 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) includes an array of the outstanding, the old, and, frankly, the odd. Aston Martins and Ferraris rub shoulders

### BEER & BREAKFAST?

You'll want to raise a toast this one – **Old Cider House** (☎ 01278-732228; www.oldciderhouse.co.uk; 25 Castle St, Nether Stowey; d £60-80; P) is quite possibly the only B&B in Britain where guests design and brew their own beer. The process involves as much formulation, mashing, boiling and fermenting as ale addicts could possibly want. Once your top tittle is ready, it's bottled up, labelled and shipped to your door. All-inclusive, two-night beer-brewing breaks start at £225 per person; nonparticipants pay £99. Bedrooms are unfussy in plain colours and pine. But then, take part in enough 'tutored tasting sessions' and you probably won't notice the bedspread. If you're not staying, ask for a pint of the B&B's Stowey Brewery Ale in the local Rose and Crown.

with Bentleys and, well, the Sinclair C5. And yes, it is *that* Haynes, of the ubiquitous car-repair manuals that you'll find in charity shops throughout the country. The museum is on the A359 off the A303, northwest of Yeovil.

### West Somerset Steam Railway

Railway buffs will love the **West Somerset Steam Railway** (☎ 01643-704996; www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk), which chugs through the Somerset countryside from Bishops Lydeard to Minehead, 20 miles away (return adult/child £13.40/6.70, 1¼ hours). There are stops at Dunster and other stations, depending on the time of year. Trains run pretty much daily from mid-March to October, otherwise occasional days only.

Bus 28 runs to Bishops Lydeard from Taunton (15 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday).

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Exmoor is an adventure. From dawn deer-spotting safaris to test-your-mettle hikes, from moorland gallops to cracking cycle rides, from clambering the coast path to a summertime dip in a cold, cold sea. This compact national park is a bit like England's version of the Wild West, except here cliffs replace cowboys, red deer replace cattle, and gumboots replace gunslingers. Part wilderness expanse, part rolling fields, these days Exmoor isn't all rustic B&Bs and higger-mugger pubs. Instead, it's scattered with pockets of boutique bliss, from refined restaurants to sumptuous country-house hotels where the service is sublime, the beds are soft and a fire crackles in the grate.

The amiable market town of Dulverton shelters south of the swaths of bracken-smothered higher moorland that encircle

the picturesque village of Exford. This unfenced wilderness plunges down to a coast dotted with charming stop-off points, from the twin villages of Lynton and Lynmouth in the west, via the pretty harbour at Porlock to the medieval town of Dunster, complete with a brooding red-brick castle. Expansive and exciting – Exmoor awaits.

### Orientation

The park is only about 21 miles wide from west to east and stretches just 12 miles from north to south. Waymarked paths crisscross the moor, and a dramatic section of the South West Coast Path runs from Minehead (a family-fun resort just outside the park) to Padstow in Cornwall.

### Information

There are several tourist offices within the park:

**Dulverton** (☎ 01398-323841; NPCDulverton@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3pm Nov-Mar)

**Dunster** (☎ 01643-821835; NPCDunster@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Dunster Steep; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, limited hr Nov-Easter)

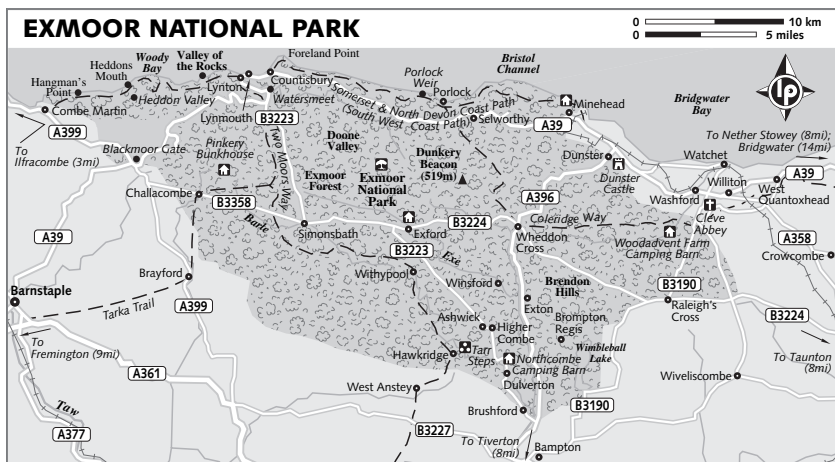
**Lynmouth** (☎ 01598-752509; Lyndale Car Park; ☎ 10.30am-3pm Easter-Oct)

**Lynton** (☎ 01598-752225; info@lynton-tourism.co.uk; Lynton Town Hall, Lee Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun)

**Porlock** (☎ 01643-863150; www.porlock.co.uk; West End, High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar)

All information outlets stock the free *Exmoor Visitor* newspaper, an excellent source of information about accommodation, guided walks, activities, attractions, transport and the moor's fragile environment.

There are four comprehensive websites covering Exmoor:



**Exmoor National Park** ([www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)) The official National Park Authority site.

**Exmoor Tourist Association** ([www.exmoor.com](http://www.exmoor.com)) Lists details on accommodation and activities.

**Visit Exmoor** ([www.visit-exmoor.info](http://www.visit-exmoor.info)) Excellent information site with advice on activities, events, accommodation and eating out.

**What's On Exmoor** ([www.whatsonexmoor.com](http://www.whatsonexmoor.com)) Local listings and information.

## Activities

**Active Exmoor** ([☎ 01398-324599](tel:01398-324599); [www.activeexmoor.com](http://www.activeexmoor.com)) is a central contact point for all the park's outdoor activity providers, ranging from riding to rowing and sailing to surfing. It also has information for more-experienced white-water kayakers and rock climbers.

**Wimbleball Lake Watersports Centre** ([☎ 01398-371460](tel:01398-371460)) runs a range of courses from sailing, windsurfing and kayaking taster sessions (£18 for one hour), to two-day windsurfing (£145 per person) and sailing courses (£145 per person).

## CYCLING

A network of bridleways and quiet lanes makes Exmoor great cycling country, but you're not going to get away without tackling a few hills. Popular trails travel through the Brendon Hills, the Crown Estate woodland and along the old Barnstaple railway line. National Park Authority (NPA) centres sell the map *Exmoor for Off-Road Cyclists* (£10), and the *Bike It Dunster and Bike It Wimbleball* leaflets (75p) – both of which feature a fam-

ily, beginner and explorer route. All are also available at the NPA's online shop.

Several sections of the **National Cycle Network** (NCN; [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)) cross the park, including the **West Country Way** (NCN route 3) from Bristol to Padstow, and the **Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route** (NCN route 27) between Exmoor and Dartmoor.

Located near Minehead, **Exmoor Mtb Experiences** ([☎ 01643-705079](tel:01643-705079); [www.exmoormtbexperiences.co.uk](http://www.exmoormtbexperiences.co.uk)), runs guided off-road days from £25 and all-inclusive weekends from £150. For bike hire, see Getting Around, opposite.

## MOORLAND SAFARIS

Several companies offer 4WD 'safari' trips across the moor, which stop at the main beauty spots and provide lots of background info. If you're a nature-lover or a keen photographer, bird- and deer-watching safaris can be arranged. Half-day trips start at around £20.

**Barle Valley Safaris** ([☎ 01643-851386](tel:01643-851386); [www.exmoor-barlevalley-safaris.co.uk](http://www.exmoor-barlevalley-safaris.co.uk)) Located at Dulverton, Dunster and Minehead.

**Discovery Safaris** ([☎ 01643-863444](tel:01643-863444); Porlock)

**Exmoor Safari** ([☎ 01643-831229](tel:01643-831229); [www.exmoorsafari.co.uk](http://www.exmoorsafari.co.uk); Exford)

## PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

Exmoor is popular riding country and lots of stables offer pony and horse treks from around £25 per hour – see the *Exmoor Visitor* for full details.

**Brendon Manor Riding Stables** ([☎ 01598-741246](tel:01598-741246)) Near Lynton.



**Burrowhayes Farm** (☎ 01643-862463; [www.burrowhayes.co.uk](http://www.burrowhayes.co.uk); Porlock)

**Overcort Stables** (☎ 01598-753341; [www.overcort.co.uk](http://www.overcort.co.uk); Lynton)

## WALKING

The open moors and profusion of marked bridleways make Exmoor an excellent area for hiking. The best-known routes are the **Somerset & North Devon Coast Path**, which is part of the **South West Coast Path** ([www.southwestcoastpath.com](http://www.southwestcoastpath.com)), and the Exmoor section of the **Two Moors Way**, which starts in Lynmouth and travels south to Dartmoor and beyond.

The **Coleridge Way** ([www.coleridge-way.co.uk](http://www.coleridge-way.co.uk)) winds for 36 miles through Exmoor, the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks, taking in Coleridge's home at Nether Stowey and the village of Porlock, where he's said to have written *Kubla Khan*.

Part of the 180-mile **Tarka Trail** falls within the park. A combination of cycling and walking paths, road routes and even a train journey, it is based on the countryside that inspired Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*. Join it at Combe Martin, hike along the cliffs to Lynton/Lynmouth, then head across the moor towards Barnstaple.

Organised **walks** run by the NPA are held throughout the year – visit [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk) or see the listings in the *Exmoor Visitor* for details. Its autumn dawn safaris to see rutting stags are superb, as are its summertime evening deer-watching hikes. Short walks cost £3; longer walks are £5.

For hard-core hikers, **Mountains+Moor** (☎ 01643-841610; [www.mountainsandmoor.co.uk](http://www.mountainsandmoor.co.uk); Minehead), offers navigation lessons (from £80 per two days) and summer mountain-craft courses (£110/270 per two/five days), which include camp-craft, rope work and river crossings, and take the form of mini-expeditions.

Dulverton (p364), Exford (p364) and Lynton (p365) make good bases.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are **YHA hostels** (☎ 01629-592700; [www.yha.org.uk](http://www.yha.org.uk)) in Minehead and Ilfracombe (outside the park), and Exford (p364) within the park.

The YHA also runs camping barns (from £7.50 per person) at Woodadvent Farm near Roadwater and at Northcombe Farm near Dulverton (p364). There are a number of official campsites along the coast.

For more-comfy sleeping options, Exmoor's accommodation ranges from rustic rooms

above pubs to cosy B&Bs to spoil-yourself-silly country-house hotels. We outline many; however, for an overview, see [www.exmoor.com](http://www.exmoor.com). If you'd like to hire a cottage, contact **Exmoor Holiday Group** ([www.exmoor-holidays.co.uk](http://www.exmoor-holidays.co.uk)).

## Getting There & Around

Once outside the key towns, getting around Exmoor by bus can be tricky, as regular services are very limited. Bus 300 shuttles regularly along the coast between Minehead and Lynmouth, while bus 400, the **Exmoor Explorer** (round trip adult/child £6/3) offers a handy circular route that takes in Minehead, Dunster, Wheddon Cross, Exford and Porlock. It operates only on Saturday and Sunday between June and September (two daily); from late July to the end of August it also runs on Tuesday and Thursday.

## BICYCLE

Several places hire out bikes:

**Fremington Quay** (☎ 01271-372586; [www.bike-trail.co.uk](http://www.bike-trail.co.uk); Fremington; per day adult/child £10/7.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) Delivers bikes to your door.

**Pompys** (☎ 01643-704077; [www.pompyscycles.co.uk](http://www.pompyscycles.co.uk); Minehead; per day £12.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Offers full-suspension mountain bikes from £25.

**Tarka Trail** (☎ 01271-324202; Train Station, Barnstaple; per day adult/child £10/7; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Apr-Oct) Can be picked up 15 miles west of the park boundary.

## BUS

National Express runs buses to Tiverton from London (£16.50, 4¾ hours, three daily) and Bristol (£14.80, two to three hours, one daily), and to Taunton from London (£16.70, four hours, seven daily) and Bristol (£6.60, 1½ hours, four daily).

Regular main-line trains also serve Tiverton and Taunton. Once there, local buses link to Dulverton (p364), Dunster (p368) and beyond.

The *Taunton & West Somerset Public Transport Guide*, free from tourist offices, contains timetables for all the main bus routes.

## DULVERTON

Dulverton is the southern gateway to Exmoor National Park., and sits at the base of the Barle Valley near the confluence of two key rivers, the Exe and Barle. It's a no-nonsense sort of country town, home to a collection of gun-sellers, fishing-tackle stores and gift shops, as well as the **NPA Visitor Centre** (☎ 01398-323841;

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3pm Nov-Mar).

## Activities

### WALKING

There's a lovely 12-mile (including hills) circular walk along the river from Dulverton to **Tarr Steps** – an ancient stone clapper bridge haphazardly placed across the River Barle and shaded by gnarled old trees. The bridge was supposedly built by the devil for sunbathing. It's a four- to five-hour trek for the average walker. You can add another three or four hours to the walk by continuing from Tarr Steps up Winsford Hill for distant views over Devon.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Town Mills** (☎ 01398-323124; www.townmillsdulverton.co.uk; High St; s/d £50/75; Ⓟ) The glossy rooms in this converted mill are resolutely 'un-country' – all crisp fabrics, sparkling bathrooms and bright artwork, topped off by original fireplaces and snazzy mirrors. It's all best surveyed while sipping a glass of complimentary sherry.

**Three Acres** (☎ 01398-323730; www.threeacrescountryhouse.co.uk; Brushford; s £55-70, d £80-110; Ⓟ) Full of genteel elegance, this fine country retreat makes a wonderful base from which to explore the southern moor. A sweeping drive leads to a hideaway that bristles with huge beds, Egyptian linen, snug armchairs and deep free-standing baths with delightfully old-fashioned taps.

**our pick Tarr Farm** (☎ 01643-851507; www.tarrfarm.co.uk; s/d £90/150, mains £13-18; ☎ lunch & dinner; Ⓟ) One of Exmoor's best bolt-holes. Snuggled in a beguiling wooded valley next to the tourist honey-pot of Tarr Steps (above), this old Somerset farmhouse has been transformed into a superstylish retreat. The beds are draped in fine cottons and sprinkled with satin cushions; luxury touches include fluffy bathrobes, power-showers and organic bath products. The restaurant plates up new-country treats – expect Exmoor beef with wild mushrooms, and local lamb with red onion confit.

**Lewis' Tea Rooms** (☎ 01398-323850; 13 High St; mains £5-18; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat Jul & Aug) The sumptuous array of homemade goodies in this cosy cafe will blow that diet – the chefs love 'experimenting with cakes'. Dinner's a belt-buster, too: try the monkfish with cream and saffron sauce (at least you can walk it off on a hefty moorland hike).

**Woods** (☎ 01398-324007; 4 Bank Sq; mains £11-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) This deservedly popular gastropub has built up a devoted following by giving excellent local ingredients imaginative treatments, all helped along by a rustic atmosphere and excellent service. Tummy treats include local lobster, pork belly with samphire, and Ruby Red sirloin steak.

Other recommendations:

**Northcombe Camping Barn** (☎ 0870 770 8868; www.yha.org.uk; per person £7.50) A converted watermill about 1 mile from town.

**Ashwick House** (☎ 01398-323868; www.ashwickhouse.com; s £84-94, d £138-158) A grand, gorgeous minibaronial pile crammed full of Edwardian features. Near Ashwick, 4 miles from Dulverton.

**Tongdam** (☎ 01398-323397; 26 High St; mains £8-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) A thrill for choice-starved vegetarians, this excellent Thai restaurant has a whole page of veggie dishes to choose from.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 398 (six daily Monday to Saturday) stops at Dulverton on its way from Minehead (50 minutes) and Dunster (40 minutes) to Tiverton (55 minutes). Bus 25B shuttles to Taunton (1½ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday).

## EXFORD

Nestled on the banks of the River Exe at the heart of the moor, Exford is a delightful middle of cottages and slate-roofed houses clustered around a village green. The village is the base of Devon and Somerset Staghounds, and meets are still an important part of life here, despite the hunting ban. Exford is also a centre for shooting, fishing, horse riding and hiking – Exmoor's highest point is 4 miles northeast of the village at Dunkery Beacon (519m), and the village is surrounded by secluded hills and quiet bridleways.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Exford YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9634; www.yha.org.uk; Exe Mead; dm £13.95; Ⓟ) Probably one of Exmoor's best budget bases, this brick Victorian house is just a short walk from the village centre – and the pub. The dorms are small and a smidgen institutional, but the hordes of hikers and cyclists aren't too bothered.

**Exmoor House** (☎ 01643-841432; www.exmoorhouse.com; Wheddon Cross; B&B only per person £39, 3-course dinner & B&B per person from £60; Ⓟ) Rich, dark woods and unfussy pastel fabrics fill this homely

restaurant-cum-B&B in nearby Wheddon Cross. Grab a local beer from the bar, read up on the moor in the cosy library, then feast on Exmoor produce: smoked trout pâté, local rabbit in Somerset cider and pungent Exmoor Jersey Blue cheese.

**Edgcott House** (☎ 01643-831495; info@edgcotthouse.co.uk; s £40, d £70-90; (P)) A 10-minute walk from the village, this beautiful 17th-century house is set in private riverside gardens. It's packed with period features, including a terracotta-tiled hallway and an amazing 15m 'Long Room' decorated with hand-painted murals. The bedrooms revel in their venerable character, so don't expect too many flat-screen TVs or designer flourishes.

**Crown Hotel** (☎ 01643-831554; www.crownhotelmoxmoor.co.uk; Chapel St; mains £13-25, s £70, d £110-140; (M) lunch & dinner; (P)) For a taste of traditional Exmoor try the Crown, where hunting prints and stags' heads preside over leather armchairs and a colour scheme of racing-green and cream. The restaurant packs a few surprises: rabbit is paired with langoustine, while the free-range chicken comes with a Madeira and truffle sauce.

## Getting There & Away

Exford is a 7-mile walk over the moors from Porlock; from Minehead it's a 10-mile hike, from Dunster it's 12 miles and from Lynton it's 15 miles.

Bus 398 from Tiverton to Minehead stops at Exford twice daily Monday to Saturday. The circular bus 400 (Exmoor Explorer) links Exford to Minehead, Dunster and Porlock twice on Saturday and Sunday between June and September, plus Tuesday and Thursday from late July to the end of August.

## LYNTON & LYNMOUTH

The attractive harbour of Lynmouth is rooted at the base of a steep, tree-lined valley, where the West Lyn River empties into the sea along Exmoor's northern coastline. Its similarity to the harbour at Boscastle (p398) is striking, and, in fact, the two harbours share more than just a common geography: like Boscastle, Lynmouth is famous for a devastating flash flood. A huge wave of water swept through Lynmouth in 1952 and the town paid a much heavier price than its Cornish cousin; 34 people lost their lives, and memory of the disaster remains strong in the village today.

Today Lynmouth is a busy tourist harbour town lined with pubs, souvenir sellers and

fudge shops. At the top of the rocky cliffs is the more genteel Victorian resort of Lynton, which can be reached via an amazing water-operated railway, or a stiff climb up the cliff path.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01598-752225; info@lyntonurism.co.uk; Lynton Town Hall, Lee Rd; (M) 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) provides a free newspaper called *Lynton & Lynmouth Scene* ([www.lyntonandlynmouthscene.co.uk](http://www.lyntonandlynmouthscene.co.uk)), which has accommodation, eating and activities listings.

There's a small **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 01598-752509; Lyndale Car Park; (M) 10am-3pm Easter-Oct) near Lynmouth harbour.

## Sights & Activities

The history of Lynmouth's flood is explored at the **Lyn & Exmoor Museum** (☎ 01598-752317; St Vincent's Cottage, Market St, Lynton; adult/child £1/20p; (M) 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Oct), which also houses some interesting archaeological finds and a collection of tools, paintings and period photos.

The **Cliff Railway** (☎ 01598-753486; www.cliffrailwaylynton.co.uk; single/return adult £1.95/2.85, child £1.10/1.85; (M) 10am-6pm Easter-Oct, later at peak times) is an extraordinary piece of Victorian engineering that was designed by George Marks, believed to be a pupil of Brunel. Two cars linked by a steel cable descend or ascend the slope according to the amount of water in the cars' tanks. It's been running like clockwork since 1890, and it's still the best way to commute between the two villages. The views aren't bad, either.

From the Lynmouth crossroads follow the signs 200m to **Glen Lyn Gorge** (☎ 01598-753207; adult/child £4/3; (M) Easter-Oct), the steepest of the two valleys into Lynmouth. There are several lovely gorge walks and a small **exhibition centre** devoted to hydroelectric power.

## WALKING

There are some beautiful short walks in and around the two villages, as well as access to some longer routes: the South West Coast Path, the Coleridge Way and the Tarka Trail all pass through Lynmouth, and it is the official starting point of the Two Moors Way.

The most popular hike is to the stunning **Valley of the Rocks**, described by poet laureate Robert Southey as 'rock reeling upon rock, stone piled upon stone, a huge terrifying reeling mass'. It's just over a mile west of Lynton, and is believed to mark the original course

of the River Lyn. Many of the tortuous rock formations have been named over the years – look out for the Devil's Cheeseering and Ragged Jack – the valley is also home to a population of feral goats.

Other popular trails wind to the light-house at **Foreland Point**, east of Lynmouth, and **Watersmeet**, 2 miles upriver from Lynmouth, where a handily placed National Trust teashop is housed in a Victorian fishing lodge.

## Sleeping

There are plenty of mid-price B&Bs dotted along Lee Rd in Lynton.

**Sea View Villa** (☎ 01598-753460; www.seaviewvilla.co.uk; 6 Summer House Path, Lynmouth; s £40, d £90-120) Adding a dash of Georgian grandeur to seaside Lynmouth, this 1721 villa makes for a supremely elegant night's kip. Egyptian cotton, Indian silk and suede fabrics grace rooms done out in 'Champagne', 'ginger' and 'vanilla'. Eggs Benedict, smoked salmon and cafetière coffee ensure the breakfast is classy, too.

**Hunters' Inn** (☎ 01598-763230; www.thehuntersinn.net; s £55-80, d £80-130) Tucked away in the heart of the heavily wooded Heddon Valley, west of Lynton, this 19th-century coaching inn is an Exmoor institution. Cosy, creaky rooms add to the atmosphere, as do views over tumbling hills and the sense of sleeping snugly somewhere in the middle of nowhere. Local ales and excellent pub grub are on offer in the welcoming, well-worn bar.

**Victoria Lodge** (☎ 01598-753203; www.victorialodge.co.uk; Lee Rd, Lynton; s £60-120, d £70-140) The rooms here positively drip with swags, pelmets and padded cushions, often in hard-to-ignore patterns – that they're named after princesses provides a clue to opulence levels. You'll also tuck into a right royal breakfast of homemade kedgeree, Victoria omelette or the enormous Exmoor Works.

**ourpick St Vincent House** (☎ 01598-752244; www.st-vincent-hotel.co.uk; Castle Hill, Lynton; d £74; P) Run by an Anglo-Belgian couple and named Hotel of the Year by Les Routiers, no less, this elegant establishment brings a dollop of class to the quiet streets of Lynton. The house once belonged to a comrade of Nelson's, and all the delightful, pared-back rooms are named after battleships from Horatio's fleet. There's a relaxed, old-world atmosphere and a spiral staircase so sweeping that you'll feel like a film star.

## Eating

**Greenhouse** (☎ 01598-753358; 6 Lee Rd; mains £9; ☎ 9am-9.30pm) Cole Porter tunes, a log-burning stove and conservatory-style dining create a cafe-cum-restaurant with gently eccentric charm. Evenings see a smooth segue from gourmet baguettes, cinnamon-scented toast and superb cream teas to supertime comfort food like pan-fried salmon with hollandaise, and crab with new potatoes.

**St Vincent Restaurant** (☎ 01598-752244; Castle Hill, Lynton; 2/3 courses £24/27; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) Part of the St Vincent House hotel (left), this cracking little eatery is the top table in town. Subdued lighting, polished wooden floors and intimate tables set the scene for dishes that fuse Mediterranean flavours with Exmoor fish and game. The Westcountry lamb with olives, tomatoes, capers and garlic is hard to resist, but leave room for the crème Catalane brûlée.

## Entertainment

**Lynton Cinema** (☎ 01598-753397; www.lyntoncinema.co.uk; Lee Rd; adult/child £4.25/2.75), This 68-seater cinema, set in a converted Methodist church, is a superbly atmospheric spot to catch the latest movies.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 300 runs from Lynmouth to Minehead (55 minutes), via Porlock (30 minutes), three to four times daily.

If you're driving, the most scenic route to Porlock is the steep, twisting road that hugs the coast all the way from Lynmouth. The scenery is worth the £2 toll, and you get to avoid the notoriously steep descent via Porlock Hill.

## PORLOCK & AROUND

The small village of Porlock is one of the prettiest on the north Exmoor coast; the huddle of thatched cottages lining its main street is framed on one side by the sea, and on the other by a jumble of houses that cling to the steeply sloping hills behind. Winding lanes lead to the picturesque breakwater of Porlock Weir, a compact collection of pubs, shops and hotels, 2 miles to the west. Coleridge's famous poem *Kubla Khan* was written during a brief sojourn in Porlock (helped along by a healthy slug of laudanum and a vicious head cold), and the villages are popular with summertime tourists, as well as walkers on the Coleridge Way and the South West Coast Path.

The village of **Selworthy**, 2½ miles southeast of Porlock, forms part of the 5060-hectare Holnicote Estate, the largest NT-owned area of land on Exmoor. Though its cob-and-thatch cottages look ancient, the village was almost entirely rebuilt in the 19th century by local philanthropist and landowner Thomas Acland, to provide accommodation for elderly workers on his estate.

Porlock's **tourist office** (☎ 01643-863150; www.porlock.co.uk; West End, High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar) is a mine of local knowledge, and is also the point of contact for information on the Coleridge Way.

For interesting artefacts and photos of the village, check to see if the tiny **Doverly Manor Museum**, housed in a pretty, 15th-century building in High St, has reopened after refurbishments.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Reines House** (☎ 01643-862913; www.reineshouse.co.uk; Parson St; s £25, d £50-54) Simplicity and bargain prices define this snug, central B&B. Expect shades of subtle cream and buttercup-yellow, tasteful scatter cushions and views of the church from the front rooms. Two rooms share bathrooms.

**Ship Inn** (☎ 01643-862507; www.shipinnporlock.co.uk; High St, Porlock; mains £7-14, s/d £40/60; ☎ lunch & dinner; (P)) Once a favoured haunt of smugglers and the poet Coleridge, this 13th-century thatched inn is still a snug spot for a pint and some great grub. Try the 'Chef's Pie of the Day' – the beef and horseradish is a triumph. The pine and faintly floral bedrooms feature all the home comforts you need after a day on the moors.

**ourpick SeaView** (☎ 01643-863456; www.seaviewporlock.co.uk; High Bank; s £27, d £50-55) You can lie in bed and gaze across Porlock Bay to the cliffs of Wales (they're only 12 miles away) in this delightful, village-centre B&B. It's crammed full of quirky charm, from art-deco bedroom furniture and distressed cabinets to a dining room dripping with oil paintings and antiques. The compact single is more like a minisuite, while the attic room looks out onto the tree-covered Porlock Hill behind. Smoked haddock, local organic eggs and dry-cured bacon make breakfast a treat.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 300 runs from Lynmouth to Porlock (30 minutes, three to four times daily) and

on to Minehead (20 minutes). Bus 39 (six daily Monday to Saturday) links Porlock to Porlock Weir (seven minutes) and Minehead (20 minutes).

## DUNSTER

Dominated by a striking russet-red castle and centred on a chaotically cobbled market square, the pretty village of Dunster can not only claim to be easy on the eye, but also architecturally interesting. It's unusual features include a medieval packhorse bridge, a 16th-century stone dovecote and a curious octagonal yarn market. In high summer it's a favourite on the coach-tour trail, but make a visit outside that time and the village is still a joy to explore.

The beautiful **St George's Church** dates mostly from the 15th century and boasts a wonderfully carved fan-vaulted roof screen. Further down the road is the **watermill** (☎ 01643-821759; Mill Lane; adult/child £3.20/1.95; ☎ 11am-4.45pm Jun-Sep, 11am-4.45pm Sat-Thu Apr, May & Oct), a working 18th-century mill.

The **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 01643-821835; Dunster Steep; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, limited hr Nov-Easter) is in the main car park.

## Dunster Castle

Although it served as a fortress for around 1000 years, present-day **Dunster Castle** (NT; ☎ 01643-821314; castle & garden adult/child £8.60/4.20, garden only £4.80/2.20; ☎ castle 11am-4.30pm mid-Mar-late Jul, Sep & Oct, to 5pm late Jul-Aug, gardens 11am-4pm Feb-mid-Mar & Nov-Jan, 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct) bears little resemblance to the original Norman stronghold. The 13th-century gateway is probably the only original part of the castle; the turrets, battlements and towers were all added later during a romantic remodelling at the hands of Victorian architects. Despite its 19th-century makeover, the castle is still an impressive sight, and is decorated with Tudor furnishings, gorgeous 17th-century plasterwork and ancestral portraits of the Luttrell family. The terraced gardens are also worth exploring, with fine views across Exmoor and the coastline, and an important national collection of strawberry trees.

## Sleeping & Eating

**ourpick Spears Cross** (☎ 01643-821439; www.spearscross.co.uk; 1 West St; s £48, d £75-85) Beam enthusiasts will be in hog-heaven in this 15th-century gem of a B&B – the bedrooms are a mass of

## MOOR ELEGANCE

**Andrews on the Weir** (☎ 01643-863300; www.andrewsontheweir.co.uk; Porlock Weir; mains £14-20, 2-course lunch £10, d £100-180; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Every meal becomes an 'experience' at this outlandishly fine restaurant-with-rooms, hovering beside the lapping waves on Porlock Weir. Local contacts (including Porlock fishermen and Exmoor farmers) help the chefs source the very best produce, from farm-reared meat to sea-fresh fish. The cuisine is classic British with a dash of Gallic panache, the atmosphere is all effortless elegance, and the tablecloths are sharp enough to cut your finger on. Classy with a capital 'C'.

burnished old-English planking and lattice-works of ancient wood and painted plaster. Posh new bathrooms and fluffy bathrobes ensure you're steeped in luxury as well as history, and breakfast is a smorgasbord of locally sourced delights – don't miss out on the sausages made from local free-range, rare-breed pork.

**Yarn Market Hotel** (☎ 01643-821425; www.yarnmarkethotel.co.uk; High St; s £60-65, d £90-100, f £120-160; 📍) Despite a historic exterior, the rooms in this small hotel are all modern identikit furniture and floral fabrics. But the suites may suit families, and wet walkers and unlucky cyclists will find the drying rooms and emergency puncture-repair kits very handy.

**Luttrell Arms** (☎ 01643-821555; www.luttrellarms.co.uk; High St; B&B d £116-150; 📍) In medieval times

this glorious old coaching inn was the guest house of the Abbots of Cleve – lucky abbots. Huge flagstones, heavy armchairs and faded tapestries dot the lounge and bar, and the lavish four-poster-bed bedrooms put some royal retreats to shame. Weekends require a two-night dinner, bed and breakfast booking (doubles £160 to £190).

**Cobblestones Cafe** (☎ 01643-821595; High St; mains £7-14; ☎ lunch Sun, Mon & Wed-Fri, dinner Sat) One for a lunchtime treat: choose to fuel your sightseeing with ham terrine, spiced potted shrimps or braised shallot and goats' cheese tart. Saturday evenings see candlelit dinners and more seriously good fare; try the sea bass or Moroccan lamb tagine.

**Reeve's Restaurant** (☎ 01643-821414; High St; mains £15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Reeve's is all rustic-chic – slim leather chairs and boxy wooden tables accompany some extremely stylish food. The menu's full of the flavours of the local moors and shores; escallop of venison sits alongside pan-seared red mullet and slow-cooked honey-glazed belly pork.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 28 runs from Minehead to Taunton via Dunster hourly Monday to Saturday, and nine times on Sunday. Bus 398 travels from Dunster to Exford (30 minutes, once daily except Sunday) and Dulverton (40 minutes, six daily except Sunday), and to Minehead (10 minutes, six daily except Sunday) in the opposite direction. Bus 398 goes to Tiverton (1½ hours, six daily).

The West Somerset Steam Railway (p361) stops at Dunster during the summer.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'