

Central Scotland



Central Scotland is less a region than a catch-all term for what comes between the Lowlands and the Highlands proper. It covers a whole gamut of terrain, from grim peaks to quiet agricultural zones, stretching across the narrow waist of the country, and including its broad eastern shoulder. The area has an enormous amount to offer with some of Scotland's most fascinating castles and stately homes, some cracking long-distance walks and cycle routes, romantic lochs and island retreats. It's also the birthplace of golf and, lest we forget, home to nearly all of Scotland's whisky distilleries.

But it's not all moody landscapes and turrets in the mist. Scotland's third- and fourth-largest cities, Aberdeen and Dundee, both have a great deal to offer, with intriguing museums, lively arts scenes and never-say-die nightlife. On the other side, however, you can trudge the hills of one-road Jura, where deer outnumber people, and feel a world away. In truth, the nature-lover is superbly catered for, with the avian paradise of Islay, the mighty Perthshire forests and the alpine landscapes around Braemar all brimming with appeal.

While there are several spots that visitors have sought for generations – Stirling's noble castle, lavish Scone Palace, romantic Loch Lomond, the sacred and magical island of Iona – there's opportunity aplenty here to explore little-known corners of Scotland. Islay enchants with its hospitality and distilleries, while Kilmartin is the cradle of modern Scotland. The valley of Glen Lyon was viewed by the ancients as a gateway to the spirit land and retains a marvellous otherworldly ambience, while the vertiginous harbour hamlet of Pennan seems to defy the sea that laps at its doorsteps.

HIGHLIGHTS

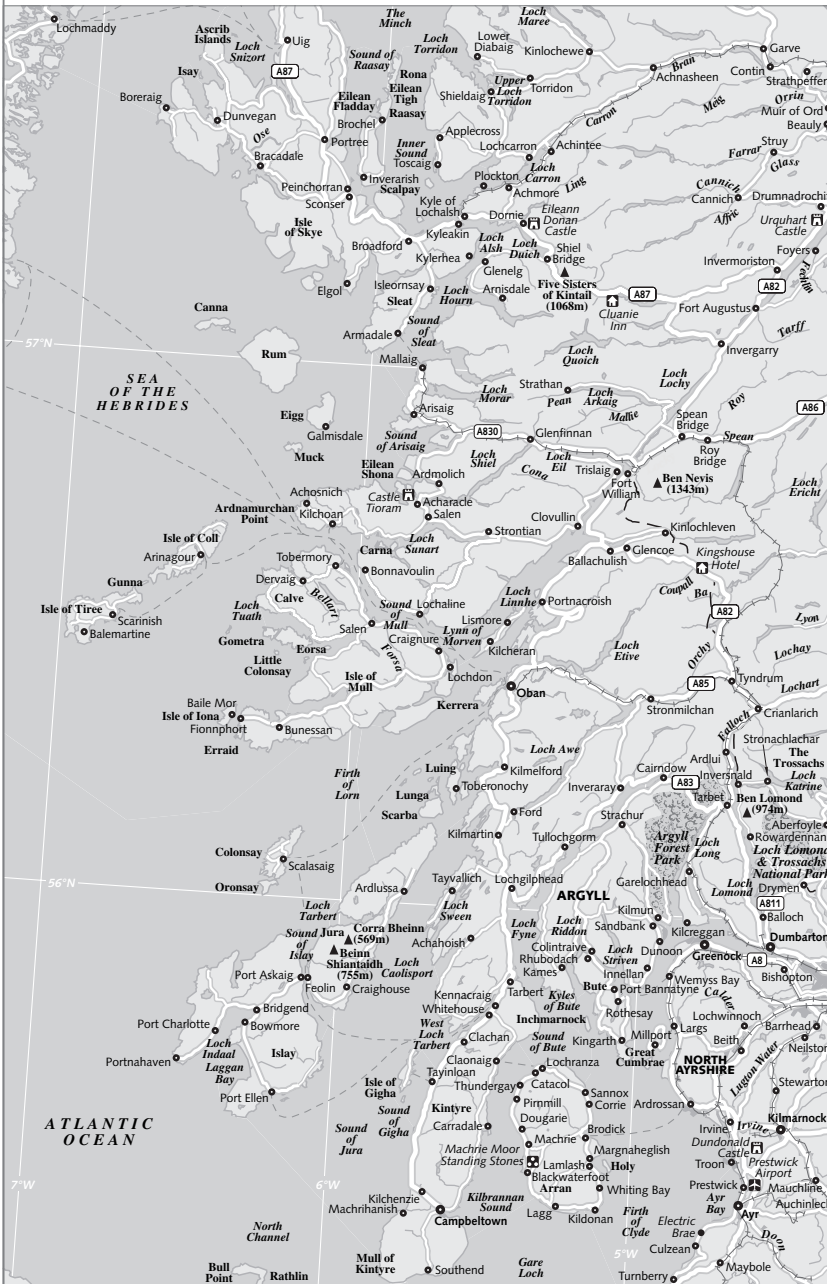
- Winding your way up Perthshire's epic **Glen Lyon** (p859), gateway to a faerie land
- Exploring friendly **Islay** (p829), Scotland's whisky paradise
- Relaxing in the spiritual calm of **Iona** (p837), Scotland's holy island
- Mounting a raid on **Stirling Castle** (p839): hold it and you hold the country
- Walking the **West Highland Way** (p824) along the Bonnie Bonnie banks of Loch Lomond
- Strutting with the peacocks at gorgeous **Scone Palace** (p854) where once kings were crowned



■ POPULATION: 1.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 10,480 SQ MILES

CENTRAL SCOTLAND



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Activities

CYCLING

Long-distance touring routes in Central Scotland include much of the 214-mile northern section of the **Lochs & Glens Cycle Way**. It starts in Glasgow, and winds its way through the region's heart via Pitlochry to Inverness, and includes some wonderful traffic-free sections (see p826).

For shorter rides, the western part of central Scotland offers the islands of Islay, Jura and Mull – all ideally explored by bike for a day or longer. If you don't have your own wheels, bikes can be hired on Mull or Islay.

A great island tour might start with a **circuit of Arran**. From here, take a ferry to the Kintyre Peninsula and loop down to Campbeltown. Then head to Islay and Jura, before returning to the mainland, reaching the port of Oban and taking another ferry to Mull. If you still have time, another ferry from Mull takes you back to the mainland at Kilchoan, from where you can reach Mallaig.

In the southeast part of this region, Fife takes cycling very seriously, and the local tourist authority has produced several maps and leaflets detailing cycle routes in this area (www.fife-cycleways.co.uk). There are only a few steep hills here, and the country roads are fairly quiet.

Another worthwhile route, **National Cycle Network Route 77**, heads out westwards from Dundee, taking in Perth and Dunkeld on the way to Pitlochry (55 miles). You get up close and personal with some fabulous Perthshire scenery.

Check out www.visitscotland.com/cycling for more details and further routes in the region.

WALKING

One of Britain's best-known long-distance walks, the **West Highland Way** (www.west-highland-way.co.uk) runs through the western part of the region. It starts just outside Glasgow and covers 95 miles of path and track through the mountains and glens, via Loch Lomond and Rannoch Moor, to finish at Fort William. It takes about a week.

The 84-mile **Speyside Way** (www.speysideway.org) is a very worthwhile and picturesque route that begins in Aviemore in the Cairngorms and heads through lush green whisky country before reaching the coast at Spey Bay and turning east to Banff. Much of the route takes

you along a peaceful disused railway line well away from traffic.

One of the most challenging islands to walk is Jura, whose centre is dominated by the rugged Paps.

The central part of the region is dominated by the Grampian and Cairngorm mountain ranges. These high and wild areas tend to be favoured by serious walkers, but there are opportunities for easier strolls and rambles too. Good bases include the highland settlements of Pitlochry and Braemar.

Getting Around

BOAT

Ferries to the Hebridean islands off the west coast are mostly run by **Caledonian MacBrayne** (Cal-Mac; ☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk). Most routes depart from Oban. If you plan to island hop, you'll save money with an Island Hopscoth ticket. A popular route leaves from Ardrossan and includes the ferry to Arran, on to the Kintyre peninsula and thence to Islay, returning to Kennacraig (or to Oban for a small additional cost). This costs £22.45 for passengers and £119 for a vehicle – a saving of over 20%.

There are also Island Rover Passes covering the whole system. Available for eight/15 consecutive days, these can be great value, costing £49.50/72 for passengers and £238/357 for vehicles. Bicycles travel free on this pass, but remember that you'll need to book your car space a few days in advance on the busier routes.

BUS

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) links the main towns in the area. Bus transport around the northeast coast is reasonable – **Stagecoach Bluebird** (☎ 01224-591381; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main operator of local services. **Postbuses** (☎ 08457-740740; www.postbus.royalmail.com) serves remote communities, charging on average £2 to £5 for single journeys.

TRAIN

There are three north-south lines, connected by a fourth running northeast from Glasgow to Aberdeen via Dundee. These include the West Highland line, Britain's most spectacular rail journey, running from Glasgow to Fort William and Mallaig. East-west travel usually involves backtracking to Glasgow.

The Central Scotland Rover pass allows unlimited travel for three days in a seven-day period on First ScotRail trains between Edin-

burgh and Glasgow and the Fife and Stirling areas. It costs £31 and is available from all train stations. A few conditions apply.

ARGYLL & BUTE

The ancient region of Argyll makes cartographers sweat, with its dramatically contorted coastline – fjordlike sea lochs lacerate the coast, their surfaces reflecting the weather's moods. Because of this, places such as the Mull of Kintyre, not so far from Glasgow as the crow flies, can seem impossibly remote. This same remoteness gives the islands hereabouts a timeless, special quality – locals are fond of saying that it 'takes longer to get to Jura than to Peru'.

Islay reverberates with the names of the heavyweights of the whisky world, with Ardbeg, Laphroaig, and Lagavulin among its pantheon. While exploring their peaty depths you can enjoy one of Scotland's most hospitable islands. Opposite, Jura is the remote getaway on which Orwell chose to pen *1984*.

Further north, romantically beautiful Mull is deservedly popular, and is the gateway to Iona, the magical emerald island where Macbeth, among other kings, is buried. They, along with more remote Coll and Tiree, are reached from the port of Oban. South and east of here, easily accessible from Glasgow, are the 'bonnie bonnie banks' of Loch Lomond, part of Scotland's first national park, majestic Loch Fyne, and Kilmartin Glen, which bristles with prehistoric sites.

LOCH LOMOND & TROSSACHS NATIONAL PARK

Scotland's first national park was created in 2002 with the aim of protecting two of Scotland's heaviest visited areas. The park is effectively two distinct neighbouring areas, with the Trossachs most easily accessed from Stirling and the western half centred on giant Loch Lomond, on Glasgow's northern doorstep.

Loch Lomond is a lake of two halves. The busy A82 runs along its western edge, and a huge influx of day-trippers descend on Balloch and the nearby lakeshores. The more isolated eastern shore is better territory for exploration. The road only runs as far as Rowardennan; beyond there the West Highland Way follows the shore through beautiful woodland. In general, the whole area is more sedate in spring or autumn, which are good times to visit.

The lake, Britain's largest, was formed by the action of glaciers, and lay at the junction of the three ancient Scottish kingdoms of Strathclyde, Dalriada and Pictland. Standing guard over the loch is Ben Lomond (974m) on the east coast.

Information & Orientation

The wedge-shaped loch runs 22 miles north from the town of Balloch, where you'll find the main gateway centre for the park. **Loch Lomond Shores** (☎ 01389-721500; www.lochlomond-trossachs.org; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿ ♻️) is a hideous Frankenstein's monster of retail, a chain aquarium, and audiovisual entertainment (a short film taking you under the waters of the lake, and a longer, romanticised account of the region's history) with a parking area the size of a small European nation. Although its purpose is highly questionable (national parks being designed to protect the countryside from this sort of crass commercialism) it has all the necessary information on the park itself.

As well as the gateway centre, there are tourist offices in **Balloch** (☎ 0870 720 0607; Balloch Rd; ☎ Apr-Oct); **Drymen** (☎ 0870 720 0611; ☎ May-Sep), in the library on the square; and **Tarbert** (☎ 0870 720 0623; Main St; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct).

Activities

The national park organises a whole range of summer activities, from guided walks to archery displays. Ask for a current schedule from tourist offices.

BOAT TRIPS

The main centre for boat trips is Balloch, where, among others, **Sweeney's Cruises** (☎ 01389-752376; www.sweeney.uk.com) offers a wide range of trips from £5.50 an hour. There's a 2½-hour cruise (£8) to the village of Luss, allowing 30 minutes ashore. It also runs trips from the dock at Loch Lomond Shores.

WALKING & CYCLING

The big walk is the West Highland Way (opposite) but it's easy to access parts of the trail for shorter walks. From Rowardennan you can tackle **Ben Lomond** (974m), a popular five- to six-hour round-trip. The route begins from the car park by the Rowardennan Hotel, and you can return via Ptarmigan (731m) for good views of the loch.

A couple of fulfilling woodland walks leave from the village of Balmaha on the eastern

shore of the loch. The **Millennium Forest Path** is a 40-minute introduction to the tree and plant life of the area, with gentle information on species. A longer stroll is the three-hour ascent of **Conic Hill**, which rewards with fantastic views along the loch.

The main cycle route is the **Lochs & Glens Cycle Way**, which reaches the loch at Balloch. Most of the route is set back to the east of the loch, through the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park. In summer, stick to the quieter, older roads beside the A82.

Sleeping & Eating

WESTERN SHORE

Loch Lomond SYHA (☎ 01389-850226; www.syha.org.uk; Arden; dm £15; ☞ Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) It's hard to believe this imposing mansion, sitting on a hillside 2 miles north of Balloch, is a hostel – but it is, and a great one, too. With heaps of space, loch views, good twin and family rooms, and excellent facilities, not to mention the luxury of being in a palace, it gets heavily booked up. Aficionados of the paranormal should grab one of the tower rooms as they are said to be haunted by the ghost of a young heers who tragically fell out a window.

Drover's Inn (☎ 01301-704234; www.thedroversinn.co.uk; Inverarnan; bar meals £6-9; Ⓟ) This historic inn at the northern end of the loch shouldn't be missed. Fully three centuries old, it oozes character and oddness, with kilt-wearing staff, a menagerie of stuffed animals, and a palpable sense that it hasn't changed a jot since Rob Roy dropped in for a pint. The rooms (single/double £30/58) are in the same vein (faded but characterful); on the other hand, modern en-suite rooms are available across the road, some with Jacuzzis (£90 to £110).

EASTERN SHORE

Our pick Rowardennan SYHA (☎ 01360-870259; www.syha.org.uk; Rowardennan; dm £13.50; ☞ Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) At the end of the road on the east side of the loch, this super hostel is an elegant ex-hunting lodge right by the lake. It's a cracking place to stay, whether as a base for climbing Ben Lomond, a stop on the West Highland Way or a relaxing retreat. It's a remarkably friendly place with a great vibe and top facilities, including a kitchen and a huge lounge with windows overlooking Loch Lomond.

Inversnaid Bunkhouse (☎ 702970; www.inversnaid.com; Inversnaid; dm £16; ☞ Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) This remote hostel is an appealing spot in a con-

verted church, a quarter of a mile from the lake. It's on the West Highland Way but can only be accessed by road via Aberfoyle in the Trossachs. It's a relaxing place perfect for weary walkers; for sore feet, you can't beat a Jacuzzi and fine selection of real ale.

Oak Tree Inn (☎ 01360-870357; www.oak-tree-inn.co.uk; Balmaha; s/d £50/70; Ⓟ) This is a top spot in quiet Balmaha, and a haven for walkers, travellers and locals alike. It has eight good rooms as well as a cheaper bunkroom (£25 per person). Downstairs is a convivial pub, plenty of outdoor tables, and good food (from noon to 9pm), which ranges from pizzas to various incarnations of char, a local whitefish.

Getting There & Away

Citylink buses link Glasgow with Balloch (40 minutes, nine daily) and continue up the west coast to Luss and Tarbert; some bus services continue to Ardlui (1¼ hours). Buses run eight to 10 times daily from Balloch Station via Drymen to Balmaha (30 minutes).

There are two railway lines. From Glasgow, one serves Balloch (35 minutes, half-hourly); the other is the West Highland Line to Oban and Fort William (two to five daily), which follows the loch from Tarbert to Ardlui (£8.80).

INVERARAY

☎ 01499 / pop 510

Little Inveraray enjoys a privileged location on the shores of Loch Fyne, and its pretty whitewashed buildings, almost blindingly bright on a sunny day, ensure that it's well established on the coach-tour circuit. It can be somewhat overrun during the day in summer, but remains a peaceful spot off-season, and has several entertaining attractions.

Inveraray is a fine example of a planned town, built by the Duke of Argyll when he revamped his castle in the 18th century. The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0616; Front St; ☞ daily) is beside the spectacularly beautiful loch.

Sights

INVERARAY CASTLE

Half a mile north of the town, **Inveraray Castle** (☎ 302203; www.inveraray-castle.com; admission £5.95; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2pm-5.45pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 1-5.45pm Sun Apr-May & Oct, 10am-5.45pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.45pm Sun Jun-Sep) has been the seat of the chiefs of Clan Campbell, the dukes of Argyll, since the 15th century. The current 18th-century building includes whimsical turrets and fake battle-

ments. Inside is the armoury hall, whose walls are patterned with more than 1000 pole arms, dirks and Lochaber axes, many of which were stuck into Catholics during the Jacobite rebellions. The dining and drawing rooms have ornate ceilings and there's a collection of porcelain. Last admissions at 5pm.

INVERARAY JAIL

The Georgian courthouse and **jail** (☎ 302381; Church Sq; adult/child £6.25/3.15; ☞ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is an award-winning, interactive tourist attraction. You can sit in on a trial, try out a cell and discover the harsh torture meted out to unfortunate souls in the 16th and 17th centuries, or learn about the many who were transported to Australia in the 19th century for minor crimes such as stealing a loaf of bread. It's a good one for the family. Last admissions one hour before closing.

Sleeping & Eating

Inveraray SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1125; www.syha.org.uk; Dalmally Rd; dm £12; ☞ 7-10.30am & 5-11.30pm Apr-Sep; Ⓟ) Located in a cosy modern bungalow 200m from the lochside, up the road to Dalmally, this is a handy spot with a kitchen and lounge. Accommodation is mostly in decent four-berth bunk dormitories (there are some two-berth rooms); at time of writing access was permitted in the middle of the day, but check that that is still the case.

George Hotel (☎ 302111; www.thegeorgehotel.co.uk; Main St East; s/d £35/70, superior d £85-135; Ⓟ) The renovation of the rooms in this stately old hotel is impressive indeed; they are all different and boast a wealth of period furniture,

quirky Scottish features, and comfortable beds, some in the four-poster class. It's all pretty good value, and there's a characterful pub and restaurant downstairs.

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar (☎ 600236; Cairndow; mains £8-15, 12 oysters £11.50; ☞ 9am-7.30pm Nov-Easter, 9am-8pm Easter-Oct; Ⓟ) Although now encompassing a couple of dozen restaurants throughout the UK, this is the original, 6 miles north of Inveraray on the A83. It hit the headlines in 2004 as MPs Gordon Brown and John Prescott planned intrigues here; they knew what they were doing, as the seafood is of the highest quality – unpretentious, and good value, with sublime smoked salmon and oysters in particular. In the same building is an excellent seafood shop and deli.

Getting There & Away

From Glasgow, Citylink buses travel to Inveraray (£8, 1¼ hours, five to six daily), some continuing to Tarbert and Campbeltown. There are also buses between Inveraray and Oban (£6.70, one hour, two to three daily).

KILMARTIN GLEN

☎ 01546 / pop 490

This magical glen is a comparatively little-known highlight of Scotland. It's the heart of one of Scotland's most concentrated areas of prehistoric sites. Burial cairns, stone circles and hill forts litter the countryside. Irish invaders founded Dalriada and formed the kingdom of Alba here, which eventually united a large part of Scotland.

The **Museum of Ancient Culture** (☎ 510278; www.kilmartin.org; Kilmartin; adult/child £4.60/1.50; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Mar-mid-Dec; Ⓟ) is a fascinating centre

SCOTLAND'S BIRTHPLACE

The oldest monuments in Kilmartin Glen date from around 5000 years ago and comprise a linear cemetery of **burial cairns**, running south of Kilmartin village for 1.5 miles. There are also two stone circles at **Temple Wood**, three-quarters of a mile southwest of Kilmartin. Although not much remains now, the stones are in a surreal setting surrounded by farmland. Four miles north of Lochgilphead, at **Achnabreck**, elaborate cup-and-ring designs cut into rock faces resemble ripples caused by a pebble breaking the surface of a pond. The site has been described as 'one of the most extensive early rock carvings in Britain' and has outstanding views over Loch Fyne.

The hill fort of **Dunadd**, 4 miles north of Lochgilphead, was the royal residence of the first kings of Dalriada, and was probably where the Stone of Destiny, used in the investiture ceremony, was located. The faint rock carvings – an ogham inscription (ancient script), a wild boar and a footprint – were probably used in some kind of inauguration ceremony. The fort overlooks farmland and the boggy plain that is now the **Moine Mhor Nature Reserve**. Clamber to the top of the fort and you'll gaze upon the same countryside as the ancient kings did thousands of years ago. Be careful when it's wet – it gets slippery.

for archaeology and landscape interpretation, with artefacts from the sites, reconstructions, interactive displays and guided tours. There's an excellent selection of information, books and souvenirs in the shop, too, and a fine café-restaurant. It's one of Scotland's best museums, and there's always something new and interesting going on, whether it be talks, guided walks, or something aimed at the kids. Don't miss the toilets, complete with darting swallows! In Kilmartin **churchyard** beside the museum there are some 10th-century Celtic crosses.

In Kilmartin itself, there's a hotel-pub and a couple of B&Bs. There are many more accommodation choices in the surrounding villages too; the museum can locate them for you on a map. See also the boxed text, p833. **Burndale** (☎ 510 235; alan-hawkins@burndale-kilmartin.freemove.co.uk; Kilmartin; s/d £30/52; Ⓟ) is a pleasant B&B with a garden in Kilmartin village. It's run by a cheery soul and is on the north side of town on the main road. By far the best place to eat is the **Glebe Cairn Café & Restaurant** (☎ 510 278; Kilmartin Museum; soup & sandwich £4.95, mains £9-12; ☎ 10am-5pm daily, 7-9pm Thu-Sat) which serves up wholesome café fare during the day and classy, good-value main meals for dinner (book ahead), served in an enchanting wooden conservatory with views over the ancient cairn below.

Getting There & Away

West Coast Motors (☎ 01586-552319) run buses every couple of hours between Lochgilphead (15 minutes) and Oban (one hour 15 minutes), stopping in Kilmartin. In Lochgilphead, you can connect with Citylink services to Inveraray and Glasgow.

KINTYRE PENINSULA

Almost an island, the Kintyre Peninsula has only a narrow strand connecting it to the wooded hills of Knapdale at Tarbert. Magnus Barefoot the Viking, who was allowed to claim any island he circumnavigated, made his men drag their longship across this strand to validate his claim.

Tarbert

Tarbert, in the peninsula's north, is the gateway to Kintyre and a pretty fishing village with colourful buildings strung along the harbour. The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0624; Harbour St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct) has internet access (per hour £3). Above the town is a small, crumbling **castle** built by Robert the Bruce.

Tarbert makes a good stop for a night. On the waterfront, the **Anchor Hotel** (☎ 01880-820 577; www.lochfyne-scotland.co.uk; Harbour St; s/d £35/50) has colourful, quirkily decorated rooms and large, attractive beds. There's good food here, but you might also head around the harbour to the friendly, bright-yellow **Victoria Hotel** (Barmore Rd; mains £8-17; ☎ food noon-3pm & 6-9pm), which has generous portions served in an attractive conservatory dining area looking out over the water.

South of Tarbert are two CalMac ferry terminals: **Kennacraig** for Port Askaig and Port Ellen (per person/car return £13.80/73, two hours) on Islay; and **Claonaig** for Lochranza (per person/car return £7.70/35, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily late March to late October) on the north of Arran.

Isle of Gigha

From Tayinloan on the west coast there are ferries (per person/car return £5.40/20.25, 20 minutes, six to 10 daily on the hour) to the **Isle of Gigha** (www.isle-of-gigha.co.uk, pronounced *ghee-a*, a flat island 7 miles long by about 1 mile wide. Recently bought from its original owner by the residents themselves, it's known for its sandy beaches and the subtropical **Achamore Gardens** (recommended donation £2; ☎ dawn-dusk). The **Gigha Hotel** (☎ 01583-505254; s/d £47.50/79; Ⓟ) has a good restaurant and lively bar.

Campbeltown

☎ 01586 / pop 5150

The journey down to Campbeltown contrasts rolling green farmland with surf-pounded beaches. The weather can change by the minute, and you feel right on the ramparts of mainland Britain. Campbeltown was in its prime in the late 19th century, but is impressively situated around a small loch surrounded by hills. The **tourist office** (☎ 552056; McKinnon House, The Pier; ☎ daily Easter-Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) is a friendly place where you'll probably get to hear some town gossip. There were once dozens of whisky distilleries here – and the Campbeltown style is distinct – but now there are just three. You can visit **Springbank** (☎ 552085; Longrow; admission £4; ☎ 2pm by arrangement Mon-Fri), which, despite being a small-scale, personal operation, does its own malting and bottling. Famous former Kintyre residents include Paul and Linda McCartney; Linda has been commemorated with a small memorial garden, entered through the **library-museum** (☎ 552367; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat), which also

has several free internet terminals. Beyond Campbeltown, a narrow, winding road leads to the **Mull of Kintyre**, popularised by McCartney's song of the same name – and the mist does indeed roll in.

Mull of Kintyre Sealtours (☎ 0870 720 0609; www.mull-of-kintyre.co.uk) runs wildlife-spotting trips from Campbeltown and can also transport you across to Ayr or nearby Northern Ireland.

Campbeltown is linked by Citylink buses to Glasgow (£13.80, four hours, three daily).

ISLE OF ISLAY

☎ 01496 / pop 3460 / elev 76m

An enchantingly friendly place, Islay is the proud home of several of the world's best whiskies and is the best place in Scotland to learn about the drink and visit distilleries. If that doesn't tempt you, then the birdlife, fine seafood, clear water, and basking seals might. Although not as scenic as the more visited islands, Islay (*eye-lah*) is one of the most appealing destinations on the west coast; life here revolves around the distilleries, of which there are currently eight active. Many of them are legendary for their peatiness and

their names reverberate on the tongue like a pantheon of Celtic deities. There's a notably different atmosphere on this island, a cheerier feel that locals attribute to the lowish rainfall but perhaps has more to do with malt. A wave or cheerio to passers-by is mandatory here and another small delight. You're much better visiting the island during the week, as most of the distilleries shut at weekends.

Orientation

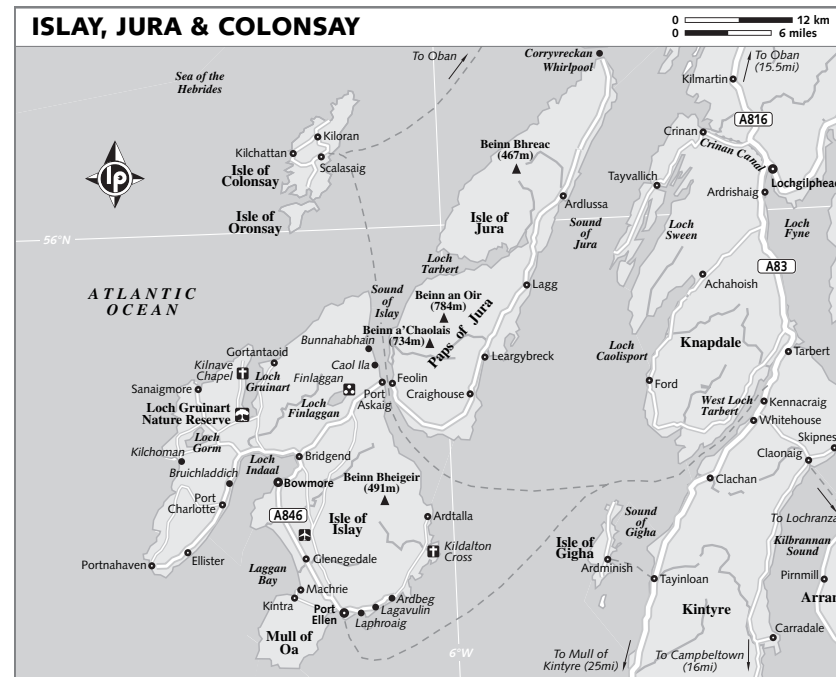
There are two ferry terminals, both served from Kennacraig on Kintyre. Port Askaig stares across at mountainous Jura from the east of Islay, while in the south is the larger Port Ellen, with three distilleries nearby. Across Loch Indaal is the attractive village of Port Charlotte. The capital, Bowmore, is in the centre of the island.

Information

Ileach (☎ 810355; Main St, Bowmore; per hr £3;

☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) Internet access at the office of the island's newspaper.

McTaggart Community CyberCafe (30 Mansfield Pl, Port Ellen; per hr £1; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm



Sun) Youth centre with several computers and a hexagonal pool table.

Tourist office (☎ 810254; The Sq, Bowmore; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) Helpful and friendly.

Sights & Activities

Eight **whisky distilleries** welcome visitors for guided tours. Most tours cost £3 to £5 and some are by appointment only. Most are only open Monday to Friday; Bruichladdich is open Saturdays, as are Bowmore and Kilchoman, which also open Sundays in July and August. Many of Islay's whiskies have a distinctive peaty taste; a quality particularly acute at the southerly distilleries of Ardbeg, Lagavulin and Laphroaig. By far the most charming to visit is **Bruichladdich** (☎ 850190; www.bruichladdich.com; tour £4) pronounced brook-laddie, located near Port Charlotte. It is one of Scotland's few distilleries to be independently owned. The enthusiasm here is palpable, and the refusal to compromise on quality is evident in its award-winning whiskies, which are fresh and light-bodied (although there's much experimentation going on here and always some intriguing new bottling being plotted). If you're going to visit any distillery in Scotland, make this the one. Tours are at 10.30am, 11.30am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday, and at 10.30am and 2.30pm Saturday. To get there, take a Port Charlotte-bound bus and jump off when you see the distinctive turquoise gates of the distillery. Drivers be warned, the complimentary dram(s) can be generous.

Another charmer is **Ardbeg** (☎ 302244; www.ardbeg.com; tour £4) which runs tours Monday to Friday; ring for times.

Not far away, the recently opened **Kilchoman** (☎ 850011; www.kilchomandistillery.com; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) is a farm distillery that aims to produce high-quality whisky using primarily its own barley, which is also malted here. It's worth visiting, although the first whisky won't be ready to drink until 2010 or so. There's a good-quality gift shop and café here, as well as a great farm-produce shop. Also here is the **Rockside Farm Trekking Centre** (☎ 850231), which will take you on horseback for an hour (£12) or, better, 2½ hours (£22), which takes you along the spectacular sands of Machir Bay.

There are Bronze Age relics, an illicit still, memorabilia and countless human stories relating Islay's long history at the quirky **Mu-**

seum of Islay Life (☎ 850358; Port Charlotte; adult/child £2.50/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, call for winter opening).

Islay was an early focus for Christianity. The exceptional 8th-century **Kildalton Cross** at Kildalton Chapel, 8 miles northeast of Port Ellen, is one of Scotland's few remaining Celtic high crosses.

In the capital, Bowmore, the **Round Church** was built in 1767 in this unusual shape to ensure the devil had no corners to hide in. He's more likely to be found in one of the distilleries.

More than 250 recorded bird species make Islay wonderful for **bird-watching**. It's an important wintering ground for white-fronted and barnacle geese, which outnumber the leechs 10 to one; local farms are hard hit when the squadrons land. For **seal-spotting**, you can't do better than at Portnahaven, at the island's southwestern tip. There are frequently dozens of the portly beasts basking in the small harbour.

Festivals & Events

The **Islay Festival of Malt & Music** in early June is a wonderful time to visit, but you'll need to book accommodation months in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

Distillery House (☎ 850495; mamak@btinternet.com; Port Charlotte; per person £25; ☎) The former Lochindaal distillery is now an excellent B&B run by a charming local couple who provide very homely and comfortable rooms and cheery service. Rooms have private bathroom, while an attractive new room with en suite has its own access. Happily, the owners also make cracking marmalade, jams, and oatcakes: nightmare eh? It's got no sign but is opposite the Islay SYHA hostel.

Lambeth Guest House (☎ 810597; lambethguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk; Jamieson St, Bowmore; B&B without bathroom per person £25) This is a great place to stay in Bowmore, just off the main street. You'll soon realise why the island has such a reputation for hospitality. Rooms are comfy and share good facilities (although they may be en suite by the time you arrive), and it feels like you're staying with friends. Breakfast is extremely tasty; you can also get a great home-cooked two-course dinner here for just £7.50.

Glenmachrie Guesthouse (☎ 302560; www.glenmachrie.com; s/d £60/90; ☎) This peaceful and friendly farmhouse (including Highland cat-

tle) is on the main road 4 miles north of Port Ellen, just south of the island's tiny airport. The owners know bucketloads about the island, and put on fabulous dinners – they use fresh local produce and can offer vegetarian on request. The breakfast is memorably good!

our pick Harbour Inn (☎ 810330; www.harbour-inn.com; Bowmore; s/d from £65/95) An absolute star on both the sleeping and eating fronts, this hospitable and courteous hotel overlooks Loch Indaal in the heart of Bowmore. Its rooms, which must be booked in advance (no single rates available over summer) are furnished attractively in light-wood furniture and are large and supremely comfortable. The classy restaurant (mains £16 to £23; open for lunch and dinner) showcases the very best of local game and seafood – the scallops are sensational – beautifully presented and served. Sip a whisky in the cane-furnished lounge while your food is prepared.

Bowmore Distillery Cottages (☎ 810671; www.bowmore.com; School St, Bowmore; cottage per night £60-250) These five charming self-catering cottages are situated in and around Bowmore distillery in the heart of the main town and are available for nightly or weekly rental. They vary widely in size; the petite Mashman's Cottage has just one bedroom, while the Old Bakery sleeps up to a baker's dozen. All are attractively furnished and have good facilities and varied charms; they are surprisingly well-priced and should usually be booked well ahead.

An Tigh Seinnse (☎ 860224; Portnahaven; dishes £6-15; ☎ food noon-8pm) This is an exceedingly good spot at the island's southwestern tip, by the little harbour where the seals flop on the rocks. It's a cosy pub with outdoor seating, and is run by friendly folk who produce a range of very tasty Aga-cooked food, with changing specials that vary from cheerful snacks to gourmet plates. Plenty of vegetarian options. Locals still usually call it 'Maureen's'.

Other recommendations:

Islay SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1128; www.syha.org.uk; Port Charlotte; dm £11.50; ☎ Apr-Oct) Clean. Well located. Somewhat gruff.

Lochside Hotel (☎ 810244; 19 Shore St, Bowmore; mains £5-8) Every whisky buff should pop in; there are around 400 malts on offer, with all sorts of rare bottlings. Decent bar meals and regular live music.

Port Charlotte Hotel (☎ 850360; Port Charlotte; mains £12-23; ☎ bar food noon-2pm & 5.30-8pm, dinner 6.30-9pm; ☎) Classy Scottish cuisine, including good veg options, conservatory seating, and a cosy bar with a great selection of malts.

Getting There & Away

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) operates one to three flights per day from Glasgow to Islay (£60 to £150, 40 minutes).

CalMac has a ferry from Kennacraig to Port Ellen and another to Port Askaig (both per person/car return £13.80/73, 2¼ hours). They operate daily but on Sunday there is a ferry to Port Ellen only. Citylink buses from Glasgow connect with the ferry at Kennacraig. In summer there is a ferry on Wednesday between Port Askaig and Colonsay (per person/car one way £4.30/22.30, 1¼ hours) and on to Oban.

Getting Around

Islay Coaches (☎ 840273) and postbuses operate frequent services from Monday to Saturday (plus one Sunday service April to October) between all the main towns and villages. You'll probably need a taxi if you're doing serious distillery investigation – call **Lamont** (☎ 07899 756159), a larger-than-life character who clocks up 45,000 miles a year on this tiny island.

Islay's size makes it ideal to explore by bike and **Bowmore post office** (☎ 810366; Main St; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) hires out mountain bikes for £10 per day.

ISLE OF JURA

☎ 01496 / pop 200 / elev 132m

The island where George Orwell wrote *1984* has a far higher population of deer than of people, who are outnumbered more than 30 to one. Almost treeless, it looms over the eastern end of Islay with fascinating menace. It's a walkers' paradise, with a wild landscape dominated by the island's stark, brooding peaks, the Paps of Jura (named for their breastlike shape). If you're not a hiker, there is little else to do, apart from visiting the **Isle of Jura Distillery** (☎ 820240; ☎ tours 11am & 2pm Mon-Fri by appointment) in Craighouse, the island's only village. Orwell stayed in a cottage, **Barnhill** (☎ 01786-850274; per week from £450), at the far north of the island. If you're a fan or, like him, appreciate remote places, you may want to rent it – it sleeps eight.

Walking

The **Paps of Jura** provide a tough hill walk that requires good navigational skills and takes eight hours. Look out for adders – the island is infested with them, but they're shy snakes that'll move away as you approach.

A good place to start is by the bridge over the River Corran, about 3 miles north of

Craighouse. The first pap you reach is Beinn a' Chaolais (734m), then Beinn an Oir (784m) and finally Beinn Shiantaidh (755m). Most people also climb Corra Bheinn (569m) before joining the path that crosses the island to descend to the road.

Sleeping & Eating

Jura Hotel (☎ 820243; www.jurahotel.co.uk; Craighouse; s/d £58/88, without bathroom £45/72; 📍) This family-run hotel opposite the distillery is a great place to stay and *the* place for a drink. The rooms at the front have fantastic views, but cost extra. There's good pub grub and excellent evening meals using local produce.

Getting There & Away

Jura is accessed via Islay. A small car ferry shuttles the five minutes between Port Askaig and Feolin (per person/car day-return £2.50/11) roughly hourly from Monday to Saturday, with six services on Sunday. A **bus service** (☎ 820314) runs three to five times a day from the ferry to Craighouse and to the north of the island. It meets some ferries, but some journeys are by request only, so call the day before.

ISLE OF COLONSAY

☎ 01951 / pop 110

Remote Colonsay is a delight, with unspoilt, lush green fields bordered by a rocky coastline and perilous cliffs, and superb beaches backed by machair and woodland. The island is in fact home to one of the most spectacular beaches in the Hebrides at **Kiloran Bay**, where Atlantic rollers thunder onto pure golden sands.

It's worth a stroll around the lovely subtropical gardens of **Colonsay House** (admission free; 📍 walled garden noon-5pm Wed & 3-5pm Fri Easter-Sep), in Kiloran, known for their rhododendrons. Discreet wandering in the rest of the estate is allowed at times other than the ones given for the walled garden. Bring that midge repellent!

Grey seals are often seen around the coast and wild goats inhabit some of the neighbouring islets. At low tide you can walk across the strand to the small **Isle of Oronsay**, to the south, where the ruins of the priory date from the 14th century.

Sleeping & Eating

Colonsay Keeper's Lodge (☎ 200312; dm/tw £12/28; 📍) In a great location on the edge of the ground of Colonsay House in a former game-keeper's lodge near Loch Fada in Kiloran, this

bunkhouse is a 30-minute walk from the ferry. The kitchen is well equipped and the lodge hires out bikes for £5 per day.

Isle of Colonsay Hotel (☎ 200316; www.colonsay.org.uk; Scalasaig; s/£50, d/£85-95; 📍 ring ahead for winter opening) A 500m walk straight ahead from the ferry, the island's main hostelry is a plush 18th-century place with well-appointed rooms, some with lovely views and four-post beds. Its bistro serves bar meals and the more upmarket restaurant (mains £15 to £20) serves excellent Scottish cuisine, including a formidable 'Braveheart' sirloin topped with haggis and mustard.

Getting There & Away

CalMac has ferries to Scalasaig from Oban (per person/car £11.40/55, 2½ hours) three to four times a week. In summer, there's an additional (Wednesday) sailing to Colonsay from Islay's Port Askaig (per person/car £4.30/22.30, 1¼ hours) and from Kennacraig on the Kintyre Peninsula (per person/car £11.40/55, 3½ hours). This sailing enables a day trip to Colonsay from Islay, with about six hours on the island. Timetables for these services change regularly, so check before making plans.

OBAN

☎ 01631 / pop 8120 / elev 64m

Oban sits on a delightful bay with sweeping views, and is a major point of departure for the Inner Hebrides, particularly Mull. In summer, it can be a little jammed, with the main street packed solid with traffic, but head a couple of miles out of town either way, and you can appreciate the beautiful coastal scenery without the crowds. The town itself hasn't got a huge amount to offer, but is attractively Victorian, all turrets and step gables, and has enough places to stay and eat to make it a decent stop for a night.

Orientation

The ferry terminal is at the southern end of town, next to the train station. North of here, the town is centred on George St, which runs north-south along the harbour. Most of the accommodation is at the northern end of town.

Information

Fancy That (☎ 562996; 108 George St; per hr £2;

📍 9am-5pm, to 9pm summer) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 563122; info@oban.org.uk; Argyll Sq; 📍 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 9am-7pm May-Sep) Helpful, busy and very well-stocked.

Sights & Activities

In the heart of town, corporate **Oban Distillery** (☎ 572004; Stafford St; tours £5; 📍 Mon-Fri Feb-Mar & Nov-Dec, Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Oct, daily Jul-Sep), offers a tour and has been producing tasty Oban single malt whisky since 1794.

Atop the hill in town is **McCaig's Folly**, a curious Victorian recreation of the Colosseum!

It's a pleasant 20-minute walk north from the harbour along the coast to **Dunollie Castle**, built by the MacDougalls of Lorne in the 15th century. It's open all the time and very much a ruin. You could continue along this road to the beach at **Ganavan Sands**, 2.5 miles from Oban. Heading the other way, past the ferry terminal, it also becomes very scenic, and gets you, after a couple of miles, to the passenger ferry to the picturesque islet of Kerrera.

A tourist office leaflet lists regional **bike rides**. They include a 7-mile Gallanach circular tour, a 16-mile route to Seil Island, and routes to Connel, Glenlonan and Kilmore.

There are boat operators at the north end of the harbour offering excursions to see seals (£7); these leave every hour or so.

Sleeping

Book your rooms in advance if you're here between June and September. Beware the northern end of George St, where there's a racket involving outrageous prices for sub-standard rooms.

BUDGET

Jeremy Inglis Hostel (☎ 565065; 21 Airds Cres; dm £8.50, s/d £16/25) This unusual place is Oban's budget bargain. The homely rooms feel more like a B&B than a hostel and are adorned with flowers and cuddly toys. A Continental breakfast is included, which features the friendly, helpful

owner's delicious homemade jam. If there's no-one at the hostel try its office (McTavish's) across the square from the tourist office, next to Argyll Bakeries.

Oban Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 562425; www.obancaravanpark.com; Gallanachmore Farm; tent sites £11-13; 📍 Apr-Oct) In a great position on a lovely green hillside above the water, near the islet of Kerrera, 2.5 miles south of Oban towards Gallanach (turn right out of the ferry terminal), this camp site is a top spot to stay. Two buses a day from town stop outside.

Oban Backpackers Lodge (☎ 562107; www.scotlandst-top-hostels.com; Breadalbane St; dm £13.50; 📍) This big, colourful, clean place has a laid-back feel and is creatively decorated with cartoon characters and a big painted map on the wall. Facilities are great, with a large kitchen, a pool table and a sociable and very comfy front lounge. Breakfast is available for £1.90.

MIDRANGE

Sand Villa Guesthouse (☎ 562803; www.holidayoban.co.uk; Breadalbane St; r per person £23-28; 📍) An attractive and reliable option, this efficiently run guesthouse has good-sized en-suite rooms more than a cut above the average. They are very appealing indeed, with a subtle sand theme and plenty of style and comfort – the beds are so snoozeworthy you might miss the early ferry! Breakfast includes fresh fruit.

Maridon Guest House (☎ 562670; Dunuaran Rd; s/d £28/50; 📍) A hurled haggis from the ferry terminal, this cheerful blue house is hard to miss. The owner takes justifiable pride in the place, and is constantly making improvements and making sure guests are comfortable. Which they are: the rooms have space, soft carpets, large wooden beds, and modern bathrooms, as well as, in some cases, water views.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lunga House (☎ 01852-500237; www.lunga.com; Craobh Haven; B&B per person £25-30; 📍 📍) This is a great spot; an affordable Scottish baronial mansion to stay in. It's a quirky, lovable place in beautiful grounds on a hillside above Craobh Haven, 24 miles south of Oban on the way to Kilmartin.

In the magnificent house itself, there are several beautiful old rooms which are gradually being refurbished by the charismatic laird (quite a character and a local visionary), as well as some self-catering flats. The mansion, which has a patina of age and a comfortable, lived-in feel, is bristling with history, antiques, portraits and character. It's a great place for kids, who are made welcome and will love roaming around the huge house and grounds. There are plenty of things to do around here, including a riding centre just down the hill. Dinner is also available by arrangement.

Kilchrenan House (☎ 562663; www.kilchrenanhouse.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; r per person £32-45; (P)) This luscious property has elegant décor and a warm, friendly feel. Most of the thoughtfully furnished rooms have great views out over the water, but rooms five and nine are the best – room five has a huge freestanding bathtub, perfect for soaking weary bones. Porridge and kippers for breakfast!

TOP END

Manor House (☎ 562087; www.manorhouseoban.com; Gallanach Rd; B&B & dinner per person £74-94; (P) wi-fi) This delightful small hotel is located in a lovely spot around the bay from town (turn right coming out of the ferry terminal), in an 18th-century building originally built by the Duke of Argyll to house his widowed mother. There are great views across to Oban; the rooms are decorated in sumptuous period style, and the salon and dining rooms are particularly luxurious. Dinner is a gourmet five-course affair; the restaurant (dinner £32.50) is also open to the public.

Eating & Drinking

Shellfish kiosks (Queens Park Pl; plates £2-5; ☎ 11am-7pm) These two excellent places on the harbour offer simple, sublime, seafood straight off the boats. Prices are incredibly reasonable: scallops lightly seared in lemon butter and served with brown bread would put many a pricey restaurant to shame and cost just £4.95.

Julie's (☎ 565952; 37 Stafford St; light meals £4-7; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the distillery, this cheerfully scatty tearoom serves up sandwiches and light meals (try the tasty smoked salmon), coffees, and toothsome treacle scones. There's also ice cream, and there are tables outside in case of good weather.

Studio (☎ 562030; Craigmard Rd; 3-course dinner £15.95; ☎ 5.30-10pm) The folk of Oban love this place, and trembled with worry when new owners took it over. They need not have; it's still a great place to dine. With more space than before, although perhaps less conviviality, it offers high-quality, solid Scottish fare and other favourites. Try the Stornoway Steak, which comes with a slice of delicious Lewis black pudding atop it. There are comparably good options for vegetarians too.

Oban Inn (☎ 562484; Stafford St) Dating from 1790, this pub overlooks the harbour by the North Pier. It's got a timeworn, historic feel with low wooden beams; there's a great mix of people here, with posh yachties comparing tidal charts with gruff local fisherfolk.

Other recommendations:

Nevis Bakery (☎ 562262; 12 Stevenson St; snacks 80p-£2, light meals £2-4; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Delicious scotch pies and hearty fry-ups.

Ee.Usk (☎ 565666; North Pier; mains lunch £6-10, dinner £13-20; ☎ lunch & dinner; ♿) Bright, breezy, tasty.

Smart seafood in a great contemporary harbourside location.
Oban Chocolate Company (☎ 566099; 9 Craigmard Rd) Turn back ye sinners! Luscious hot chocolate and goodies made on-site.

Lorne Bar (☎ 570020; Airds Cr; ☎ 11am-1am) Island bar, beer garden, stained glass, polished brass. A good pub.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Numerous CalMac boats link Oban with the Inner and Outer Hebrides. In winter ferries run less often. There are ferries to Barra and South Uist (per person/car £21.10/77, five to six hours, four to seven times weekly); Coll (per person/car £12.90/75, 2¼ hours, five weekly); Colonsay (per person/car £11.40/55, 2¼ hours, three to six weekly, one weekly continues to Islay in summer only); Mull (per person/car £4.05/36, 45 minutes, five to seven daily); and Tiree (per person/car £12.90/75, four hours, daily).

BUS

Citylink runs buses to Oban from Glasgow (£13.10, three hours, two to three daily), Inveraray (one hour, two to three daily) and Fort William (£8.20, 1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday).

TRAIN

From Glasgow there are trains to Oban (£16.80, three hours, up to three daily), which is at the end of a scenic branch line that leaves the West Highland line at Crianlarich.

Getting Around

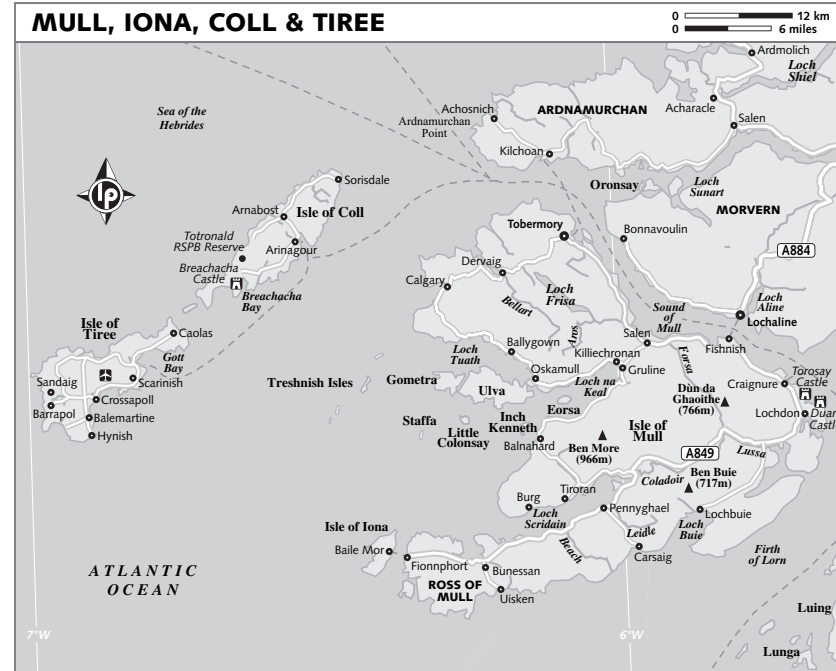
Liberty Cycle Hire (☎ 564000; www.libertycycles.co.uk; Mill Lane; ☎ 8am-7pm mid-Mar–Nov), near Tesco, rents out mountain bikes for £14 per 24 hours.

ISLE OF MULL

pop 2700 / elev 271m

As one of the most easily accessible of Scotland's islands, Mull is enduringly popular, and deservedly so, with its range of spectacular scenery, culminating in the angular hills dropping almost sheer into Loch na Keal. The enchanting holy island of Iona just offshore is another huge attraction, which can mean Mull gets a little busy in high season – make sure

MULL, IONA, COLL & TIREE



you reserve those ferries a few days in advance. Mull's main town, Tobermory, has lately experienced a boom of its own: it gets a huge dose of toddler tourism as it's the place where the kids' hit show *Balamory* is filmed.

Orientation & Information

Two-thirds of Mull's population live in Tobermory, in the north. Most visitors to the island arrive at the ferry terminal Craignure, on the eastern coast. The island is large, and has mostly single-track roads, so don't try to 'do' it in a day – you'll end up exhausted.

There are tourist offices located at **Craignure** (☎ 01680-812377; ☎ daily), opposite the ferry slip, and at **Tobermory** (☎ 01688-302182; Main St; ☎ daily). Internet access is available at the **Posh Nosh Café** (☎ 302499; per 15min £1; ☎ 10am-9pm) in Tobermory.

Sights & Activities

Craignure is basically just a ferry stop, but from here you can catch the **Mull Rail** (☎ 01680-812494; www.mullrail.co.uk; adult/child return £4/3) narrow-gauge, miniature steam train that takes passengers 1.5 miles south to **Torosay Castle** (☎ 01680-812421;

adult/child £5.50/2.75; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mar-Oct). This rambling Victorian mansion in the Scottish baronial style is set in a beautiful garden.

Two miles further on, **Duart Castle** (☎ 01680-812309; www.duartcastle.com; admission £4.50, ☎ 11am-4pm Sun-Thu Apr, 10.30am-5.30pm May–mid-Oct) is the ancestral seat of the Maclean clan and sits in a spectacular position on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Sound of Mull. A restoration removed some of the character of the 17th-century building, but you can still see the dungeons and appreciate the turbulent history of the castle and the clan who inhabited it. A bus to the castle meets some of the incoming ferries at Craignure.

Mull's capital is **Tobermory**, a sparkling little fishing port in the island's north. The brightly painted houses strung out along a sheltered bay surrounded by wooded hills, make this one of the prettiest villages in Scotland. Here, the **Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust** (☎ 01688-302620; 28 Main St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) is a research centre that has informative displays on the local marine population. It has information on various whale- and dolphin-spotting operators on Mull.

You can walk up **Ben More** (966m), the highest peak on Mull, which has spectacular views across to the surrounding islands when the weather is clear. A trail leads up the mountain from Loch na Keal, by the bridge on the B8035, about 8 miles southwest of Salen. Allow six hours for the return trip.

In the hamlet of Gruline is the **mausoleum** of Lachlan Macquarie, the enlightened fifth governor of New South Wales, a Mull native. It's a 500m walk off the main road in attractive farmland.

Sleeping & Eating

TOBERMORY

Tobermory SYHA (☎ 0870 004 1151; www.syha.org.uk; Main St; dm £13; ☹ Mar-Oct; ♿) This appealing official hostel has a perfect location in Tobermory, and excellent facilities. It's right on the waterfront, with a colourful red façade and is a quiet, friendly place that welcomes families and outdoor types. There's a laundry and drying room, as well as an impressive kitchen.

Fàilte Guest House (☎ 01688-302495; www.failteguesthouse.co.uk; 27 Main St; s/d from £28/60) Happiness in Tobermory is a cosy B&B on the pretty, colourful waterfront, and this welcoming choice fits the bill perfectly. The rooms come with en suite and are decorated warmly, with nice Asian-print bedcovers and lovely gleaming white bathrooms. The best face out to the water, and have huge windows to take advantage of the privileged view.

Highland Cottage (☎ 01688-302030; www.highlandcottage.co.uk; Breadalbane St; d £125-160; ☹ mid-Mar-mid-Oct, call for winter opening; ♿) Tobermory's most comfortable and luxurious sleeping place, this small personable hotel sits on the hill above the harbour and offers friendly elegance, a warm welcome, and great food. It feels very cosy, with comfortable antique furniture in country-house style and rooms with a homely feel. Not that they lack facilities – crystal glasses, CD player, videos, books, and bathrobes are all here, among many other small touches. Dinner is a gourmet four-course affair (£37.50) that has a deservedly high reputation hereabouts; nonguests are welcome but book ahead!

Mishnish Hotel (☎ 01688-302009; Main St; bar meals £8-10; ☹ lunch & dinner) This legendary pub is still the best spot to drink in town, with many a comfortable nook and cranny behind its black façade (someone will explain why it's not yellow like it is in the postcards). There's always something going on, and it has an interesting

mix of locals and tourists. Large pub meals are good value.

Anchorage (☎ 302313; 28 Main St; mains £14-20; ☹ 10am-4pm & 6-9.30pm) This worthwhile restaurant is on the main drag and has a vaguely nautical theme. The French-influenced seafood is very tasty, with old favourites and new creations on show. It's very popular – if you don't book, you'll be having haddock supper from the chip van opposite (also good by the way!).

Other recommendations:

34 Main St (☎ 01688-302530; 34 Main St; s/d without bathroom £15/30) Three cosy attic rooms with good shared bathroom. Room-only, next to the supermarket. A bargain.

Island Bakery (☎ 01688-02223; Main St; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) British baking is still alive! The turkey, ham and cranberry pie is a champion among champions.

AROUND TOBERMORY

ourpick Achnadrish House (☎ 01688-400388; achnadrish@hotmail.com; Dervaig Rd; r per person £30-40; ♿) There aren't too many guesthouses in Scotland where you'll find pad thai on the breakfast menu, but this charming, upmarket B&B in an old shooting lodge between Tobermory and Dervaig is one. The welcoming, personable owner spends a lot of time in Southeast Asia and elegant Indochinese fabrics adorn the rooms, where small Buddhas watch over guests' slumbers. Ubiquitous are three ultrafriendly Labradors; it's that sort of relaxed retreat. There's also a self-catering cottage attached, which sleeps up to six (£400 to £600 per week) and has handsome original features, including the steep stair to what was once the hayloft.

Glengorm Castle (☎ 01688-302321; www.glengormcastle.co.uk; Glengorm; d £140-180; ♿) This castle, bristling with turrets, enjoys an unforgettable location; huge windows showcase the memorable vistas of green fields sloping down to the water. The five bedrooms are all different, beautiful, and with character in spades. They have plenty of space – and, while very attractively furnished, are happily uncluttered. The place is run by lively young people, and kids will have a ball running around the grounds or admiring the sheep and Highland cattle.

CRAIGNURE

Shieling Holidays (☎ 01680-812496; www.shielingholidays.co.uk; Craignure; dm £10, shieling £26-39; ☹ Apr-Oct; ♿) This unusual place has a fabulous headland situation around the corner from the ferry. Its central concept is the tentlike 'shieling', which have tiled and carpeted floors, and offer the at-

mosphere of camping without banging in pegs. The more luxurious ones have running water, a toilet and a hot shower. Hostel-rate beds are available in simple shielings, and there's also a good-value cottage (per night £58) on-site.

Getting There & Away

CalMac ferries go from Oban to Craignure (per person/car £4.05/36, 45 minutes, five to seven daily). The shortest crossing links Fishnish, 6 miles northwest of Craignure, with Lochaline (per person/car £2.50/10.90, 15 minutes, at least hourly) on the Morvern Peninsula. From Tobermory a service runs to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula (per person/car £3.85/20.35, 35 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, plus five Sunday May to August).

Getting Around

Bowman's Coaches (☎ 01680-812313; www.bowmans.tours.co.uk) operates a Craignure to Tobermory service (return £6.60, one hour, up to six daily Monday to Saturday, two to four on Sunday). There's also a bus connecting Craignure to Fionnphort (£10 return, 1¼ hours, up to four times daily Monday to Saturday, and once on Sunday) for the island of Iona.

Cycling is a good way to get around and you can rent bikes from a number of places. In Tobermory the great **Archibald Brown & Son** (☎ 01688-302020; 21 Main St) have mountain bikes at £13 per day.

ISLE OF IONA

☎ 01681 / pop 130

Iona, holy island and burial place of kings, lives up to its lofty reputation. From the moment you embark on the ferry towards its sandy shores and green fields, you'll notice something different about it. Iona is indeed special – but the crowds that pile off the tour buses sometimes make it difficult to appreciate; it's best to stay overnight.

Iona Abbey (HS; ☎ 700512; adult/child £4/1.60; ☹ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿) is the focus of the island and contains some of the most outstanding examples of stone carvings in Britain. Outside stands the magnificent 8th century **St Martin's Cross**; other crosses are in the small museum. The spectacular nave, dominated by high stone arches and wooden beams, is a highlight of the abbey – sitting outside is a bench with 'Be Still' etched into the woodwork, summarising the mood nicely.

St Columba landed on Iona from Ireland in 563 before setting out to convert Scotland. He established Iona's monastery, where the *Book of Kells* is believed to have been transcribed. The book was taken to Kells in Ireland when Viking raids drove the monks from Iona.

The monks returned and the monastery prospered until its destruction during the Reformation. The ruins were given to the Church of Scotland in 1899, and the abbey was reconstructed. It's still a flourishing spiritual community holding regular courses and retreats.

Next to the abbey is an ancient **graveyard** where a mound marks the burial place of 48 of Scotland's early kings, including Macbeth.

ourpick Iona Hostel (☎ 700781; www.ionahostel.co.uk; dm £17.50; ☹ check-in 4-7pm, ring for winter opening), one of Scotland's most relaxing places to stay, is at the end of the (only) road. Utterly rural and tranquil, it's part of a working croft and runs on sound ecological principles. Around are only lovable black Hebridean sheep and ducks, while nearby is a fabulous beach. What you won't find is a TV lounge – the welcoming owners and warden keep it a tech-free zone, the better to relax. There's also a self-catering cottage here (www.lagan.dorain.com).

A great place to eat or stay is the **Argyll Hotel** (☎ 700334; www.argyllhoteliona.co.uk; s/d £49/84, d without bathroom £66; ☹ Mar-Oct), a place where you'll really feel looked after. It's a higgledy-piggledy sort of place, with a variety of rooms, as well as the dining room (lunch mains £4 to £11, dinner mains £10 to £15; food served from noon to 1.30pm and 7pm to 8.30pm March to October) with conservatory space looking out across the water back to Mull. Rooms with sea view cost more (doubles £118); there's also a fabulous furnished apartment (£158) with a hammock. Other rooms look out towards the back, where an organic garden turns out vegetables for the delicious meals.

From Fionnphort, at the southwestern extremity of Mull, a CalMac passenger ferry takes you to Iona (return £3.75, 10 minutes, frequent).

ISLE OF STAFFA

This uninhabited island off Mull is truly a magnificent sight, and once there you'll understand why it inspired Mendelssohn to compose *Hebridean Overture*. It forms the eastern end of that geological phenomenon (made up of massive, hexagonal basalt pillars)

which begins in Northern Ireland where it's known as the Giant's Causeway. Here the pillars are called the **Colonnade** and form a series of cathedral-like caverns including **Fingal's Cave**, which pushes out of the sea like a grand pipe organ. Staffa is also visited by a sizeable **puffin colony**. The tourist offices on Mull book tickets for boat trips (adult/child around £17.50/7.50, three hours), most of which leave from Fionnphort.

ISLE OF COLL

☎ 01879 / pop 160

This windswept, sleepy little island, 7 miles west of Mull, isn't packed with visitor sites, but for many people that's the attraction. Ringed by sandy beaches, the island is an important refuge for the **corncrake**, which visits in summer; you can find out about it at the small RSPB post at Totronald. Nearby, **Breachacha Castles** are two fortified tower houses built by the Maclean Clan.

For accommodation the **Coll Hotel** (☎ 230334; www.collhotel.com; Arinagour; r per person £30-50; **P**), is a great spot, with quirky rooms, some with harbour views, and a cracking restaurant (mains £8 to £13) serving top-notch seafood and game.

CalMac ferries run to Coll from Oban (per person/car £12.90/75, 2¾ hours, five weekly), and continue to Tiree.

ISLE OF TIREE

☎ 01879 / pop 770

A low-lying island with some beautiful, sandy beaches, Tiree has one of the best sunshine records in Britain – there's nowhere for the clouds to get trapped. That's the good news. The bad news is, like Coll, the island is subject to howling Atlantic gales. The canny island, however, has turned this to its advantage. It's the windsurfing capital of Scotland; call **Wild Diamond Windsurfing** (☎ 220399; www.tireewindsurfing.com) for information; it also runs kitesurfing courses.

For accommodation **Kirkapol House** (☎ 220729; www.kirkapoltiree.co.uk; Gort Bay; s/d £29/54; **P**) is a very appealing converted 19th-century church, overlooking the island's best beach. Dinner is also available here.

British Airways flies from Glasgow to **Tiree airport** (☎ 220309) for around £60 to £150 return. CalMac ferries from Oban (per person/car £12.90/75, four hours, daily) arrive via Coll, and on Thursday also call at Barra.

STIRLING REGION

The Stirling region sits at the narrow waist of Scotland and has historically been a pivotal strategic point between the Lowlands and the Highlands. For this reason, it has seen more than its share of battles, including the freedom struggles of two of the greatest of Scottish heroes. William Wallace, portrayed in the film *Braveheart*, pursued his freedom struggle in these lands and is commemorated by a gigantic monument, which overlooks Bannockburn, where Robert the Bruce achieved Scotland's greatest military triumph.

Stirling itself boasts perhaps the country's most fascinating castle, perched on a crag high above the modern town. Northwest of here, the Trossachs is a region of stunning natural beauty and a top destination for walkers and cyclists, especially since it recently became joined with Loch Lomond as Scotland's first national park. The Trossachs was the home of yet another legendary Scot, Rob Roy, whose deeds, although somewhat less glittering than those of the freedom fighters, have earned him a Robin Hood-like position in north-of-the-border history.

Activities

There are numerous **walks** in the area, particularly in the Trossachs. Collins *Walk Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* (£5.99) is a useful guidebook available from tourist offices.

The Trossachs is also a great place for **cycling**, with several circular routes, as well as the **Lochs & Glens Way** that cuts across the region on its way from Glasgow to Inverness.

Getting Around

First (☎ 01324-613777; www.firstgroup.com) is the main bus operator. Stirling town is the rail hub, but the lines only skirt the region, so you'll be relying on buses if you don't have your own transport.

STIRLING

☎ 01786 / pop 32,700 / elev 47m

You can see Stirling for miles around, or at least the mighty crag on which its castle perches. This fortress is perhaps the most interesting of all Scottish castles to visit. Staring at it across a couple of miles of open country is the brooding Wallace monument, a strange Victorian Gothic creation honouring the giant

freedom fighter of *Braveheart* fame. Nearby is Bannockburn, scene of Robert the Bruce's major triumph over the English.

Below the castle is Stirling's beautiful old town, somewhat reminiscent of Edinburgh with its noble old buildings that bear witness to the city's centuries at the forefront of Scottish power. Wandering the cobbled streets is a real pleasure, especially as the city boasts a couple of old pubs of huge character and charm, to quench your thirst at along the way.

Information

Library (Corn Exchange Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Tue & Thu) Free internet.

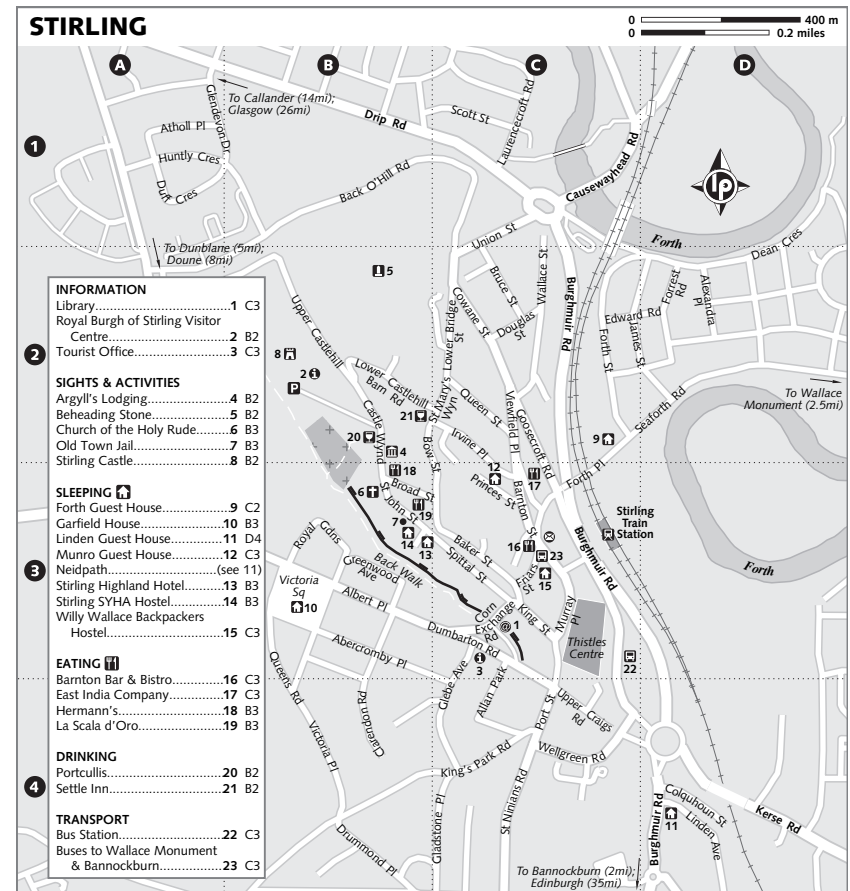
Royal Burgh of Stirling Visitor Centre Just below the castle entrance.

Tourist office (☎ 475019; stirlingtic@allst.ossian.net; 41 Dumbarton Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat Oct-May, daily Jun-Sep) Staff border on the hostile.

Sights

STIRLING CASTLE

Hold Stirling and you control the country. This simple maxim has ensured that a **castle** (HS; ☎ 450000; adult/child £8/3, audio tour extra £2; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar; ♿) has existed here since prehistoric times. Commanding superb views, you cannot help drawing parallels with Edinburgh castle – but many find Stirling more atmospheric. The location, architecture and historical significance combine to make it one of the grandest of all Scottish castles. This means it draws plenty of



visitors, so it's advisable to visit in the afternoon; many tourists come on day trips from Edinburgh or Glasgow, so you may have the castle to yourself by about 4pm.

The current building dates from the late 14th to the 16th century, when it was a residence of the Stuart monarchs. The spectacular palace was constructed by French masons in the reign of James V. The **Great Kitchens** are especially good, bringing to life the bustle and scale of the enterprise of cooking for the king.

An elaborate project to re-create the grandeur of the king's hall and queen's lodgings in the time of James V is underway. One of the most interesting parts of this is the making of a series of tapestries depicting the capture of a unicorn. The ones finished so far hang in the chapel; you can see the weavers at work in the **Tapestry Studio**. The handheld audio guide available at the castle entrance for an extra £2 is a worthwhile investment.

The **visitors centre**, just below, has useful audiovisual introductions to the castle's history and architecture. Last entry to the castle is an hour before closing. There's a car park outside (£2).

Complete with turrets, the spectacular **Argyll's Lodging** (admission free with castle ticket, otherwise £4) – by the castle at the top of Castle Wynd – is the most impressive 17th-century town house in Scotland. It's the former home of William Alexander, an earl of Stirling and noted literary figure.

OLD TOWN

Below the castle, the old town has a remarkably different feel compared with modern Stirling, its cobblestone streets packed with fine examples of 15th- to 17th-century architecture.

Stirling has the best **town wall** in Scotland; built around 1547 it can be followed on the **Back Walk**. The walk follows the line of the wall from Dumbarton Rd (near the tourist office) up to the castle through peaceful woodland. You pass the town cemeteries, and you could make a short detour to Gowan Hill to see the **Beheading Stone**, now encased in iron bars to keep ritual axe murderers away.

The **Church of the Holy Rude** (St John St; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm May-Sep) is just down the hill from the castle and has been the town's parish church for 500 years. James VI was crowned here in 1567. The nave and tower date from 1456 and the church features one of the few surviving medieval open-timber roofs.

The **Old Town Jail** (☎ 450050; St John St; adult/child £5.95/3.95; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct & Mar, 10.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) is something of a tourist trap but is undeniably entertaining for the kids, as actors in costume portray the hardships of prison life in an entertaining and innovative style. The actors are weekends-only between November and March. Last entry is one hour before closing.

NATIONAL WALLACE MONUMENT

Two miles north of Stirling is this towering Victorian Gothic **monument to William Wallace** (☎ 472140; www.nationalwallacemonument.com; adult/child £6/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-May & Oct, 10am-6pm Jun, 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Sep, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Feb), who was hung, drawn and quartered by the English in 1305 and was portrayed by Mel Gibson in the film *Braveheart*. The view, from the top, of seven battlegrounds – one of them at Stirling Bridge where Wallace defeated the English in 1297 – is as breathtaking as the climb. The monument contains interesting displays including a parade of other Scottish heroes and Wallace's mighty broadsword. Clearly the man was no weakling.

Local buses 62 and 63 run from Murray Pl in Stirling to the visitors centre, from where free shuttle buses run up the hill to the monument itself. Otherwise, it's about a half-hour walk from the centre of Stirling.

BANNOCKBURN

On 24 June 1314 the greatest victory in Scotland's struggle to remain independent from the English took place at the Battle of Bannockburn. Robert the Bruce overcame superior numbers and sent Edward II's English force packing. At the **Bannockburn Heritage Centre** (NTS; ☎ 812664; adult/child £5/4; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct; ♿) the story is told in a simple and eloquent exhibition, including an audiovisual display. There is also a handy timeline of events. Bannockburn is 2 miles south of Stirling; the battle site itself never closes. You can reach the site on bus 51 from Murray Pl in the centre of Stirling.

Sleeping BUDGET

Willy Wallace Backpackers Hostel (☎ 446773; www.willywallacehostel.com; 77 Murray Pl; dm £14, tw £30-35; ♿) This highly convenient central hostel is friendly, spacious, and sociable. The dormitories are large and light, there's free tea and coffee, a good kitchen, and a relaxing

atmosphere. Other amenities include a laundry service and Sass, the exuberant hostel dog. The helpful folk here will make an onward booking for you, free of charge.

Stirling SYHA Hostel (☎ 473442; www.syha.org.uk; St John St; dm/tw £15/£35; ♿ ♿) In a perfect location on the way up to the castle in the old town, this hostel is concealed behind the façade of an old church. Once inside, however, it's clean, efficient and modern. The facilities are excellent, and include a pool table. The dorms are small but well equipped, there's a handful of twins with single beds, and there's access until 2am.

MIDRANGE

Forth Guest House (☎ 471020; www.forthguesthouse.reserve.co.uk; 23 Forth Pl; s/d from £20/46) You can't miss this small Georgian terrace just over the bridge near the train station: its façade and front garden are a riot of blooming flowers possibly visible from orbit. The rooms are ultracommodious and furnished with style but no frippery. Bathrooms are modern, and the top-floor rooms with their sloping ceilings are especially lovable. There's easy parking outside, an important consideration in Stirling.

Munro Guest House (☎ 472685; www.munroguesthouse.co.uk; 14 Princes St; s/d £30/50; ♿) This snug B&B is right in the centre of town, but on a quiet side street. It's run by friendly people and has smallish but comfortable rooms, including some attractive attic ones. The walls are hung with Vetriciano prints. The breakfast is also better than the norm, with fruit salad on hand. There's easy (pay) parking opposite.

Garfield House (☎ 473730; 12 Victoria Sq; s/d £35/58) In a quiet and attractive Victorian part of Stirling, this loveable old mansion makes a characterful place to stay. There's a patina of age about the place, but its huge rooms, bay windows, and old-fashioned elegance make it a top choice.

Linden Guest House (☎ 448850; www.lindenguesthouse.co.uk; 22 Linden Ave; s/d £40/55; ♿) Handy for the bus station, this is one of several good choices on this street. There are four rooms, attractively furnished and with comfortable beds; two are suitable for families. The breakfast is especially good, with fresh fruit, and plenty of choice, including kippers.

Neidpath (☎ 469017; 24 Linden Ave; s/d £35/48; ♿) Next door to Linden, this is friendly and comfortable, and a more than acceptable alternative.

TOP END

Stirling Highland Hotel (☎ 272727; www.paramount-hotels.co.uk; Spittal St; s/d £130/160; ♿ ♿ wi-fi ♿) The town's smartest hotel is a sympathetic refurbishment of the old high school. Although the public areas still feel a little institutional, the rooms are of the highest comfort, and the facilities, which include pool, spa, gym, sauna and squash courts, are a rarity for a city-centre hotel in these parts. There's a decent restaurant too; check the website before booking, as there are often good dinner, bed and breakfast offers.

Eating

Barnton Bar & Bistro (☎ 461698; 312 Barnton St; snacks £4-6; ☎ 10am-late) Opposite the main post office, this popular student hang-out serves an all-day breakfast of William Wallace proportions (£4.95) and scrumptious baguettes as well as a range of typical lunches. It's also not a bad spot for a beer or two of an evening.

ourpick East India Company (☎ 471330; 7 Viewfield Pl; mains £5-10; ☎ 5pm-midnight) This basement Indian restaurant is one of the best spots in Scotland for a curry. Sumptuously decorated to resemble a ship's stateroom, with portraits of tea barons on the wall to conjure images of the days of the clippers, the restaurant offers exquisite dishes from all parts of India. There's a buffet dinner available (£11.95; Sunday to Thursday), but you're better off going à la carte, and savouring the astonishingly toothsome flavours.

Hermann's (☎ 450632; 58 Broad St; 2-course lunch £10.50, mains £14-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) This quiet Scottish-Austrian restaurant is one of Stirling's more elegant choices. Focus on the solid wooden tables or the bright back conservatory rather than the tartan carpet and misplaced wildlife photos, and enjoy anything from Cullen skink or venison stew to schnitzel and spätzle. There's always a tempting vegetarian option, and you can accompany your meal with Austrian wines, which are of pleasing and delicate quality.

La Scala d'Oro (☎ 274010; Jail Wynd; snacks £3-8, 3-course meal £23.95; ☎ bar 11am-1am Tue-Sun, restaurant lunch & 5-9.30pm; ♿) At the back of the arts centre, the café-bar serves decent coffee (gold dust in Stirling) and tasty paninis and pasta; it's also a trendy spot for a drink. The restaurant serves upmarket and tasty Scottish-Italian fare.

Drinking

ourpick Settle Inn (☎ 474609; St Mary's Wynd; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9.30pm Sun) Stirling's

oldest pub is a gem. The cheery staff go beyond the call to make both visitors and locals feel at home, and there's always an interesting guest ale on tap. There are plenty of atmospheric nooks for settling down with a whisky against the winter chills too.

Portcullis (☎ 472290; Castle Wynd) This gracious old pub is another fine drinking option. With an atmospheric beer garden, this stonebuilt former primary school serves good ales and malts and has a cosy buzz inside on winter evenings. Food (bar meals £7 to £16; open for lunch and dinner) is served until 9pm, but you may need an hour or so to get through the massive portions.

Getting There & Away BUS

Citylink services include Dundee (£8, hourly), Edinburgh (£4.20, one hour, hourly, also operated by First), Glasgow (£4.20, 45 minutes, hourly) and Perth (£4.90, 50 minutes, half-hourly).

TRAIN

Half-hourly services run to Edinburgh (£5.90, 50 minutes) and Glasgow (£6.10, 40 minutes). There are hourly services to Perth (£8.90, 30 minutes), Dundee (£13.70, 50 minutes) and Aberdeen (£33.50, two hours).

AROUND STIRLING Dunblane

☎ 01786 / pop 7900

Dunblane, 5 miles northwest of Stirling, is a small, pretty town with a couple of good attractions. It is difficult not to associate the town with the horrific massacre that took place in the primary school in 1996 but happier headlines have come to the town through the successes of young tennis star Andy Murray, who hails from here. For visitor information, contact the **tourist office** (☎ 824428; Stirling Rd; ☹ May–mid-Sep).

Dunblane Cathedral (HS; ☎ 823388; admission free; ☹ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, 2–6pm Sun Apr–Sep, closes 4.30pm Oct–Mar) is the main attraction and it's well worth a detour. The elegant, sandstone building is a superb example of Scottish Gothic. A standing stone commemorates the slain children, while there's also a 10th-century carved Celtic stone at the head of the nave.

First runs frequent buses to Dunblane from Stirling. Trains to Dunblane run every 15 to 30 minutes from Stirling.

Doune

☎ 01786 / pop 1635

Eight miles northwest of Stirling, this town has a great attraction in **Doune Castle** (HS; ☎ 841742; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ☹ 9.30am–6.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Sat–Wed Oct–Mar), one of the best-preserved 14th-century castles in Scotland, having remained largely unchanged since it was built for the Duke of Albany. It was a favourite royal hunting lodge; Mary Queen of Scots stayed here, as did Bonnie Prince Charlie – the first as a guest, the second as a prisoner. There are great views from the castle walls and the lofty gatehouse is impressive, rising nearly 30m. Many visitors come for the Monty Python connection: the castle featured in the *Holy Grail*.

First buses connect to Stirling (30 minutes) roughly hourly from Monday to Saturday, less frequently on Sunday.

THE TROSSACHS

The outstandingly attractive Trossachs offers a region of forested hills and achingly beautiful lochs within easy reach of the cities of southern Scotland. It forms the eastern part of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park. The Trossachs offer excellent walking and cycling opportunities, especially if you get off the more established routes.

The Trossachs first gained popularity as a tourist destination in the early 19th century, when curious visitors came from all over Britain drawn by the romantic language of Sir Walter Scott's poem *Lady of the Lake*, inspired by Loch Katrine, and *Rob Roy*, about the bravado and derring-do of the region's most famous son.

In summer the region can be overburdened with coach tours, but many of these are day-trippers, so peaceful, long evenings gazing at the reflections in the nearest loch are still possible. If you have the choice, it's worth timing a visit so as not to coincide with a weekend.

Aberfoyle & Around

☎ 01877 / pop 575 / elev 87m

Aberfoyle is a sort of gateway town to the Trossachs, and is often inundated with tour buses. There are some very scenic spots nearby, but the town itself needn't detain you. Callander, or somewhere small, is a better base for the area.

Aberfoyle is on the eastern edge of the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, which stretches right across to the hills beside Loch Lomond. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0604; Main St; ☹ daily Apr–Oct, Sat & Sun Nov–Mar) with internet ac-

cess for £1.80 per 15 minutes. There's also information at the **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park Visitors Centre** (☎ 382258; parking fee £1; ☹ 10am–6pm Mar–mid-Dec) which has audiovisual displays and information about the many walks and cycle routes in and around the park. The centre is half a mile north of town, up the hill.

SIGHTS

Four miles east of Aberfoyle off the A81 is **Lake Menteith** (the reason it's a lake not a loch comes down to a mistranslation from Gaelic). The substantial ruins of **Inchmahome Priory** (HS; ☎ 385294; adult/child incl ferry £4/1.60; ☹ 9.30am–6.30pm Apr–Sep), where Mary Queen of Scots was kept safe as a child during Henry VIII's 'Rough Wooing' (when Henry attacked Stirling to force Mary Queen of Scots to marry his son in order to unite the kingdoms), are on a picturesque island in the middle of the lake. A boat takes visitors from the village to the Augustinian priory; the last outbound boat is 5.15pm.

WALKING & CYCLING

Several picturesque but busy waymarked trails start from the forest park visitors centre above town. These range from a light 20-minute stroll to a nearby waterfall to a tough, hilly 5-mile circuit.

An excellent 20-mile circular cycle route links with the **ferry** (☎ 376316) at Loch Katrine. From Aberfoyle, join the Lochs & Glens Cycle Way (see p826) on the forest trail, or take the A821 over Duke's Pass. Following the southern shore of Loch Achray, you reach the pier on Loch Katrine. The ferry (see p845) can take you to Stronachlachar (£5.50) on the western

shore; from Stronachlachar, follow the beautiful B829 via Loch Ard to Aberfoyle.

SLEEPING & EATING

Forth Inn (☎ 382372; Main St; bar meals £5–6, mains £6–14; ☹ lunch & dinner; ☐) In the middle of the village, this place is all things to the weary traveller. It's a great spot for a drink and for value-packed pub grub. It's often full of coach parties during the day, but if you head on down in the evening you'll find a much more enjoyable local atmosphere. The rooms are bright and pink-tinged with solid, modern furniture and good bathrooms (single/double £45/70).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

First buses connect Aberfoyle to Stirling (45 minutes, up to four daily). For details of the useful Trossachs Trundler service, see p845.

Callander

☎ 01877 / pop 2750 / elev 130m

Callander has been pulling in the tourists for more than 150 years, especially domestic day-trippers who make the town a little overcrowded at weekends. However, it's a good base to explore the surrounding area and a pleasant spot to just stroll about.

The busy but helpful **Rob Roy & the Trossachs Visitors Centre** (☎ 0870 720 0628; info@robroyvisitorcentre.com; Ancaster Sq; ☹ daily; ☹) is also the tourist office. A Rob Roy audiovisual (£3.85) gives some insight into the famous man.

SLEEPING

Trossachs Tryst (☎ 331200; www.scottish-hostel.co.uk; dm £15, self-catering f per person £15–20; ☐ ☹ wi-fi ☹) This

ROB ROY

Robert MacGregor (1671–1734) was the wild leader of the wildest of Scotland's clans, Clan Gregor. Roy is an Anglicisation of the Gaelic 'ruadh' (red): he was nicknamed for his ginger locks. Although he claimed direct descent from a 10th-century king of the Scots and rights to the lands the clan occupied, these estates stood between powerful neighbours who had the MacGregors outlawed, hence their sobriquet 'Children of the Mist'. Adopting another surname, Rob became a prosperous livestock trader, before a dodgy deal led to a warrant for his arrest.

A legendary swordsman, the fugitive from justice then became notorious for his daring raids into the Lowlands to carry off cattle and sheep. He was forever hiding from potential captors; he was twice imprisoned, but escaped dramatically on both occasions. He finally turned himself in, and received his liberty and a pardon from the king. He lies buried in the churchyard at Balquhider, by Loch Voil (see the boxed text, p844); his uncompromising epitaph reads 'MacGregor despite them'. His life has been glorified over the years due to Sir Walter Scott's novel and the 1995 film. Many Scots see his life as a symbol of the struggle of the common folk against the inequable ownership of vast tracts of the country by landed aristocrats.

WORTH THE TRIP

The village of **Balquhiddier** (bal-whidder), 11 miles northwest of Callander, is famous as being the final resting place of Rob Roy, who is buried with his wife and two sons in the small churchyard. No less a drawing card is the sublime hotel and restaurant **Monachyle Mhor** (☎ 01877-384622; www.monachylemhor.com; lunch from £31, dinner from £44; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 📶 wi-fi 🍷 restaurant only). With a fantastic location overlooking two lochs, this is an excellent fusion of country Scotland and comfortable contemporary design. The rooms and suites are fabulous, withquirkily original décor, and various price grades (doubles from £95 to £220). The restaurant (open to the public) offers set lunch and dinner menus which are high in quality and deliciously innovative. Monachyle Mhor's enchantment lies in its successful combination of top-class hospitality and service with a relaxed rural atmosphere; dogs and kids happily romp on the lawns, and no-one looks askance if you come in flushed and muddy after a day's fishing or walking.

Balquhiddier is 2 miles west of the A84, 9 miles north of Callander. The hotel is a further 4 miles beyond the village.

purpose-built hostel is in a beautifully isolated spot a mile from Callander. The dorms are excellent, very spacious with four or six beds and have their own bathroom. Rates include Continental breakfast, and there's a helpful, easygoing atmosphere. An appealing lounge space has big windows looking out across the countryside, and there's on-site cycle hire and advice. To get there, take Bridge St off Main St, then turn right onto Invertrossachs Rd and follow it for a mile.

Abbotsford Lodge (☎ 330066; www.abbotsfordlodge.co.uk; Stirling Rd; s/d from £30/60; 📶) On the main road on the eastern side of town (look for the monkey puzzle), this beautiful old Victorian home has recently been the subject of an extremely tasteful renovation under new owners. They've consigned tartan carpets and florals to the bonfire, sanded back the floorboards, and brightened the rooms up with smart white linen. It's a friendly place, and good to relax in, with a lounge and conservatory space where lunches are served.

Arden House (☎ 330235; www.ardenhouse.org.uk; Bracklinn Rd; s/d £35/65; 🍷 Apr-Oct; 📶) Very close to the centre, but well away from cars and crowds, this guesthouse is a wonderful place for grown-ups (no kids under 14 allowed) and was used as the setting for the TV series *Doctor Finlay's Casebook*. The rooms, named for characters in the show, are decorated with faultless taste and include a suite with great views. The hosts are solicitous and enjoy a good conversation.

our pick Roman Camp Hotel (☎ 330003; www.romancamphotel.co.uk; s/d/superior d £75/125/165; 📶 🍷) This mansion is in the centre of Callander but feels like a remote country hotel as it's set by the river in its own beautiful grounds. Its endear-

ing features include a lounge with blazing fire, as well as a library with a tiny secret chapel. There are three grades of room; the standards are certainly luxurious, but the superior ones are even more appealing, with period furniture, armchairs, and a fireplace. The restaurant is open to the public and excellent (dinner £44). And fear not; the name refers not to toga parties but to a ruin in the adjacent field.

EATING & DRINKING

Lade Inn (☎ 330152; Kilmahog; bar meals £4-9; 🍷 food noon-9pm). A mile north of town, this sociable local is the sort of appealing and inviting place that leaves you wondering where your afternoon went to. It's child-friendly, does decent bar meals, and serves a good pint of ale, sometimes home-brewed. There's live music at weekends.

our pick Callander Meadows (☎ 330181; 24 Main St; lunch £6.95, mains £9-12; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Sun, plus Mon Apr-Sep, plus Wed Jul & Aug) Run by a friendly chef couple, this is that rare beast that combines sophisticated, delicious cuisine with prices that are surprisingly reasonable: if you have lunch here for seven quid, you'll feel like Rob Roy after a successful cattle raid. The dishes are prepared with flair and presented with style in a relaxed, cheerful atmosphere. Make sure you leave room for dessert. Upstairs there are three very appealing rooms (£46 to £54) elegantly kitted out with dark-varnished furnishings and striped wallpaper (one has a four-post bed).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Morrison's buses from Stirling (45 minutes) run hourly from Monday to Saturday and less frequently on Sunday.

There is also a Citylink bus between Edinburgh (£9.60, 1½ hours, one daily) and Fort William (£14, 2¼ hours, one daily), stopping here.

The vintage **Trossachs Trundler** (☎ 01786-442707) is a useful hop-on hop-off bus service that does a circuit including Callander, Aberfoyle, Port of Menteith and Loch Katrine. The bus operates daily (except Wednesday), June to September; a day ticket costs £8; the service is wheelchair accessible. Alternatively, postbus 24 does the same circuit twice daily Monday to Friday (once on Saturday).

GETTING AROUND

Based at Trossachs Tryst, the excellent **Wheels Cycling Centre** (☎ 331100; www.scottish-cycling.co.uk) hires out bikes per half-/full day for £7.50/12.50.

Loch Katrine

The rugged area around this beautiful loch, 6 miles north of Aberfoyle and 10 miles west of Callander, is the heart of the Trossachs. Two **boats** (☎ 01877-376316; www.lochkatrine.com) run cruises from Trossachs Pier at the eastern tip of the loch (£6.50, 45 minutes). Two daily departures head across to the other end at Stronachlachar before returning (return £7.50). From there (accessible by car via Aberfoyle), you can reach the eastern shore of Loch Lomond at isolated Inversnaid. A tarmac path links Trossachs Pier with Stronachlachar, so you can also take the boat out and walk/cycle back (12 miles).

KILLIN

☎ 01567 / pop 670 / elev 183m

This lovely village sits at the western end of Loch Tay (see also p858) and is a great little place. Roaring through the centre are the scenic **Falls of Dochart**: on a sunny day people sprawl over the rocks by the bridge, pint or picnic in hands, and a top spot it is too. Killin is an excellent base for a few nights; there's some fine walking around the town, and several mighty mountains and glens close at hand.

The helpful, informative **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0627; Main St; 🍷 daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Feb) is in the Breadalbane Folklore Centre.

Walking & Cycling

Five miles northeast of Killin and rising above Loch Tay is Ben Lawers (1214m; see p859). Other walks around Killin abound; grab the ParkPaths map from a tourist office. One

rewarding circular walk heads up into the Acharn forest south of town, emerging above the tree-line to great views of Loch Tay and Ben Lawers.

Killin is on the Lochs & Glens cycle route (see p826) from Glasgow to Inverness.

Sleeping & Eating

The best eating spots in town are the hotels. The Killin is reliable and serves tasty food. The Falls of Dochart Inn is a great spot fallen on strange times – it had mislaid both its liquor licence and its courtesy at time of research.

Killin SYHA (☎ 0870 004 1131; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13; 🍷 Mar-Oct) This popular hang-out for walkers is a friendly spot with a good kitchen, efficient drying room, and clean dorms. It's situated in a lovely Victorian mansion at the northern end of the village about a mile from the centre on the main road.

our pick Drumfinn Guest House (☎ 820900; www.drumfinn.co.uk; Main St; s/d £30/56; 📶) What a great spot this is. The appealing, comfortable rooms – with soft toys for company – are recommendation enough, but add the fabulous welcome to that and you're in B&B heaven. The über-friendly hosts offer great advice on where to go, especially for walkers. But you might struggle to bag some of the Munros hereabouts with the delicious, generous breakfast on board!

Getting There & Away

There are buses roughly hourly from Killin to Callander and Stirling and a service to Kenmore four times daily Monday to Friday, but not in July or August. There is also a postbus service (202) between Aberfeldy and Killin (1½ hours, Monday to Saturday).

Killin is on the Citylink bus route linking Perth (£4.50, 1¼ hours) and Oban (£8.40, 1½ hours); there are two buses each way daily.

FIFE

Fife can feel quite different from the rest of Scotland, partly due to its geographical position. A tongue of land between the Firths of Forth and Tay, it is still mostly accessed by bridges and indeed feels something like an island. It was home to generations of Scottish monarchs and still likes to style itself 'The Kingdom of Fife'.

Although southern Fife's proximity to Edinburgh has led to overdevelopment and

a commuter-belt feel, the rest of the county is enchanting. Rolling, tumbling, lush farmland dominates the countryside, while the coast is dotted with fishing villages where you can munch on fresh local crabs while gazing across the Firth of Forth. In the west, the dignified village of Culross is an incredibly well-preserved 17th-century burgh.

Fife's biggest attraction is St Andrews, whose university is the oldest in Scotland. It has a wealth of stately buildings and, as the birthplace and headquarters of golf, draws professionals and keen slashers alike to take on the Old Course and its blustery conditions.

Getting Around

Fife Council produces a useful transport map, *Getting Around Fife*, available from tourist offices, bus and train stations and has a **Public Transport Information Line** (☎ 01334-412902). **Stagecoach** (☎ 01383-511911; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main bus operator.

ST ANDREWS

☎ 01334 / pop 14,200 / elev 33m

The home of golf, and Scotland's oldest university town, St Andrews is a small, prosperous place that's a very appealing spot to visit even if you're not a fan of the world's most frustrating game. There's an impressive concoction of medieval ruins and idyllic coastal scenery here, as well as the stately buildings of the university itself. Prince William is just one of many famous St Andrews graduates.

The Old Course, the world's most famous, has a striking seaside location at the western end of town. Although it's difficult to get a game (see the boxed text, p848), it's still a thrilling experience to stroll the hallowed turf. Between the students and the golfers, St Andrews can feel like the least Scottish of places as, although technically a city, it's very small.

History

It's believed that St Andrews was founded by the Greek monk St Regulus in the 4th century. He brought important relics from Greece, including some of the bones of St Andrew, who became Scotland's patron saint.

The town soon grew into a major pilgrimage centre for the shrine of the saint and developed into an ecclesiastical centre. Scotland's first university was founded here in 1410.

Golf has been played here for more than 600 years; the Royal & Ancient Golf Club was

founded in 1754 and the imposing clubhouse was built a hundred years later.

Orientation & Information

St Andrews preserves its medieval plan of parallel streets with small closes leading off them. The old town stretches east from the bus station, with Market St running east-west between North St and South St. The Old Course stretches northwest of town. The old university buildings are integrated into the central part of the town. There's a small harbour below the cathedral and two excellent sandy beaches.

Useful businesses:

Costa Coffee (Market St; per hr £3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Internet access.

St Andrews Library (☎ 412685; Church Sq; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 9.30am-7pm Tue-Thu) Free internet access upstairs. Several terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 472021; www.standrews.com; standrews@visitfife.com; 70 Market St; ☎ Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, daily Apr-Oct) Mountains of information about Fife.

Sights

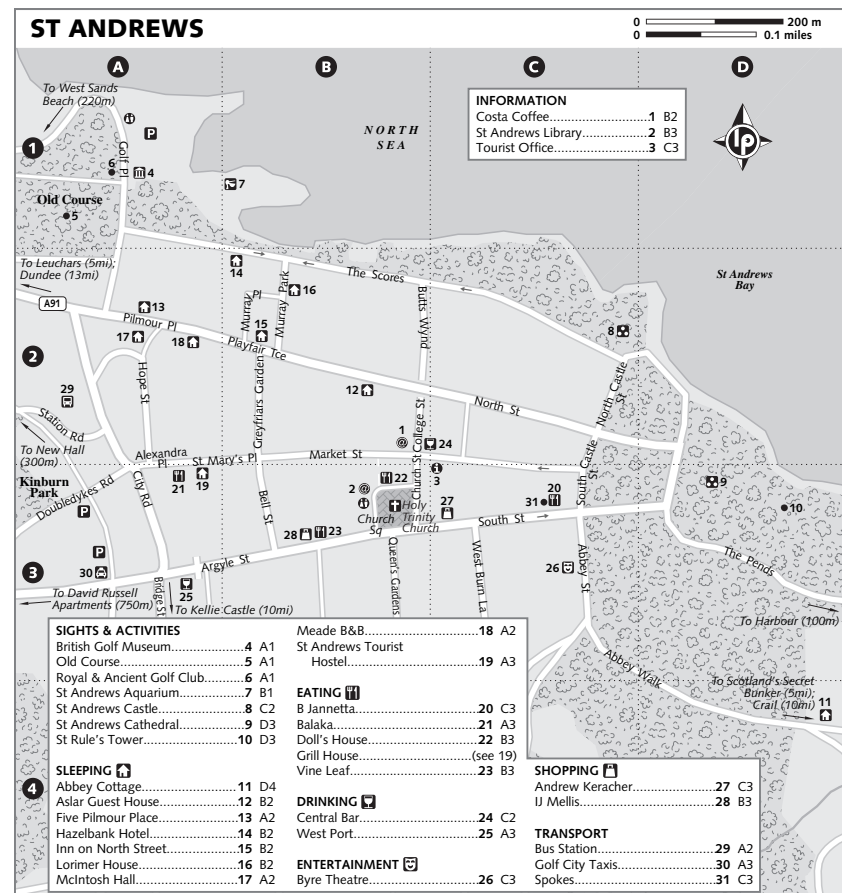
ST ANDREWS CATHEDRAL & RULE'S TOWER The ruins of St Andrews' once-mighty cathedral (HS; ☎ 472563; cathedral & castle £6, cathedral only £3.50; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿) have been described as 'the greatest achievement in Scottish medieval architecture'. It was once the largest – and one of the most magnificent cathedrals – in the country, and it's possible to get a sense of its immensity from the remaining but ruined western end.

Although it was founded in 1160, it was not consecrated until 1318. It stood as the focus of this important pilgrimage centre until 1559, when it was pillaged during the Reformation.

St Andrews' supposed bones lay under the high altar; until the cathedral was built, they had been enshrined in the nearby Church of St Regulus (St Rule). All that remains is **St Rule's Tower**, well worth the climb for the view across St Andrews and a great place for taking photographs. The visitors centre includes a museum with a collection of Celtic crosses and gravestones found on the site. There's an entry fee for access to the museum and St Rule's Tower, but the ruins you can absorb freely.

ST ANDREWS CASTLE

With dramatic coastline views, **St Andrews castle** (HS; ☎ 477196; cathedral & castle £6, castle only



£4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿), round from the cathedral, is mainly in ruins, but the site itself is evocative. The most interesting thing to see is the complex of **siege tunnels**, said to be the best surviving example of castle siege engineering in Europe. You can walk along the damp, mossy tunnels, lit by electric lights – but be warned, it helps if you're short!

The castle was founded around 1200 as the fortified home of the bishop. In the 1450s the young King James II often stayed here. After the execution of Protestant reformers in 1545, other reformers retaliated by murdering Cardinal Beaton and taking over the castle. They spent almost a year holed up, during which they dug the siege tunnels.

THE SCORES

From the castle, the Scores follows the coast west and down to the first tee at the Old Course. At the west end is the family-friendly **St Andrews Aquarium** (☎ 474786; www.standrewsaquarium.co.uk; adult/child £6.20/4.40; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, call for winter opening), where, bizarrely, you can snack on fish and chips in the café after your visit.

Nearby, the **British Golf Museum** (☎ 460046; www.britishgolfmuseum.co.uk; Bruce Embankment; adult/child £5/2.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar; ♿) is an excellent attraction for anyone interested in golf, with a great level of detail about the history and development of the game. Most charming fact: bad players were formerly known as 'foozlers'. There's less about the modern game, but good

interactive panels where you can relive former British Opens or watch classic moments like Paul Azinger snapping his putter. Check the website for special offers before visiting.

Opposite the museum is the **Royal & Ancient Golf Club**, which stands proudly at the head of the **Old Course**, which you can stroll on once play is finished for the day. Beside it stretches the magnificent West Sands beach, made famous by the film *Chariots of Fire*.

Sleeping

Accommodation in St Andrews is fairly expensive, due to high property prices, but there's a wide choice, except during summer when things fill up quickly. The biggest concentration of B&Bs is on Murray Park, between North St and the Scores.

BUDGET

St Andrews Tourist Hostel (☎ 479911; www.standrews-hotel.com; St Marys Pl; dm £12-15; 📶) This is the only hostel in St Andrews, and it is located mightily conveniently; it's often booked solid. Set in the upstairs floors of an attractive building, it has high corniced ceilings and a spacious feel. Run along extremely easygoing lines, the dorms are good and bright; groups and families can take advantage of the attic room, with five single beds. There's laundry, internet, a good kitchen, and a sociable lounge.

MIDRANGE

Meade B&B (☎ 477350; annmeade10@hotmail.com; 5 Albany Pl; s/d without bathroom £23/45) An economical gem in pricy St Andrews with a warm, unfussy family atmosphere. You'll soon meet the family and pets, especially Fudge, the golden retriever who sits hopefully by the breakfast table. The three rooms share a good bathroom and are all named by their prevailing colour scheme. They are comfortable, airy, and bright, and have books and DVDs to enjoy. Children are more than welcome – and stay cheaper. The location couldn't be better, close to the bus station and Old Course, and with plenty of free parking nearby.

Lorimer House (☎ 476599; www.lorimerhouse.com; 19 Murray Park; per person £26-42; 📶) This Victorian terrace is one of several good B&Bs on this street. The rooms vary significantly; the standard ones are smallish, with dark lacquered fittings; the ones at the front are perhaps best for the large windows they offer. All feel sparkling clean and newly decorated and have especially comfortable beds. The room on the top floor is classified as 'deluxe', and has a great outlook and an excellent bathroom.

Aslar Guest House (☎ 473460; www.aslar.com; 120 North St; s/d £41/82; 📶 wi-fi) A real bastion of St Andrews hospitality, this terraced house has sumptuously elegant rooms. It's exceptional value; computers with free internet have recently been added

to all rooms, which had DVD players before most people had heard of them. These modern conveniences do not detract from the house's period features, which include a whimsical turret, which houses one of the rooms. Another room has a lovely four-poster; downstairs is a very comfortable leather lounge area. There's a real feeling of relaxed luxury without fussiness here, so book well ahead!

University of St Andrews Holidays (☎ 462000; www.escapetotranquillity.com; 📶 mid-Jun–early Sep; 📶) When the university is out of session, three student residences are opened up as visitor accommodation. There's a hotel, New Hall (singles/doubles £46/68); self-catering flats, David Russell Apartments (per week £490 to £590); and a B&B, the central Mcintosh Hall (per person £29.50). These prices are all good value for the standard of accommodation on offer.

our pick **Abbey Cottage** (☎ 473727; coull@lineone.net; Abbey Walk; d £52-56; 📶) This is a delightful and engaging spot in which to stay; it feels like you are staying in the country, rather than in town, with eggs from the hens, tasty porridge, and a doocot (dovecote) outside in the rambling garden. There are three excellent rooms, all different, with patchwork quilts, sheepskins, and antique furniture. Best, it's run with relaxed good humour by the fascinating owner, who is a photographer. Stunning shots of noble wild tigers decorate the round breakfast room.

TOP END

Hazelbank Hotel (☎ 472466; www.hazelbank.com; 28 the Scores; s £75, small d £85, d from £111; 📶 wi-fi) Best value of the hotels along the Scores, the Hazelbank is family-run, and a relaxed environment in which to stay. There are good portents if you are playing a round – Bobby Locke stayed here when he won the British Open in 1957. The hotel is characterised by a genuine welcome and very good personal service. The rooms at the front cost a little more but are worth every penny for their sensational views – some through big bay windows – along the beach and out to sea.

Inn on North Street (☎ 473387; www.theinnon-northstreet.com; 127 North St; s £100, d £120-140; wi-fi) Prices have soared at this cheery hostelry in the last couple of years, but it still represents an intriguing place to stay. The rooms are sun-kissed and spacious, with a lightly-worn Celtic theme. The 'superior' rooms are especially large, and boast large bathrooms with a Jacuzzi. The bar and breakfast area are similarly attractive, with plenty of natural light,

and predominantly wood décor. There's good bar food, as well as a more serious restaurant. Downstairs, the Lizard Lounge has DJs and occasional ceilidhs.

our pick **Five Pilmour Place** (☎ 478665; www.5pil-mourplace.com; 5 Pilmour Pl; r to £143; 📶 wi-fi) Just around the corner from the Old Course, this luxurious and intimate spot marries contemporary European design with Indochinese art and modernised Victoriana. Colourful checked squares pattern freestanding bathtubs, while twin Buddhas contemplate your progress up the stairs. The bedrooms are very luxurious, with modern conveniences – DVD player, flat-screen TV – alongside ultracomfy king-size beds. There are several generous touches that add to the pleasure of a stay: free international calls, for example, free internet, and a professional and friendly welcome. Breakfast is in the gourmet class, and can be eaten in the attractive garden on a good day.

Eating & Drinking

B Jannetta (☎ 473285; 31 South St; 2-scoop cone £1.80; 📶 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This is a St Andrews institution, offering 52 varieties of ice cream. These range from the decadent (strawberries-and-champagne) to the weird (Irn-Bru sorbet)! There's also a decent café next door.

Balaka (☎ 474825; 3 Alexandra Pl; mains £5-13; 📶 noon-3pm & 5pm-12.30am Mon-Thu, noon-1am Fri & Sat, 5pm-12.30am Sun) This Bangladeshi restaurant comes highly recommended for its great-value curries, which are seasoned with herbs grown in its own plot of land. There's a great range of usual favourites and inspiring new discoveries. The service is patient and good-natured. The £6.95 lunch deal is a bargain too.

Grill House (☎ 470500; St Mary's Pl; mains £7-15; 📶 noon-3pm & 5-10.30pm) This cheerful, sometimes boisterous restaurant is run by the folks at the Doll's House but offers a much different vibe, with a big range of food ranging from Mexican, pizza and pasta to char-grilled salmon and quality steaks. There's something for every taste and wallet; scatty service is compensated for by the upbeat atmosphere and nice touches, such as free margarita and corn chips on arrival.

Doll's House (☎ 477422; 3 Church Sq; mains £12-15; 📶 lunch & dinner) Like the bedroom of a Victorian child, with dark-wood furniture and rocking horses, this offers a highly enjoyable lunching or dining experience in the centre of St Andrews. Apart from the atmospheric surroundings and outdoor tables, the food is creative

PLAYING THE OLD COURSE

Golf has been played at St Andrews since the 15th century and by 1457 was apparently so popular that James II had to place a ban on it because it was interfering with his troops' archery practice. Although it lies beside the exclusive, all-male (female bartenders, unsurprisingly, allowed) Royal & Ancient Golf Club, the Old Course is actually public.

Getting a tee-off time is something of a lottery. Unless you book months in advance, the only chance you have of playing here is by entering a ballot at the **caddie office** (☎ 01334-466666) before 2pm on the day before you wish to play. Be warned that applications by ballot are normally heavily oversubscribed, and green fees are £120 in summer. There's no play allowed on Sunday. If your number doesn't come up, there are five other public courses in the area, none with quite the cachet of the Old Course but all of them significantly cheaper. Summer fees are: New £57, Jubilee £57, Eden £34, Strathtyrum £23 and Balgove £10. There are various multiple-day tickets available for these courses. If you play on a windy day expect those scores to balloon: Nick Faldo famously stated that when it blows here, 'even the seagulls walk'.

Advance bookings for the Old Course can be made by phone or online to the **St Andrews Links Trust** (☎ 01334-466666; www.standrews.org.uk). You must reserve after the first Wednesday in September the year before you wish to play. You'll need a handicap certificate (minimum 24/36 for men/women).

The trust runs **guided walks** (£2.50) of the Old Course at weekends in June and daily in July and August; these will take you to famous landmarks such as the Swilcan Bridge and the Road Hole bunker. Times vary according to events on the course.

and comfortable, with inventive flair applied to traditional Scottish and European dishes, served in generous portions. The set meals are brilliant value: just £6.95 for a two-course lunch, or £12.95 for dinner before 7pm.

Central Bar (☎ 478296; 77 Market St; ☎ food 11am-9pm) Right in the heart of things, this pub is also something of an institution, and the island bar is regularly surrounded by a mixture of students, academics, and golfers debating missed putts. There's always a wide range of Scottish beers, including a few guest selections. The food served is fairly standard pub fare, without pretensions to 'gastro' status.

Other recommendations:

West Port (☎ 473186; 170 South St; mains £8-14; ☎ noon-11pm; wi-fi) Modernised, sleek and handsome, with sophisticated food (served from 6pm to 8pm) and a great beer garden out the back.

Vine Leaf (☎ 477497; 131 South St; 2-course dinner £19.95; ☎ 7-10pm Tue-Sun) Sumptuous seafood, game and vegetarian dishes in a refined, comfortable, and welcoming atmosphere. There's also an attractive self-catering apartment (per day/week £80/350).

Entertainment

Byre Theatre (☎ 475000; www.byretheatre.com; Abbey St) Originally housed in a cowshed, hence the name, St Andrews main theatre now resides in a smart new building that cleverly takes advantage of natural light. As well as the performances, it's got a very pleasant café and bar.

Shopping

Andrew Keracher (☎ 472541; 73 South St) Widely regarded as Scotland's finest fishmonger.

IJ Mellis (☎ 471410; 149 South St) A wealth of cheeses that you can smell halfway down the street.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus destinations include Edinburgh (£7, two hours, hourly), Glasgow (£7, 2½ hours, hourly), Stirling (£6, two hours, six to seven Monday to Saturday), Dundee (£3.10, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

The nearest train station to St Andrews is Leuchars, 5 miles away. There are services to Edinburgh (£9.70, one hour, hourly), Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness. Buses connect the station with St Andrews bus station frequently.

Getting Around

To park in the centre of town you need a voucher, bought from the tourist office or many shops in town. Parking police are vigilant.

A taxi from the train station at Leuchars to the town centre costs around £10 with **Golf City Taxis** (☎ 477888).

Spokes (☎ 477835; 37 South St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) hires out hybrids and mountain bikes from £10.50 per day or £3 per hour.

AROUND ST ANDREWS

Also see East Neuk, below, for attractions in the St Andrews area.

Kellie Castle

A magnificent example of Lowland Scottish domestic architecture, **Kellie Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01333-720271; adult/child £8/5; ☎ 1-5pm Easter weekend & May-Sep, garden & grounds 9.30am-5.30pm year-round) has creaky floors, crooked little doorways and some marvellous works of art, which give it an air of authenticity. It's set in a beautiful garden and many rooms contain superb plasterwork; the Vine room is the most exquisite. The original part of the building dates from 1360 and was enlarged to its present dimensions around 1606.

It's 3 miles northwest of Pittenweem on the B9171. Stagecoach Fife bus 95 from St Andrews gets you closest; about 1.5 miles away.

Scotland's Secret Bunker

A compelling and fascinating relic of the Cold War, **Scotland's Secret Bunker** (☎ 01333-310301; www.secretbunker.co.uk; adult/child £7.80/4.80; ☎ 10am-6pm late Mar-Oct, last admission 5pm) is by the B9131 about 5 miles south of St Andrews. It was earmarked to be one of Britain's underground command and control centres and a home for Scots leaders in the event of nuclear war. Hidden 30m underground and surrounded by reinforced concrete are the austere operation rooms, communication centre and dormitories. It's very authentic and uses original artefacts of the period, which make for an absorbing exploration.

If the spine-tingling atmosphere isn't enough, a harrowing film called *The War Game*, which was banned by the BBC, gives a horrifying account of the realities of a nuclear war. It's graphic and definitely not for kids, but highlights the madness of the era. There's also an underground café and free internet access.

There's no easy bus access, but a cab from St Andrews will cost about £12.

EAST NEUK

☎ 01333

South of St Andrews, the section of the southern Fife coast that stretches from Leven east to

the point at Fife Ness is known as East Neuk. There are picturesque fishing villages, some great restaurants, and good coastal walks in the area. It's easily visited from St Andrews, but also makes a peaceful area to stay.

Crail

pop 1700

Pretty and peaceful, little Crail has a much photographed harbour surrounded by stone cottages with red-tiled roofs. You can buy lobster and crabs from a kiosk at the harbour; just to the east is a large grassed area with seating, the perfect place to munch on your alfresco crustacean meal while admiring the view across to the Isle of May.

See the small and friendly **tourist office** (☎ 450 869; crail@visitfife.com; 62 Marketgait; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, weekends only Apr-May) for information. The village's history and involvement with the fishing industry is outlined in the **Crail Museum** (admission free), in the same building and keeping the same hours.

Caipie House (☎ 450564; www.caipiehouse.com; 53 High St North; r £55-60; ☎ Apr-Oct), in the centre of town, a block west of the crossroads, has large rooms with lots of lights, and big soft beds perfect for flopping down after a day's touring, walking, or golfing; a lounge with chessboard; and a pretty dining room where breakfast is served: dinners can also be arranged. An extra couple of quid buys the top room, which has fantastic views across to the East Lothian coast.

Crail is located 10 miles southeast of St Andrews. Stagecoach bus 95 connects them hourly.

Anstruther

pop 3440

Once one of Scotland's busiest ports, cheery Anstruther has ridden the tribulations of the Scottish fishing industry better than some, and now has a very pleasant mixture of bobbing boats, historic streets, and visitors ambling around the harbour grazing on fish and chips or contemplating a trip across to the Isle of May.

The **tourist office** (☎ 311073; anstruther@visitfife.com; Harbourhead; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct) is by the harbour and is extremely helpful and efficient. In the same building, is the down-to-earth **Scottish Fisheries Museum** (☎ 310628; adult/child £4.50/free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat & noon-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep; ☎), beside the tourist office. Displays include a typical fishing family's cottage and the history

of Anstruther's once-important herring and whaling industries.

From the harbour you can take a four- to five-hour excursion aboard the **May Princess** (☎ 310103; www.isleofmayferry.com; adult/child £16/8; ☎ one almost daily Apr-Sep) to the **Isle of May**, a nature reserve; sailing times depend on the tide (phone or check the website) and the crossing takes just under an hour. The cliffs are packed with breeding kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots, shags and puffins from May to July. Inland are the remains of 12th-century **St Adrian's Chapel**.

SLEEPING & EATING

Curpick Spindrift (☎ 310573; www.thespindrift.co.uk; Pittenweem Rd; s/d £45/65; ☎ wi-fi) A refuge of good taste and warm hospitality, this excellent guesthouse is one of the best-value spots to stay in Fife. The en-suite rooms (with teddy bears) are exceptionally attractive and comfortable; you can see across to Edinburgh from some of them. For something different, try the room which the old salt who once owned the house did out like a ship's cabin. Downstairs, the bar-lounge has malts and distinctive Scottish ales; the breakfast is generous, and includes porridge which has been voted the best in the Kingdom. Dinner also by arrangement.

Anstruther Fish Bar (☎ 310518; 42 Shore St; ☎ 11.30am-10pm) Reputedly one of Prince William's favourite destinations while studying at St Andrews, this waterside place does tasty and famous fish and chips to eat in or, better, sit outside with. It's mobbed in summer. Haddock and chips to take away is £4.35; to eat in is £6.35.

Dreel Tavern (☎ 310727; 16 High St; bar meals £5-11; ☎ food noon-2pm & 5.30-9pm) This atmospheric traditional pub appeals for its low ceilings and bright and breezy staff. There's a beer garden, appetising food served and several real ales on tap, including the brilliantly named 'Bitter and Twisted', a Stirlingshire-brewed beer bristling with fresh hoppy flavour.

Cellar Restaurant (☎ 310378; 24 East Green; lunch £17.50, 2-/3-/4-course dinner £28.50/34.50/38.50; ☎ lunch Wed-Sat, 7-9pm Tue-Sat) Tucked away behind the museum, this convivial spot is famous for its variety of seafood. It's heavily booked in summer; if you get a table, adorn it with local crab, lobster, or the excellent marinated herring.

Seafood Restaurant (☎ 730327; 16 West End, St Monans; ☎ lunch & dinner) This swish seafood restaurant is on the harbour at St Monans, 4 miles

west. It's an enchanting and relaxing place to eat, with delicious fish dishes; the Dover sole is a star. There's another attractive branch in St Andrews.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The hourly Stagecoach bus 95 runs hourly from Leven (45 minutes) to Anstruther and on to St Andrews (35 minutes) via Crail.

FALKLAND

☎ 01337 / pop 1180

Below the soft ridges of the Lomond Hills in the centre of Fife is the charming village of Falkland. It essentially developed around its magnificent centrepiece, the 16th-century **Falkland Palace** (NTS; ☎ 857397; adult/child £10/7; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun Mar-Oct), a country residence of the Stuart monarchs. Mary Queen of Scots is said to have spent the happiest days of her life 'playing the country girl in the woods and parks' at Falkland.

The palace is visually stunning, a masterpiece of Scottish Gothic, and with much French influence evident in the decoration and furnishings. There are several fine portraits of the Stuart monarchs, and various chambers have been reconstructed, although much of the original castle was gutted by Cromwell's troops. The highlight is the beautiful chapel with heraldic windows, an ornate painted ceiling, and elegant oak screen. Outside in the ample gardens, one feature of an ancient royal leisure-centre still exists: the oldest royal tennis court in Britain, built in 1539 for James V, is in the grounds and still in use.

Sleeping & Eating

Burgh Lodge (☎ 857710; www.burghlodge.co.uk; Back Wynd; dm/tw £12/24; P) An excellent budget choice, this sparkingly refurbished hostel has terrific views of the Lomond Hills and enthusiastic management. The rooms are bright as a new pin; there are dorm beds as well as twin and family rooms available. Guests have use of a modern kitchen and laundry service; this is seriously comfortable hosting. Great disabled facilities. Often booked out by groups.

Covenanter Hotel (☎ 857224; High St; www.covenanterhotel.com; s/d £45/70) Opposite the church, this characterful old coaching inn is a decent enough place to stay. There are just three rooms which are large and somewhat faded, but comfortable. More inspiringly, downstairs is a smart new Italian restaurant: Luigino's

(mains £8 to £12; open for lunch and dinner) serves authentic and tasty dishes such as saltimbocca, as well as delicious wood-fired pizza accompanied by a good range of Italian wines. All served in a cheerful and stylish atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus 36 travels between Glenrothes and Auchtermuchty via Falkland. From either of those two places, there are regular connections to St Andrews and other Fife destinations. It carries on to Perth (one hour) every couple of hours.

SOUTHWESTERN FIFE

☎ 01383

Southwestern Fife is an odd mixture of rapidly expanding urban sprawl (Fife's proximity to expensive Edinburgh has made it part of the commuter belt) and quiet country lanes. There are several worthwhile attractions here, all easily visited on a day trip from the capital.

Aberdour

This little town is notable chiefly for the attractive ruins of **Aberdour Castle** (HS; ☎ 860519; adult/child £3.50/1.50; ☹ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar). Long a residence of the Douglasses of Morton, the stately structure exhibits several architectural phases. It's worth purchasing the guidebook to better comprehend what you see. Most charming of all is the elaborate doocot at the bottom of the garden. Be sure to pop into the beautiful Romanesque church of St Fillan's, next door to the castle.

Aberdour is 5 miles east of the Forth Rd Bridge on the A921. Stagecoach bus 7 regularly connects Aberdour with nearby Dunfermline, and there are regular trains to Edinburgh (30 minutes) and Dundee (one hour).

Dunfermline

Sprawling Dunfermline is an important regional centre and the major town in Fife but appeals more as a day trip from Edinburgh, Stirling, or St Andrews than as a place to stay. However, it has an excellent historical attraction. **Dunfermline Abbey** (HS; ☎ 739026; admission £3; ☹ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Thu, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) was built by David I in the 12th century as a Benedictine monastery. It grew into a major religious centre, eclipsing the island of Iona (off Mull) as the favourite royal burial ground. Many

ROSYTH FERRIES

Rosyth, 3 miles south of Dunfermline, is home to a ferry-link with Belgium. From Edinburgh, Stagecoach bus X2 runs to Rosyth (35 minutes) and connects with the ferries. There are frequent local services from Dunfermline, and buses to the train station at nearby Inverkeithing connect with rail services to Edinburgh, Perth and Inverness.

monarchs are buried here, including Robert the Bruce, under the pulpit. The area you can explore is the wonderful Norman nave with ornate columns and superb stained-glass windows. Note the picture of Robert the Bruce standing over the devil (England, perhaps?).

Next to the abbey are the ruins of **Dunfermline Palace** (admission included in abbey ticket) rebuilt from the abbey guesthouse in the 16th century for James VI, whose son, the ill-fated Charles I, was born here in 1600.

There are frequent buses to Edinburgh (40 minutes), Stirling (1¼ hours) and St Andrews (1¼ hours). There are also regular trains from Edinburgh (30 minutes).

Culross

Enchanting Culross (coo-ross) is the best-preserved example of a 17th-century Scottish burgh. Small, red-tiled, whitewashed buildings line the cobbled streets, and the winding Back Causeway to the abbey is embellished with whimsical street-front stone cottages.

As the birthplace of St Mungo, Glasgow's patron saint, Culross was an important religious centre from the 6th century. The burgh developed by mining coal through underwater tunnels, under the laird George Bruce; vigorous trade resulted between Culross and the Forth ports and Holland, enabling Bruce to build and complete the palace by 1611. When a storm flooded the tunnels and mining became impossible the town switched to making linen and shoes.

You can visit **Culross Palace** (NTS; ☎ 880359; adult/child £8/5; ☹ noon-5pm Easter-Sep), more a large house than a palace, which features decorative, painted woodwork and an interior largely unchanged since the early 17th century, as well as a re-created formal garden from the era. The **Town House** and the **Study** (admission included in the palace ticket), also early-17th-century buildings, are also open to the public.

On the hill is the grand, ruined **Culross Abbey** (HS; admission free; ☹ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 2-7pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Mar), founded by the Cistercians in 1217.

Culross is 12 miles west of the Forth Rd Bridge, off the A985. Stagecoach bus 78/78A runs to Culross from Dunfermline (20 minutes, hourly), with some services going to Stirling (one hour, every two hours).

PERTSHIRE & KINROSS

A 19th-century competitor to this guidebook suggested 'Among all the provinces in Scotland, if an intelligent stranger were asked to describe the most varied and the most beautiful, it is probable he would name the county of Perth'. Nothing has changed, for the joys of Perthshire are many, and the region has a magical quality.

It's an area of huge scenic variety, from the bleak expanse of Rannoch Moor in the west to the rich forested valleys and lakes further east. The main town, Perth, is an excellent little place, quiet, but with an outstanding attraction in the lavish country mansion that is Scone Palace. Further north, another sumptuous residence, Blair Castle, stands near the touristy town of Pitlochry.

It's more remote western Perthshire that really gets pulses racing, though. The enchanting valley of Glen Lyon can strike visitors dumb with its wild and remote beauty. Stunning Loch Tay, base for ascending Ben Lawers, is nearby; the River Tay runs east from here towards Dunkeld, which has an outstanding cathedral that is among the most beautifully situated in the country.

Getting Around

The A9, Scotland's busiest road, cuts across the centre of this region through Perth and Pitlochry. It's the fast route into the Highlands and to Inverness, and very busy.

Perth & Kinross Council produce a useful public transport map that's available at all tourist offices in the area; it shows all services in the region. **Stagecoach** (☎ 01738-629339; www.stagecoachbus.com) and **Strathtay Scottish** (☎ 01382-228345) run local services.

Trains run alongside the A9, destined for Aviemore and Inverness. The other main line connects Perth with Stirling (in the south) and Dundee and Arbroath (in the east).

PERTH

☎ 01738 / pop 43,500 / elev 22m

Perth is a grand little town elegantly perched on the banks of the Tay. Once the country's capital, it's of a very manageable size, and is a delightful place to wander. On the outskirts, Scone Palace, a country house of staggering luxury, is built alongside the mound where Scotland's kings were once crowned. It's a must-see, but the city itself is a bustling, liveable place enriched by stately architecture, fine galleries, and some excellent restaurants. On a sunny day it's hard to top a picnic in one of the two large, verdant parks that sandwich the centre of town. It's an important regional hub and is within easy striking distance of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Information

AK Bell Library (☎ 444949; York Pl; ☎ Mon-Sat) Free internet access.

Gig@Bytes (☎ 451580; 5 St Paul's Sq; per hr £5;

☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Friendly, if pricy, internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 450600; West Mill St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat Nov-Mar) Maps of Perth and well-prepared information sheets.

Sights

SCONE PALACE

So thanks to all at once and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crowned
at Scone.

Macbeth

Fabulous **Scone Palace** (☎ 552300; www.scone-palace.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, call for winter opening; Ⓜ), pronounced skoon, is 2 miles north of Perth. It was built in 1580 on a site intrinsic to Scottish history. Here in 838, Kenneth MacAlpin became the first king of a united Scotland and brought the Stone of Destiny (see p757), on which all Scottish kings were ceremonially invested, to Moot Hill. In 1296 Edward I of England carted the talisman off to Westminster Abbey, where it remained for 700 years before being returned to Scotland.

A visit here doesn't really conjure up hoary days of bearded warrior kings swearing oaths in the mist, however, as Scone, rebuilt as a Georgian palace in the early 19th century, is a mansion of extreme elegance and luxury.

The visit takes you through a succession of sumptuous rooms filled with fine French fur-

niture and noble artworks. There's an astonishing collection of porcelain and fine portraits, as well as a series of exquisite Vernis Martin papier maché. Scone Palace has belonged for centuries to the Murray family, Earls of Mansfield, and many of the objects have fascinating history attached to them (friendly guides are on hand). Each room has comprehensive multilingual information; there are also panels relating histories of some of the Scottish kings crowned at Scone over the centuries.

Outside, the resident peacocks – all named after a monarch – strut around the magnificent grounds, which incorporate woods, a butterfly garden, and a maze.

The ancient kings were crowned atop Moot Hill, topped by a chapel, next to the palace. It's said that the hill was created by bootfuls of earth, brought by nobles attending the coronations as an acknowledgement of the king's rights over their own lands, although it's probably the site of an ancient motte-and-bailey castle.

From the centre of Perth, cross the bridge, turn left, and keep bearing left until you reach the gates of the estate (15 to 20 minutes). From here, it's another half-mile or so to the palace. Stagecoach bus 3, and Strathtay bus 58 stop at the gates roughly hourly; the tourist office will give you a complete timetable. There's a good café at the palace.

FERGUSON GALLERY

Within the original Perth waterworks building, aptly titled the Round House, this **gallery** (☎ 441944; cnr Marshall Pl & Tay St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; Ⓜ) has the most extensive collection of work by Scottish colourist JD Fergusson, one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century. He spent much time in Paris, and the French influence is evident in this fine assemblage of paintings, drawings, and sculpture.

ST JOHN'S KIRK

One block south of High St, this redoubtable stone **church** (St John's Pl; requested donation £1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun May-Sep, before services rest of year) dates from the 15th century, although the site was first consecrated in 1126 and serves as an impressive reminder of the Reformation in Scotland. In 1559 John Knox preached a powerful sermon here, inciting a frenzied destruction of Scone abbey and other religious sites. Perth used to be known as St John's Town after this church; the football team here is still called St Johnstone.

PERTH MUSEUM

The city's main **museum** (☎ 632488; cnr George & Charlotte Sts; admission free; ☎ Mon-Sat 10am-5pm; Ⓜ) is worth a stroll through for the elegant neoclassical interior alone. There's a varied shower of exhibits, ranging from portraits of dour lairds to good local social history. A geological room provides more entertainment for the young, while there are often excellent temporary exhibitions.

BLACK WATCH MUSEUM

Housed in a mansion on the edge of North Inch, this **museum** (☎ 0131 310 8530; Hay St; recommended donation £3.50; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) honours what was once Scotland's foremost regiment. Formed in 1725 to combat rural banditry, the Black Watch have fought in numerous campaigns, re-created here with paintings, memorabilia, anecdotes, and countless medals. There's little attempt at historical perspective: there's justifiable pride in the regiment's role in the gruelling trench warfare of WWI, where it suffered nearly 30,000 casualties, but no hint of sheepishness about less glorious colonial engagements, such as against

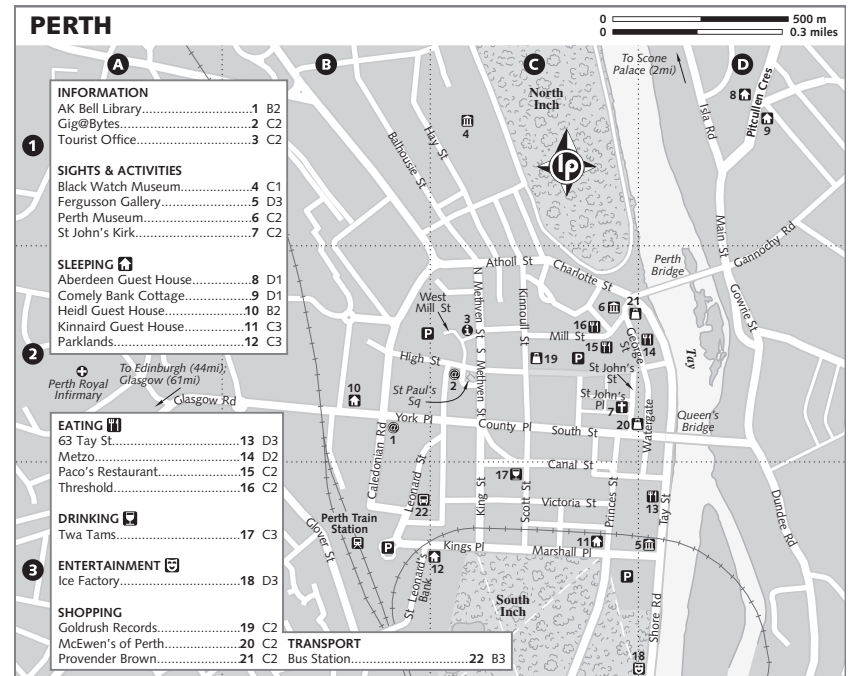
the 'Fuzzy Wuzzies' of Sudan. These days they sport combat trousers instead of the traditional kilts. In March 2006 the five Scottish regiments were subsumed as battalions in the new Royal Regiment of Scotland, so the Black Watch, as a separate regiment at least, is no more.

Sleeping

There is currently no hostel accommodation in Perth.

Heidl Guest House (☎ 635031; www.heidl.co.uk; 43 York Pl; s/d £23/46; Ⓜ) The Heidl has much better rooms than you'd expect at first glance. They're light and have good-sized beds, and even the one facing the busy road isn't too noisy. Shared bathrooms (some rooms come with good, modern en suite) are very clean and the owners are helpful. Writer John Buchan (of *Thirty-Nine Steps* fame) was born in the house opposite.

Comely Bank Cottage (☎ 631118; www.comelybankcottage.co.uk; 19 Pittcullen Cres; s/d £30/48; Ⓜ) This is one of the best B&Bs on this stretch, a beautifully kept family home offering large and commodious rooms with spacious en suite. The hospitable owner will make you feel very welcome.



Kinnaird Guest House (☎ 628021; www.kinnaird-guesthouse.co.uk; 5 Marshall Pl; s/d £35/55; (P) wi-fi) This is the best of the handful of guesthouses enjoying a privileged position across the road from the lovely South Inch parkland. The elegant old house has noble original features and boasts appealing, bright rooms with big beds. The owners are engaging and extremely helpful; they are justifiably proud of what Perth has to offer.

Aberdeen Guest House (☎ 633183; peterbuchan@fsmail.net; 13 Pitcullen Cres; d £50-60; (P)) A real pleasure to stay at, the Aberdeen is run by an enthusiastic, ebullient couple who will really make you feel at home. Not averse to strapping on a backpack themselves, they know what a weary traveller is after, with great, comfortable beds, Horlicks on the tea tray, rooms overlooking a beautiful garden, and plenty of friendly conversation.

our pick Parklands (☎ 622451; www.theparklandshotel.com; 2 St Leonard's Bank; s/d from £79/99; (P) wi-fi) This is a delightful, secluded place overlooking the verdant expanse of South Inch. While the rooms conserve the character of this beautiful building, formerly the residence of the town's mayors, they also offer modern conveniences such as CD and DVD players and wireless broadband internet. The rooms are all different in size and price, but all offer a high degree of comfort. The restaurant has a fine reputation and a terrace to lap up the Perthshire sun.

Eating

Threshold (☎ 0845-612 6324; Mill St; dishes £7-10; ☎ food 10am-6pm) In the foyer of the spanking new Perth Concert Hall, this open-plan eatery has plenty to offer. The range of light daytime dishes includes several healthy and vegetarian choices – an asparagus and pea risotto stood out – as well as sandwiches and fresh juices.

Paco's Restaurant (☎ 622290; 3 Mill St; mains £7-19; ☎ 9.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 4.30pm-11pm Sun) A well-loved local eating spot, Paco's is popular for its fountain-tinkled outdoor seating and huge, wide-ranging menu. Whatever you fancy, you'll probably find it here – steaks, seafood, pizza, pasta and Mexican all feature, including plenty of vegetarian choice. The portions are generous and the quality unspectacular but reliable.

Metzo (☎ 626016; 33 George St; mains £10-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ☎) This is a zippy modern eatery whose light contemporary interior – shaved floorboards, abstract art, and large windows – buzzes with chatter. There's substance to the style; enticing daily

specials enhance a French bistro-style menu bursting with confident flavours and served with effortless charm.

our pick 63 Tay Street (☎ 441451; 63 Tay St; lunch £12.95, 3-course dinner £25.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This classy, understated place has steadily built a great reputation for its attractive, light, dining area, excellent service and quality food. There's always an extremely tempting range of fish, game, beef and vegetarian dishes with an emphasis on quality Scottish produce.

Drinking

Twa Tams (☎ 634500; 79 Scott St) Comfortably Perth's best pub. There's something on nearly every night; it has a sound reputation for attracting talented young bands to town, and is a great spot to see live music. There's also, crucially, a walled beer garden. At the time of writing, it was being refurbished – don't ruin it please!

Entertainment

Ice Factory (☎ 630011; www.icefactory.co.uk; Shore Rd; cover £5-10; ☎ 11pm-2.30am Thu-Sat) Widely known as one of Scotland's best nightclubs outside of Glasgow and Edinburgh, this is near the harbour in the south of town. Built around an open courtyard, high-jinks in the paddling pool and foam parties are regular favourites. High-profile Scottish house DJs often appear and, true to its name, it's a pretty cool place.

Shopping

McEwen's of Perth (☎ 623444; 56 St John's St) This venerable old department store is famous throughout Scotland and sells distinguished and upmarket clothing.

Goldrush Records (☎ 629730; 9 Kinnoull St) A down-to-earth spot that has a well-priced range of secondhand and new CDs, as well as some vinyl.

Provender Brown (☎ 587300; 23 George St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Fabulous deli, with great cheeses, pâtés, and wines.

Getting There & Away

Citylink operates one or two buses every hour to/from Aberdeen (£14.59, 2½ hours); Dundee (35 minutes); Edinburgh (£6.80, 1¼ hours); Glasgow (£7, 1½ hours); and Inverness (£12.20, 2½ hours, at least three daily).

Trains run to Edinburgh (£11.10, 1½ hours, two hourly) and Glasgow (Queen St; £11.10, one hour, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday).

PERTH TO AVIEMORE

There are several major sights strung out along the busy A9, which becomes a scenic treat after Pitlochry – it's the main route north to Aviemore and the Highlands.

Dunkeld & Birnam

☎ 01350 / pop 1000 / elev 78m

Dunkeld is an appealing riverside town with quirky shops, some great nearby walks and one of the best attractions in the region.

The smiling staff at **Dunkeld tourist office** (☎ 727688; The Cross; ☎ daily Apr-Oct, Fri-Tue Nov-Mar) offer plenty of information.

Dunkeld Cathedral (HS; ☎ 727601; High St; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Oct-Mar; ☎) has one of Scotland's most beautiful settings, situated between open grassland which drops into the River Tay on one side, and rolling hills on the other. Half the cathedral is still in use as a church – the rest is in ruins. It partly dates from the 14th century; the 15th-century tower contains a small museum. The cathedral was damaged during the Reformation and burnt in the battle of Dunkeld in 1689. The Wolf of Badenoch (see p868) is buried – undeservedly – here.

A collection of **artisans' houses** restored by National Trust Scotland (NTS) line High and Cathedral Sts; most have plaques with a brief history of their origins. Across Telford Bridge is **Birnam**, made famous by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. There's plenty left of Birnam Wood, which has several walking and cycling trails detailed by the tourist office; there's also a small **Beatrix Potter Park** (the author spent childhood holidays in the area).

A fine spot for a pub lunch on a sunny day is a riverside table at the character-packed **Taybank** (☎ 727340; www.thetaybank.com; Tay Ice; bar mains £5-8; (P)), a music-focused pub which does pasta, baguettes, bar food and more elaborate restaurant meals; it also has decent rooms (singles/doubles £28/45) upstairs.

Citylink buses from Glasgow/Edinburgh (£9.30, two hours, at least three daily) to Inverness stop at the Birnam House Hotel. Frequent Stagecoach buses head to Perth (20 minutes) and Pitlochry (20 minutes, Monday to Saturday).

Trains depart for Edinburgh (£11.10, 1½ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday), Glasgow (£11.10, 1½ hours, two direct daily), and Inverness (£18.70, two hours, three to seven daily).

Pitlochry

☎ 01796 / pop 2564 / elev 147m

While it's a peaceful Highland town out of season, the quantity of tour buses and other holiday traffic choking the main street in summer can really diminish Pitlochry's appeal. However, it's very well situated for exploring northern Perthshire, and has one of Scotland's best pubs in the hills behind the town.

The efficient **tourist office** (☎ 472215; 22 Atholl Rd; ☎ daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) has information about the area. **Computer Services Centre** (☎ 473711; 67 Atholl Rd; per hr £3; ☎ Mon-Sat) has internet connections upstairs.

One of Pitlochry's attractions is its riverside; the Tummel is dammed here, and you can watch salmon swimming (not jumping) up a fish ladder to the loch above.

Pitlochry has a couple of distilleries; by far the nicer is pretty **Edradour** (☎ 472095; www.edradour.co.uk; tours free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jan & Feb, 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun Nov & Dec), proudly Scotland's smallest distillery. It's 2.5 miles east of Pitlochry along the Moulin road, and a pleasant walk there.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are dozens of hotels and guesthouses in Pitlochry; the tourist office can help with finding a bed.

Pitlochry Backpackers Hotel (☎ 470044; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 134 Atholl Rd; dm/tw £14/28; ☎ Mar-Oct; (P) ☎) This excellent, sociable hostel is in a pretty old building in the heart of things. The dorms are comfortable enough, and there are great-value twins (beds not bunks), with shared bathroom as well as an en-suite double. Breakfast, laundry, and bike hire are all available.

Tir Aluinn Guest House (☎ 473811; www.tiraluinn.co.uk; 10 Higher Oakfield; s/d £25/50; (P)) This small spot tucked away above the main street is a gem of a place, with a big welcome and neat, comfortable rooms. One is suitable for a family; and there's a pretty garden.

our pick Moulin Hotel (☎ 472196; www.moulinhotel.co.uk; Moulin; bar mains £6-10; ☎ food 11am-9.30pm) A mile away but a world apart, this atmospheric little inn was trading centuries before the tartan tack came to Pitlochry. With its romantic low ceilings, ageing wood and booth seating, it's a great spot to escape the crowds for a drink and a meal. The Highland comfort food is excellent, particularly the haggis, or

the venison stew, and you can accompany it with the hotel's home-brewed ales. A more formal restaurant serves equally delicious fare. There's a variety of very appealing rooms (£70 to £85) too. The best way to get here from Pitlochry is to walk: it's a pretty uphill stroll through green fields, and an easy roll down the hill afterwards.

Port-Na-Craig Inn (☎ 472777; Port Na Craig; mains £8-17; ☞ 11am-11pm) By the River Tummel just below the Festival Theatre, this is a great little spot in what was once a separate village. Accompanied by the tinkling of the water and the whisk of the odd angler's rod, you can enjoy anything from simple pasta or cottage pie to more elaborate creations with venison or tuna, or just relax with a drink at the picnic-style tables outside.

Other places to stay:

Pitlochry SYHA Hostel (☎ 472308; www.syha.org.uk; Knockard Rd; dm £13.50; ☞ Mar-Oct; (P) ☞) Overlooks the town centre and has great views.

Atholl Villa (☎ 473820; www.athollvilla.co.uk; 29 Atholl Rd; r per person £22-35; (P) ☞) Appeals with its large lawn and flowery garden. No children.

Derrybeg Guest House (☎ 472070; www.derrybeg.co.uk; 18 Lower Oakfield; r per person to £32; (P) ☞) Set in two adjacent stone buildings with a large garden. Great dinner available.

Knockendaroch Hotel (☎ 473473; www.knockendaroch.co.uk; Higher Oakfield; d B&B with dinner to £156; ☞ Feb-Nov; (P) ☞) Romantic, lavish Highland hospitality; dassy but small and friendly, with dinners fit for Pavarotti.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses operated by Citylink run roughly every hour and connect Pitlochry to Inverness (£9.60, two hours), Perth (40 minutes), Edinburgh (£9.40, two hours) and Glasgow (£9.40, 2¼ hours).

Pitlochry is on the main rail line from Perth (30 minutes, nine daily Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) to Inverness.

Blair Castle

Noble **Blair Castle** (☎ 01796-481207; www.blair-castle.co.uk; adult/child £7.20/4.50; ☞ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, last admission 4.30pm, call for winter opening) and the 108 sq miles it sits on, is the seat of the Duke of Atholl. It's an impressive white building set beneath forested slopes above the River Garry.

The original tower was built in 1269, but the castle has undergone significant remodeling since then. Thirty rooms are open to the public and they present a wonderful picture of upper-class Highland life from the 16th

century to the late 20th century. The dining room is sumptuous – check out the 9-pint wine glasses – and the ballroom is a vaulted chamber that's a virtual stag cemetery.

The current duke is a distant relative (in every sense of the word – he lives in South Africa) to the 10th duke, who died a bachelor in 1996. He visits the castle every May to review the Atholl Highlanders, Britain's only private army.

Blair Castle is 7 miles north of Pitlochry, and a mile from the village of **Blair Atholl**. Local buses run to Blair Atholl four to six times daily, and a couple go direct to the castle. There's a train station but few trains stop here.

WEST PERTSHIRE

This remote area of Perthshire is a real jewel in Scotland's crown, with fabulous hills and lochs the equal of any Highland scenery. It's difficult to reach via public transport – some buses are once-a-day postal services – but for just that reason has an appeal that lives long in the memory.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 01887-820276; The Sq; ☞ daily mid-Apr–Oct, Mon–Sat Nov–mid-Apr) in the village of **Aberfeldy**, the gateway to the region, and one in Killin. Stagecoach runs buses to Aberfeldy from Perth (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) and from Pitlochry (45 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

Loch Tay & Kenmore

☎ 01887 / elev 476m

Long, beautiful Loch Tay reflects the powerful forests and mountains around it. The bulk of mighty **Ben Lawers** (1214m) looms above and is part of a National Nature Reserve that includes the nearby Tarmachan range. The **Ben Lawers visitors centre** (☎ 01567-820397; admission £1; ☞ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep), which sells the *Ben Lawers Nature Trail* booklet, describing the area's flora and fauna, is 5 miles east of Killin, a mile off the A827.

Pretty **Kenmore** lies at the eastern end of Loch Tay, and is dominated by a church and clock tower and the striking archway of the privately owned **Taymouth Castle**. Just outside town, on the loch, is the cracking **Scottish Crannog Centre** (☎ 830583; www.crannog.co.uk; guided tour £4.95; ☞ 10am-5.30pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov). A crannog, perched on stilts in the water, was the favoured form of defence-minded dwelling in Scotland from the 3rd millennium BC onwards. This one has been

superbly reconstructed, and the guided tour (last tour one hour before closing) includes an impressive demonstration of firemaking. It's a fascinating, informative place to visit.

our pick **Kenmore Hotel** (☎ 830205; www.kenmorehotel.com; s/d £67/104; (P) ☞) is another good reason to stop here. It's a historic inn (founded 1572) and has a lovely beer garden by the riverbank. In the bar, cosy with its roaring fire, look out for the verses written on the chimney piece by Robert Burns in 1787. The rooms, many of which have bay windows overlooking the River Tay, have been modernised without losing their character.

Loch Tay is a great spot for cycling; you can hire bikes at **Perthshire Mountain Bikes** (☎ 830291; 31 Taymouth Dr), which has a leaflet detailing local routes.

There are regular buses from Aberfeldy to Kenmore (20 minutes).

At the western end of Loch Tay, but just out of Perthshire, Killin (p845) is another good base.

Fortingall

West of Aberfeldy, the pretty village of Fortingall is at the turn-off to Glen Lyon. Tranquil and picturesque, it has 19th-century thatched cottages, and is famous, curiously, as the possible birthplace of Pontius Pilate, and for its ancient yew tree.

Fortingall Hotel (☎ 830367; www.fortingallhotel.com; s/d from £69/99; ☞ Mar-Oct; (P) ☞) is a place to come for a bit of solitude or walking. Part of the hotel dates from 1300; it's just been completely made over, but hasn't lost its remote, hospitable character. The rooms look out over the green meadows and have great beds and proper modern bathrooms. There's a good restaurant here (mains £9 to £15), for guests only.

BEN LAWERS – A CLASSIC ROUTE

The trek up Ben Lawers starts at the visitors centre and is one of the best walks in the area. The trip to the top and back can take up to five hours and you need wet weather gear, water and food. Take the nature trail that heads northeast. After the boardwalk protecting a bog, cross a stile, then fork left and ascend along a burn (to the right). At the next rise, fork right and cross the burn. A few minutes' later ignore the nature trail's right turn and continue ascending parallel to the burn's left bank for just over half a mile. Leave the protected zone by another stile and steeply ascend Beinn Ghlas' shoulder. Reaching a couple of large rocks, ignore a northbound footpath and continue zigzagging uphill. The rest of the ascent is a straightforward succession of three false summits. The last and steepest section alternates between erosion-sculpted rock and a meticulously crafted cobbled trail. Views of the North Sea, and Atlantic, are outstanding on a clear day.

Glen Lyon

This remote and stunningly beautiful glen runs for some 34 unforgettable miles of rickety stone bridges, Caledonian pine forest and sheer peaks (splashed with red and orange heather) poking through swirling clouds. It becomes wilder and more uninhabited as it snakes its way west and is proof that hidden treasures still exist in Scotland. The ancients believed it to be a gateway to faerie land, and even the most sceptical of people will be entranced by the valley's magic.

From Fortingall, a narrow road winds its way up the glen – another road from the Ben Lawers visitors centre crosses the hills and reaches the glen halfway in, at Bridge of Balgie. The glen continues up to a dam (look out for the memorial to explorer Robert Campbell); bearing left here you can actually continue, with a sturdy car, to remote Glen Lochay and on to Killin. Cycling through Glen Lyon is a wonderful way to experience this special place.

There's little in the way of attractions in the valley – the majestic and lonely scenery is the reason to be here, but at **Glenlyon Arts & Crafts**, next to the post office (which does more-than-decent lunches) at Bridge of Balgie, a selection of fine handmade pieces are on sale.

our pick **Milton Eonan** (☎ 01887-866318; www.miltoneonan.com; Bridge of Balgie; s/d £35/70, dm £15; (P) ☞) is a working croft on the site of a 7th century watermill. The setting is fabulous, and the young, lively owners live surrounded by an amazing menagerie of animals. As well as B&B in comfortable rooms, they offer excellent three-course evening meals (£15) and can prepare packed lunches. Another cottage on the croft has been converted to a bunkhouse. After crossing the bridge at Bridge of Balgie, you'll see Milton Eonan signposted to the right.

The only public transport in the glen is postbus 211, which leaves Aberfeldy at 9am, Monday to Saturday, returning from Glen Lyon post office at 1.25pm.

ABERDEENSHIRE & MORAY

This part of the northeast is a curious blend of the softer and harder sides of Scottish geography, a diversity that lends it much appeal. The shoulder of Scotland juts out defiantly into the North Sea, which batters the coastal fishing towns with some force when aroused. Inland, however, is a more peaceful agricultural zone. Speyside is studded with dozens of distilleries, among them some of the most famous of Scottish malts; the Dee Valley runs through what at times can seem like fairy-tale woodland scenery.

Aberdeen itself was given a crucial boost when oil was discovered offshore. With fish stocks dwindling, the future had looked grim, but the city is now notably well-heeled thanks to its role as a service centre for the giant rigs.

The coast deserves exploration, particularly the impossibly picturesque village of Penan and imposing Dunnottar Castle. Busy Braemar nestles among some awe-inspiring mountainscapes and is an excellent base for walking and, if snow comes, skiing.

ABERDEEN

☎ 01224 / pop 184,800 / elev 36m

The third city of Scotland, Aberdeen is a busy port and thriving settlement, with the offshore riches of the oil and gas reserves driving the economy. Its nickname 'The Granite City' may conjure up images of a dour, funless sort of town, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The whole city is indeed built of granite – even the roads are paved with the stuff – and on a sunny day every building glints cheerfully as the sun reflects off the spangling of mica particles. When it rains, as it likes to do in these parts, it can be a little less inspiring!

Aberdeen has some great museums and galleries, including, fittingly for a place which seems to have its back to the Highlands and its face out to sea, a maritime museum. Nearby, the bustling fish market opens at dawn as it has done for centuries.

The soft Aberdonian tones mingle here with the accents of transient multinational oilworkers and a large student population from around the country, ensuring that the inviting pubs, roaring clubs and decent restaurants are always busy.

History

Aberdeen was a prosperous North Sea trading and fishing port centuries before oil was considered a valuable commodity. After the townspeople supported Robert the Bruce against the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, the king rewarded the town with land for which he had previously received rent. The money was diverted into the Common Good Fund, to be spent on town amenities, as it still is today.

Since the 1970s, Aberdeen has become the main onshore service port for one of the largest oilfields in the world; its harbour is Britain's second busiest in terms of ship movement.

Orientation

Aberdeen is built on a ridge that runs east-west between the River Dee and River Don. Union St, the main commercial street, follows the line of the ridge. The bus and train stations are next to each other, off Guild St, south of Union St. The ferry quay is east of the bus and train stations, off Market St.

Old Aberdeen and the university are north of Union St. To the east lies a long stretch of clean, sandy beach.

Information

Central Library (☎ 652500; Rosemount Viaduct;

☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Thu, 9am–5pm Fri & Sat) Free internet access; sessions limited to 30 minutes.

Ottakar's (☎ 592440; 3 Union Bridge; ☎ daily) Central bookshop with a café.

Soul & Spice Café (☎ 645200; 15 Belmont St; per hr £2; ☎ 10am–late) Friendly internet café above the One-Up record shop.

Tourist office (☎ 288828; 23 Union St; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Sat Nov–mid-Mar, 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat mid-Mar–Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Jul & Aug). Very helpful. Internet access per 15 minutes £1.

Sights

MARITIME MUSEUM

Partly set in Aberdeen's oldest building, the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 337700; Shiprow; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–3pm Sun; 🚶) overlooks the harbour and is well worth a visit. There



are lots of interactive displays, frightening statistics about the human impact on the ocean, and bags of information on life aboard an oil rig. There's even a translation of the mysterious BBC shipping forecast.

Sections on shipbuilding and technological advances over the centuries recall the days when speedy Aberdeen clippers competed on the tea runs from India and the Far East in the 19th century, and there's plenty of information about Aberdeen's important contemporary role as a port. The museum also has a good basement café.

PROVOST SKENE'S HOUSE

Surrounded by ugly concrete-and-glass office blocks, **Provost Skene's House** (☎ 641086; Broad St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) is a late medieval, turreted town house near Marischal College, occupied in the 17th century by the provost (the Scots equivalent of a mayor).

Typical of its kind, the house has intimate, panelled rooms. The 1622 tempera-painted ceiling, with its Catholic symbolism, is unusual for having survived the deprecation of the Reformation. It has undergone extensive restoration and is a gem of its time. There is also a small local history and archaeology museum.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE

In 1593 the fifth Earl Marischal founded this huge building (pronounced 'marshall'), which currently accommodates the science faculty of the University of Aberdeen. The present building is actually the second-largest granite structure in the world, after El Escorial near Madrid.

The quirky **Marischal Museum** (☎ 274301; Broad St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun) is refreshingly out of the ordinary. In one room there's a lively depiction of northeast Scotland arranged alphabetically; a good spot to learn a few Scots words! The other gallery is set up as an anthropological overview of the world, incorporating objects from vastly different cultures. It's arranged thematically, with Polynesian wooden masks alongside gasmasks and so on.

ABERDEEN ART GALLERY

Behind the grand façade of the **Aberdeen Art Gallery** (☎ 523700; Schoolhill; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; ♿) is a cool, white space that exhibits both the work of young contemporary painters and also more traditional works,

including an excellent Victorian Scottish section, with many canvases by William Dyce. There's also a Rodin bronze and an extensive selection of watercolours and etchings, including a handful of Picassos and Chagalls.

OLD ABERDEEN

Old Aberdeen is a district north of the centre. The name is somewhat misleading, since the area south around the harbour is actually older; this area was named Alton in Gaelic, and this was anglicised to Old Town. It's a peaceful, genteel district, with stone mansions lining leafy lanes, and backing onto parkland. Many of the buildings belong to the university.

At the heart is imposing 15th-century **St Machar's Cathedral** (☎ 485988; Chanonry; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar). One of the country's few examples of a fortified cathedral, it sits in a peaceful churchyard above the riverside parkland. According to legend, St Machar was ordered to establish a church where the river takes the shape of a bishop's crook, which it does just here. The cathedral is best known for its impressive heraldic ceiling, dating from 1520.

ABERDEEN HARBOUR

From Market St, Aberdeen's busy harbour stretches east to the mouth of the Dee. Here you can watch large ships sailing through the narrow navigation channel, and explore the delightful little district of **Footdee** (pronounced 'fiddy') with its picturesque 19th-century fishermen's cottages. North of here stretches the golden **beach**, scored by breakwaters.

Sleeping

Southwest of the centre, Bon Accord St and Great Western Rd are bristling with B&Bs. There are many oil workers in town during the week; it's easier finding accommodation at weekends, when many hotels drop their rates.

BUDGET

Aberdeen SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1100; www.syha.org.uk; 8 Queen's Rd; dm £15; ♿) This hostel a mile west of the train station is Aberdeen through and through, housed in a sturdy granite town house. There are good facilities including laundry service; beds are in small, clean dormitories, and there are two family rooms. Walk west along Union St and take the right fork along Albyn Pl until you reach a roundabout; Queen's Rd continues on the western side.

MIDRANGE

Adelphi Guest House (☎ 583078; www.adelphiguesthouse.com; 8 Whinhill Rd; s/d from £25/36) On the continuation of Bon Accord St, this B&B offers quiet rooms, some overlooking leafy parkland. All are comfortable and well-equipped, with cable TV and big firm beds; there are also several en-suite rooms available (singles/doubles £35/46), which are large enough for a family.

Applewood Guest House (☎ 580617; carolgarden154@aol.com; 154 Bon Accord St; s/d £25/40; ♿) This bright and chirpy B&B is somewhat Tardis-like, with far more rooms and space than appears possible from outside. The rooms, some with en suite, are mostly large and all are clean as a whistle and comfortably appointed.

Dunrovin Guest House (☎ 586081; www.dunrovin.guesthouse.co.uk; 168 Bon Accord St; s/d £30/50, without bath-room £25/40; ♿) An excellent choice in the area; this friendly granite home has good rooms with great natural light and shiny modern en suites. The triple room, with lots of space, is particularly good for families.

Butler's Islander Guest House (☎ 212411; www.butlersguesthouse.com; 122 Crown St; d £60, s/d without bathroom £30/50; ♿) This cheery and welcoming spot is handy for both the centre and transport options. The rooms are light and cosy, most with small en-suite bathrooms, and there's free internet access for guests. Best of all is the charismatic breakfast menu, which features brose, a fortifying blend of porridge, whisky and honey that is guaranteed to send you out to see the sights in a good mood.

Brentwood Hotel (☎ 595440; www.brentwood-hotel.co.uk; 101 Crown St; s/d £82/92, Fri-Sun £40/59; ♿) This friendly hotel is handily located and makes a reliable place to bed down, particularly at weekends, when the price is hugely reduced. There's a decent restaurant and a great bar below, with several real ales on tap.

Other recommendations:

Crynoch Guest House (☎ 582743; crynoch@btinternet.com; 164 Bon Accord St; B&B s/d from £28/50; ♿) Front rooms particularly lovely, and all have DVD player.

Royal Crown Guest House (☎ 586461; www.royal.crown.co.uk; 111 Crown St; s/d to £36/50; ♿) Popular spot with eight small but well-furnished rooms.

TOP END

Aberdeen Douglas Hotel (☎ 582255; www.aberdeen.douglas.com; 43 Market St; d from £95; wi-fi) The Douglas is an Aberdeen landmark that had fallen on hard times until new owners rescued and reno-

vated it. Now it's a great, central option with classy executive rooms (from £135) kitted out with tasteful wooden furniture and crisp white linen. The standard rooms are also spacious, although not quite as inspiringly decorated.

Marcliffe (☎ 861000; www.marcliffe.com; North Deeside Rd; s/d from £155/175; ♿) Aberdeen's best hotel sits at the end of a winding driveway in 4 hectares of parkland, and is a lovely retreat. The rooms combine antique furniture and country-house comfort with stylish modern bathrooms; the restaurant offers fine Scottish produce with a massive wine list. You can fish on the River Dee within the grounds or indulge yourself with spa treatments. There are cheaper rates at weekends, and deals offered on the website.

Eating

Beautiful Mountain (☎ 645353; 13 Belmont St; snacks £2-7; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-4.30pm Sat) This is an excellent takeaway café with a great range of sandwiches and toasted ciabattas. Fillings are delicious and fresh. There's a small upstairs eat-in area and a relaxed buzz.

our pick Foyer (☎ 582277; Trinity Church, 82a Crown St; light lunches £5-7, mains £10-15; ☎ food 11am-10pm Tue-Sat; ♿) Set in a converted church, this laudable gallery-restaurant funds an enterprise which assists homeless youth. The food is excellent, with many vegetarian and special-needs dietary choices; the menu changes regularly but is always interesting. The space itself is very attractive, and showcases contemporary art exhibitions; service comes with a smile.

Sam's Chinese Cuisine (☎ 626233; 13 King St; mains £8-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) A hop away from Union St, this is a big jump – above the average Scottish Chinese takeaway – in class and imagination. The menu is well set-out and includes intriguing choices. The Peking duck is lusciously textured, the monkfish stir-fries are exquisite, while the 'volcanic' king prawns will have you grabbing for your glass in a hurry. Service is slow, but that's because the dishes are freshly prepared.

Rendezvous@Nargile (☎ 323700; 106 Forest Rd; mains £8-13; ☎ noon-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm Mon-Sat) This is a newly opened restaurant of what is a highly regarded Aberdeen institution for high-quality Turkish food. A shared spread of *mezes* (starters) is the way to kick off; the tender treatment of meats characterises main courses. Note for the wise: if tempted by the Turkish wine, go for the best of them.

Silver Darling (☎ 576229; Pocrá Quay; lunch mains £10-13, dinner mains £18-21; ☎ noon-1.45pm Mon-Fri, 7-9.30pm Mon-Sat) With a great situation at the mouth of the Dee, this restaurant is named for the herring which used to drive the economy in these parts. Its reputation is lofty and deserved, with exquisite French seafood dishes in a stylish dining area overlooking the comings and goings of ships. The menu changes regularly; you might come across delights such as steamed halibut with salmon mousse and squid-ink pasta. Delicious.

Other recommendations:

Goulash (☎ 210530; 17 Adelphi; starters £2.95, mains £9.45; ☎ 7-10pm Tue-Fri, noon-10pm Sat) Authentic, charismatic, eccentric Hungarian eatery off Union St. Tasty stews and good people.

Ashvale Fish Restaurant (☎ 596981; 46 Great Western Rd; mains £5-9; ☎ 11.45am-11pm; 🍷) Battered seafood and sizzling steaks, with plenty to eat and do for kids.

Poldino's (☎ 647777; 7 Little Belmont St; pastas £6-9, other mains £13-18; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10.45pm Mon-Sat) Long-time Italian favourite; the pricy seafood mains are more memorable than the pasta.

Drinking

Belmont St is the focus of Aberdeen's lively nightlife, with a wide range of style bars and preclub venues.

Prince of Wales (☎ 640597; 7 St Nicholas Lane) Aberdeen's best-known pub is in an alley off Union St. Boasting a counter that stretches to the horizon, gnarled wooden floorboards, and a buzz of soft Aberdonian accents lubricated by a range of guest beers, it's a haven of good cheer and a Scottish pub par excellence.

Old Blackfriars (☎ 581922; 52 Castlegate) The most intimate of the inner-city pubs, this is a great traditional bar with low roofs, timber interior and a warrenlike layout. There's nothing pretentious about it, and it makes a great place for a drizzly evening. There's also a pleasing range of bar food.

Entertainment

To find out about current listings check *What's on in Aberdeen*, available from the tourist office. You can book tickets for most events at the **Aberdeen Box Office** (☎ 641122; Union St) by the Music Hall.

CINEMAS

Belmont Picturehouse (☎ 343534; 49 Belmont St) Superbly located for a postmovie debrief over

a pint or a G&T, this cinema shows new releases, arthouse classics, and themed series of films. Essential.

NIGHTCLUBS

Belmont St is the place to go for preclub action; check the noticeboards in One-Up Records at number 17 for upcoming club nights.

Ministry (☎ 594585; 16 Dee St; cover £2-6; ☎ 10.30pm-2am or 3am Wed-Sat) Like so many of Aberdeen's restaurants, pubs and clubs, this is housed in a former church – have the people lost their faith? Fashions change, but on our visit, this was unquestionably the city's premier club. Two floors of high-quality sound.

Kef (☎ 684000; 9 Belmont St; admission free-£5; ☎ 11pm-2am or 3am) One of the city's most popular venues, with decadent cushions backing a Moorish design concept. Echoes of the Middle East are less prominent around the lager-soaked bar and the decks, from which a range of high-quality sounds emanate. Attached is Siberia, a cool pub and vodka bar with a conservatory space – perfect for relaxing before hitting the club. It also does some innovative pub food.

THEATRE & MUSIC

Music Hall (☎ 632080; www.musichallaberdeen.co.uk; Union St) Right in the heart of town, this is the main venue for classical-music concerts.

Lemon Tree Theatre & Cafe (☎ 642230; www.lmtree.org; 5 West North St) This has an interesting programme of dance, music or drama. It hosts festivals and often has rock, jazz and folk bands playing. The café does good lunches from Thursday to Sunday.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Seven miles northwest of the city centre, **Aberdeen airport** (☎ 722331), known as Dyce, has numerous domestic flights, including to Orkney and Shetland, and a few European flights, including some budget routes to Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark (check out www.whichbudget.com for up-to-date information). Bus 27 runs there from Union St regularly (35 minutes).

BOAT

The passenger terminal is a short walk east of the train and bus stations. **NorthLink Ferries** (☎ 0845 6000 449; www.northlinkferries.com), a CalMac subsidiary, has taken over the operation of car

ferries from Aberdeen to Lerwick (passenger £20.40 to £31.20 depending on season, car £82.80 to £111.30, cabins £18 to £106; 12 to 14 hours, daily) on the Shetland Islands, and Kirkwall (passenger £15.10 to £23.80, car and driver £74.60 to £84.40, six hours, three to four weekly) on the Orkney Islands.

BUS

Citylink runs to Dundee (£9.40, two hours, more than hourly), Edinburgh (£18.19, 3¼ hours, hourly), Glasgow (£18.19, 3½ hours, hourly) and Perth (£14.59, 2½ hours, hourly), among other destinations. There are discounted fares at www.megabus.com for some departures on these routes. Stagecoach runs to Inverness (£11.50, 3¼ hours, hourly).

TRAIN

Destinations served from Aberdeen by rail include Edinburgh (£34.90, 2½ hours, hourly or more frequently), Glasgow (£34.90, 2½ hours, hourly), Dundee (£20.70, 1¼ hours, two hourly), Inverness (£21.50, 2¼ hours, five to 10 daily) and Perth (£24.40, 1½ hours, hourly).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

For bike rental, hit **Alpine Bikes** (☎ 211455; www.alpinebikes.co.uk; 64 Holburn St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am-8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun). Mountain bikes cost £15 per day during the week and £30 for the weekend (Friday evening to Monday morning).

BUS

The main local operator is **First Aberdeen** (☎ 650 065; www.firstgroup.com). The most useful services are buses 18, 19 and 24 from Union St to Great Western Rd, bus 27 from the bus station to the SYHA Hostel, and bus 20 for Old Aberdeen.

CAR

There are several car-rental companies in Aberdeen. **Arnold Clark** (☎ 249159; www.arnoldclarkrental.co.uk; Girdleness Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) has rates starting at £23 per day for a small car.

AROUND ABERDEEN

Stonehaven

☎ 01569 / pop 9580

A pretty, low-key seaside resort 15 miles south of Aberdeen. Stonehaven is nestled around a bay with some good walks and one of the most

spectacularly situated castles in the country. The **tourist office** (☎ 762806; 66 Allardice St; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) is very helpful.

The most pleasant way to reach **Dunnottar Castle** (☎ 762173; adult/child £4/1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, 9am-dusk Fri-Mon Nov-Mar), is on foot; it's about a 15-minute walk from the harbour. The castle ruins are sensational, spread out across a grassy promontory rising 45m above the sea. The original fortress was built in the 9th century; the keep is the most substantial remnant, but the restored **Drawing Room** is more interesting.

Our pick A hugely appealing place to stay is **Twentyfourshorehead** (☎ 767750; www.twentyfourshorehead.co.uk; 24 Shorehead; s/d £50/60). Right on the harbour in a 300-year-old former cooorage, it's a hugely relaxing spot renovated with taste and flair. The bright rooms have big bay windows looking over the water and, using the binoculars thoughtfully provided, you can spot birds and seals.

There are regular buses to Stonehaven from Aberdeen (45 minutes, at least hourly), some continuing to Dundee. There are also trains on the same route.

DEESIDE & DONSIDE

This area west and southwest of Aberdeen is outstandingly beautiful, with the pretty woodlands of the Dee valley giving way to some epic mountain scenery around Braemar and Glenshee. There's fantastic walking and skiing in this zone, as well as the Queen's Scottish residence at Balmoral. The tourist offices have information on the Castle Trail to explore the many other fine baronial buildings, but you will need your own wheels.

Balmoral Castle

This **castle** (☎ 01339-742534; www.balmoralcastle.com; adult/child £6/2, parking 70p; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Jul; 🚗) was built for Queen Victoria in 1855 as a private residence for the royal family. It sits in a privileged and beautiful position by the Dee, which looks like a children's picturebook river here. In truth, the somewhat hefty entrance fee is mainly for the grounds, as visitors are only allowed into one room of the castle – a ballroom stocked with rather uninteresting memorabilia. Walking around the gardens, however, is delightful on a nice day, although the flowers don't bloom until the Queen's stay in August. Perhaps best is the audio tour, which, although a little sycophantic, brings

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (complete with Bavarian accent) to life.

Balmoral is just off the A93 (where there's a tourist office) near the village of Crathie and can be reached on buses running between Aberdeen and Braemar. The castle website has details of various self-catering cottages in the grounds that are let out on a weekly basis.

Braemar & Around

☎ 01339 / pop 410 / elev 312m

Braemar, surrounded by mountains, has long been a visitors' favourite and a base for walking or skiing at nearby Glenshee. Although it gets busy with coach parties, it still makes a good stop; it's at its best in the evenings when, breathing the fresh mountain air, urbanites tend to wonder why they live in a city.

The **tourist office** (☎ 741600; The Mews, Mar Rd; ☹ daily) has lots of useful information on walks in the area.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

North of the village, turreted **Braemar Castle** dates from 1628, and was a garrison post after the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. It is now closed to visitors, perhaps permanently.

An easy walk from Braemar is up **Creag Choinnich** (538m), a hill to the east above the A93. There are route markers and the walk takes about 1½ hours. For a longer walk (three hours) and superb views of the Cairngorms, climb **Morrone** (859m), the mountain south of Braemar. Five miles west of Braemar is the tiny settlement of **Inverey**; numerous mountain walks start from here, including the adventurous **Lairig Ghrù trail** – 24 miles over the pass to Aviemore. Another fine place for leisurely hiking is around the beautiful **Linn of Dee gorge**, a couple of miles beyond Inverey.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On the first Saturday in September, the **Braemar Gathering** (Highland Games) brings tens of thousands to the village; bookings during this period are essential.

SLEEPING

our pick Rucksacks (☎ 741517; 15 Mar Rd; dm £12, bothy £7, tw £30; ☑ ☹) What was already a fabulous hostel for walkers and travellers has been made even better. A shiny new building out the back now houses the dorms, but all the creature comforts are still there; barbecue, communal kitchen, drying room, laundry

service, internet terminal and even a proper sauna! The well-loved Alpine hut – bring your own bedding – offers simpler berths. Even if you're not staying here, you can use the internet (from 10.30am to 4.30pm) or put on a load of washing – nothing is too much trouble for the enthusiastic, welcoming owner.

Craiglea (☎ 741641; www.craigleabraemar.com; Hill-side Dr; s/d to £30/52) This guesthouse is run by a friendly young family and has very pleasing, spacious rooms painted in bright colours, including one that boasts a luxury bathtub. It's a top spot for walkers, with outdoors magazines, plenty of advice, a MemoryMap route planner for guests' use, and packed lunches available.

Other recommendations:

Braemar Lodge (☎ 741627; www.braemarlodge.co.uk; Glenshee Rd; dm £11, s/d £35/70, self-catering log cabins per week £300-400; ☑) Restored shooting lodge on the outskirts of the town, with a range of accommodation.

Inverey SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1126; www.syha.org.uk; dm £11.75; ☹ May-Sep) Very basic walkers' digs in a beautiful, isolated spot. A mile beyond Inverey.

St Margarets (☎ 741697; 13 School Rd; s/tw £25/46) One room only, bedecked with sunflowers. And a big, genuine welcome. Grab it if you can.

EATING

Most of the places to eat in Braemar are the pubs and hotels, of which the Braemar Lodge does the best evening meals (from 6pm to 8.30pm). There is nowhere to eat or drink in Inverey.

Gathering Place (☎ 741234; Invercauld Rd; mains £10-14; ☹ dinner Tue-Sun) This modern bistro on the riverbank is one of two of the more sophisticated Braemar eating options, offering contemporary Scottish flavours with a Mediterranean twist. Tasty creations such as rabbit cassoulet or haggis filo parcels are the pleasing result, and are complemented by a good range of wines and welcoming service. Future uncertain at the time of research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Stagecoach Bluebird bus 201 from Aberdeen to Braemar (£8, 2¼ hours, hourly daily, two-hourly on Sunday) travels along the Dee valley. Postbus 072 leaves Braemar daily Monday to Saturday for Inverey, the SYHA Hostel, and the Linn of Dee.

Glenshee

☎ 01250

The route south from Braemar along the A93, through Glenshee, is one of the most

spectacular drives in the country. Meandering burns, tussocked grass, and stark soaring peaks, splashed with glaring snow, dwarf open-mouthed drivers. It's an awe-inspiring piece of Highland landscape.

Glenshee Ski Centre (☎ 01339-741320; www.ski-glenshee.co.uk; daily lift pass £23) is Britain's major ski resort, but snow cover is unreliable. While it'll never see the Winter Olympics, it is, however, a cheery, family-friendly place, and has 36 pistes. One of the chairlifts heads up to the top of the Cairwell (933m).

As well as the accommodation centres of Braemar to the north and Blairgowrie to the south, there are places to stay in Spittal of Glenshee, 6 miles south of the resort. **Spittal of Glenshee Hotel** (☎ 885215; www.spittalofglenshee.co.uk; dm £17.45, r per person £24-36; ☑) is a very 'Scottish experience' – it's a friendly ski-style lodge with a big bar serving massive portions of comfort food. There are rooms with and without en suite; as well there's a bunkhouse, and all rates include breakfast. It's a good base for walking too, and you can take a companion – one of the hotel dogs!

our pick Dalmunzie House (☎ 885224; www.dalmunzie.com; Glenshee; s/d from £60/120, 4-course dinner £36; ☑ ☹) is a grand property situated in a glen among bare hills, 1.25 miles north of Spittal on a side road. There's great walking on the vast estate as well as the highest golf course in Britain. Inside it's all roaring fires, leather armchairs, wood panelling and, in some of the rooms, posh four-post beds. There's a beautiful library, set up to help people research their Scottish forefathers.

There is a **Strathay Scottish** (☎ 01738-629339; www.stagecoachbus.com) service from Perth to Blairgowrie (50 minutes, about six daily). The only service from Blairgowrie to the Glenshee area is the once-daily Monday to Saturday postbus to Spittal of Glenshee.

NORTHERN ABERDEENSHIRE & MORAY

Heading north from Aberdeen, the coastal road runs up to Fraserburgh, at the 'shoulder' of Scotland. From here it's a very pleasant, leisurely journey west to Inverness, via some magical fishing villages. The more direct Aberdeen to Inverness route cuts across country; both routes meet at Elgin, the genteel capital of the ancient county of Moray (pronounced murray). South of here, the whisky-drenched Speyside region awaits.

Pennan & Around

☎ 01261 / pop 22

The tiny harbour hamlet of Pennan, built at the base of steep cliffs, is one of the gems of this part of Scotland's coast. The single street of houses in this former fishing settlement seems completely at the mercy of the grey sea; it's an unforgettable location that was immortalised in the mouse-that-roared British classic *Local Hero*.

our pick Pennan Inn (☎ 561201; www.thepennaninn.com; r £60, without bathroom £40, with sea view £70-80), along with the village's red phonebox, featured prominently in the film. The beating heart of this community, it's recently been refurbished and does innovative, delicious bar food (£8 to £10; try the venison burger) as well as restaurant meals. The rooms are small but cosy. While Pennan is gorgeous on a sunny day, it's particularly memorable if the weather turns harsh and the wind and rain drum at the windows!

The nearby village of **Crovie** (crivvy) is similarly atmospheric. The remoteness of these towns meant that they became important harbours for the movement of illicitly distilled whisky.

Stagecoach Bluebird buses run north from Aberdeen to Fraserburgh (£5.50, 1½ hours, at least hourly). Onward buses running from Fraserburgh to Banff stop at the junctions to these villages, from where it's a short but steep downhill walk.

Banff & Macduff

☎ 01261 / pop 3990 (combined)

A popular seaside resort, the twin towns of Banff and Macduff (elevation 37m) are separated by Banff Bridge, which spans the River Deveron. Banff is a fairly genteel little town and nearby Macduff is a busy fishing port; there's been an almost comical historical rivalry between the two. The **tourist office** (☎ 812419; High St, Banff; ☹ Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, Mon-Sun Jul & Aug) has plenty of brochures about the area and is helpful.

Duff House (☎ 818181; www.duffhouse.com; adult/child £5.50/4.50; ☹ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Mar), in Banff, is an impressive Georgian baroque mansion designed by William Adam. Completed in 1749, it's been a hotel, hospital and POW camp and is now an art gallery housing a collection of paintings from the National Gallery of Scotland. The House hosts regular live performances including theatre and dance; call to find out what's on.

Not to be outdone, Macduff has a good attraction of its own; the **Marine Aquarium** (☎ 833 369; www.marine-aquarium.com; 11 High Shore; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm; ♿). It's an enthusiastic place and particularly interesting because it focuses on local species rather than piranhas and sharks.

Stagecoach Bluebird runs buses from Aberdeen and Elgin (one hour, hourly) to Banff and Macduff.

Elgin

☎ 01343 / pop 20,800 / elev 21m

At the heart of Moray, Elgin has been the provincial capital since the 13th century. One of the country's sunniest towns, Elgin is a sedate sort of place, very pleasant but without a great deal going on. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 542666; 17 High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 11am-3pm Sun Apr-Oct) dishes out an abundance of leaflets.

Elgin Cathedral (HS; ☎ 547171; adult/child £4/1.60; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar) is made of soft sandstone and is undergoing constant restoration, though it must have been magnificent once. It's known as the 'lantern of the north', and was consecrated in 1224. In 1390 it was burnt down by the infamous Wolf of Badenoch (below). It was rebuilt, but ruined once more in the Reformation.

There are several guesthouses and B&Bs, including the central **Heather Glen** (☎ 545221; www.heather-glen.com; 1 North Guildry St; r per person £23; ♿), in a noble stone house near the fabulous Gordon & Macphail whisky shop and deli.

our pick **Old Church of Urquhart** (☎ 843063; www.oldkirk.co.uk; Parrandier; s/d £36/52; ♿) has by far the most character in Elgin. It's a fabulous conversion of a 19th-century church, 5 miles northeast. There are bikes for hire and tasty

home-cooked dinners. The friendly owner will pick you up from Elgin train station.

Hourly services along the coast by Stagecoach Bluebird run to Banff and Macduff (one hour), south to Dufftown (50 minutes), west to Inverness (one hour), and southeast to Aberdeen (£9.25, two hours). Trains run four to 10 times daily from Elgin to Aberdeen and Inverness.

Speyside

Beautiful Speyside is a region of rolling green hills, dark forests and sparkling streams. It's a place of particular interest to walkers and, of course, whisky lovers. There's a vast number of distilleries in a small area here, including most of the famous names in the pantheon of Scottish malts. The Speyside style tends towards the rich, sweet, and nutty, and they are many people's favourite tipples. The region is best explored by car, but the **Speyside Way** is a footpath that follows a disused rail line from Aviemore in the Cairngorms to the coast at Spey Bay and on to Buckie, passing through utterly tranquil riverside scenery and not a few distilleries.

DUFFTOWN

☎ 01340

'Rome may be built on seven hills, but Dufftown's built on seven stills' claim locals. It's a good base for the area, with seven operational distilleries in town. It was founded only in 1817 by James Duff, fourth Earl of Fife. The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 820501; 9a The Sq; ☎ Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, Mon-Sun Jul & Aug) is in the clock tower.

The **Davaar in Dufftown** (☎ 820464; www.davaar.dufftown.co.uk; 17 Church St; s/d £35/50) is a welcoming guesthouse in the centre of town. Rooms are

BLAZE YOUR OWN WHISKY TRAIL

Visiting a whisky distillery can be a memorable experience, but only hardcore malt fans will probably want to go to more than two or three. While there are some excellent ones to visit, others are depressingly corporate. Here are some of the more worthwhile in Speyside:

Aberlour (☎ 01340-881249; www.aberlour.com; tour £7.50; ☎ 10.30am & 2pm daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Fri by appointment Nov-Mar) Excellent, detailed tour with a proper tasting session. On the main street in Aberlour.

Glenfarclas (☎ 01807-500257; www.glenfarclas.co.uk; admission £3.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, plus 10am-4pm Sat Jul-Sep) Small, friendly and independent. Five miles south of Aberlour on the Grantown road. Last tour leaves 90 minutes before closing.

Glenfiddich (☎ 820373; www.glenfiddich.com; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Oct-Easter, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun Easter-mid-Oct). Big and busy, but handiest for Dufftown. Standard tour is free but packaged, but there's a very good Connoisseur's Tour (£15, must be booked). Glenfiddich single-handedly kept malt whisky alive in the dark years.

Macallan (☎ 01340-872280; www.themacallan.com; standard tour free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) Highly rated sherry-casked malt. Several tours available (last tour at 3.30pm), including an expert one that requires prebooking (£15). Lovely location 2 miles northwest of Craigellachie.

Other whisky tips:

- Getting around to some of these distilleries can be tricky. Even if you've got your own wheels, there are obvious benefits to leaving the car behind. **Heavenly Highlands** (☎ 01807-590438; www.heavenlyhighlands.com) run a bespoke whisky taxi service – very handy indeed!
- The **Speyside Cooperage** (☎ 01340-871108; www.speysidecooperage.co.uk; admission £3.10; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a spot where you can see the fascinating art of barrel-making in action. Between Craigellachie and Dufftown.
- The **Spirit of Speyside** (www.spiritofspeyside.com) is an annual whisky festival in Dufftown in early May with plenty of great events that should be booked well ahead. There's another festival in late September.
- During summer, there are weekly whisky nosing sessions in Dufftown. These take place on Tuesday evenings at 8.30pm. Book on ☎ 01340-821097 or whiskyshop@dufftown.co.uk.

snug and attractive, and the breakfast is great. You can hire mountain bikes to explore the area too. **La Faisanderie** (☎ 821273; The Sq; set lunch/dinner £13.50/24; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon, lunch Thu-Mon) is a great place to eat, run by a respected local chef. The interior is decorated in French auberge style with a cheerful mural and pheasants hiding in every corner. The set menu, which features plenty of game, won't disappoint; you can order à la carte as well.

Stagecoach Bluebird links Dufftown to Elgin (50 minutes, hourly). Enthusiasts run a heritage railway between Keith and Dufftown; services operate three times a day over summer weekends.

AROUND DUFFTOWN

The River Fiddich runs from Dufftown for 3 miles before joining the Spey at attractive **Craigellachie**, on the Speyside Way. Two miles southwest, also on the Way, the charming village of **Aberlour** is worth a visit. The home

of Walkers, whose buttery shortbread is seen around the world, it boasts a fine local pub next to the old station. The **Mash Tun** (☎ 01340-881771; 7 Broomfield Sq; light meals £5.95, mains £7-13; ☎ food noon-9pm) is built of reassuringly solid stone and has a great line-up of real ales, plenty of local whisky, filling bar meals and rooms upstairs (singles/doubles £50/70). Hourly buses link Dufftown, Craigellachie and Aberlour, but there is also a scenic 4-mile path from Dufftown to Aberlour, clearly waymarked.

DUNDEE & ANGUS

One of the less-visited corners of Scotland, the Dundee area has traditionally been more concerned with making a living than prettifying itself for tourism. It makes an appealing destination for precisely this reason. It's attractive too, with a hinterland of peaceful glens meandering towards the sea.

THE WOLF OF BADENOCH

Of all the hard figures of medieval Scotland, few inspired as much terror as Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan (1343-1405), illegitimate son of the king and better known as the Wolf of Badenoch. A cruel landowner with a number of castles in the Strathspey region, he was not a man to get on the wrong side of, as the Bishop of Moray found out in 1390. When the earl ditched his wife in favour of his mistress, the bishop excommunicated him. The monk that bore the message of excommunication was thrown headfirst into a well, and the infuriated Wolf, accompanied by a band of 'wild and wicked Highland men', embarked on an orgy of destruction, burning first Forres, then Elgin, to the ground, destroying the cathedral and nearby Pluscarden Abbey in the process. Amazingly, Stewart still managed to end up being buried in Dunkeld cathedral. Legend says his death occurred on a dark, stormy night. The Devil came calling on a black horse and challenged the Wolf to a game of chess. The Wolf was checkmated, and the devil took his life (and soul) as prize.

The city of Dundee is far from fashionable but certainly deserves a visit. It has been busy transforming itself from moribund industrial centre to a bright modern city, and has great cultural centres, lively student life, and a few excellent attractions, including the superb Verdant Works jute museum.

Within easy reach of Dundee are two excellent attractions: Glamis Castle, where the bloody deeds of *Macbeth* are set, and Arbroath Abbey, where a day trip can be fuelled by lunching on one of Scotland's tastiest dishes, the smokie.

Getting Around

Strathtay Scottish (☎ 01382-228054; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main bus operator between Dundee and places in Angus. Trains run east along the scenic coastline from Dundee to Arbroath and Montrose.

DUNDEE

☎ 01382 / pop 154,700 / elev 75m

Scotland's fourth-largest city is a place that still has a grim reputation in parts. This was once deserved, as severe urban poverty and poor civic planning took their toll in the wake of the collapse of traditional industries, but now the city is ambitiously moving forward. Dundee's superb location on the Firth of Tay is finally being taken advantage of, and the presence of several top-drawer attractions – the super Verdant Works museum among them – is bringing public opinion of the city slowly, but very surely, around.

Dundee – the most Scottish of cities – was traditionally driven by the 'three Js': jute, journalism and jam. The jam refers to Dundee marmalade, while jute is explained in detail at Verdant Works. Journalism was the *Desperate Dan* and *Beano* comics; Dan himself stands proud in the city's main square.

Dundee is a city of two halves, with the centre's somewhat hard-bitten feel counterbalanced by lively Perth Rd just to the west, which has a youthful, arty flair given weight by a series of most appealing places to eat and socialise. Broughty Ferry, a few miles east, has always been where Dundonians, the most open and welcoming of folk, head for during weekends to stroll on the beach or nestle down with a pint and a pub lunch.

History

In the 19th century, Dundee was a major player in the shipbuilding and railway engi-

neering industries. Then came the rise of jute and, since whale oil was used in the process, whaling developed alongside. At one time there were as many as 41,000 people employed in the textile industry and as the jute workers became redundant, tough economic times led to the city developing a reputation as one of the most 'red' in Britain. Winston Churchill, who was once MP for Dundee, described speaking to 'an audience of lions with Communist teeth'. The city was also important in the suffragette movement.

Orientation

Most people approach the city from the Tay Rd Bridge or along the A90 from Perth; both routes take you into the centre. Stretching west of the centre, Perth Rd is home to the university and nearly all the city's best places to eat and drink.

Information

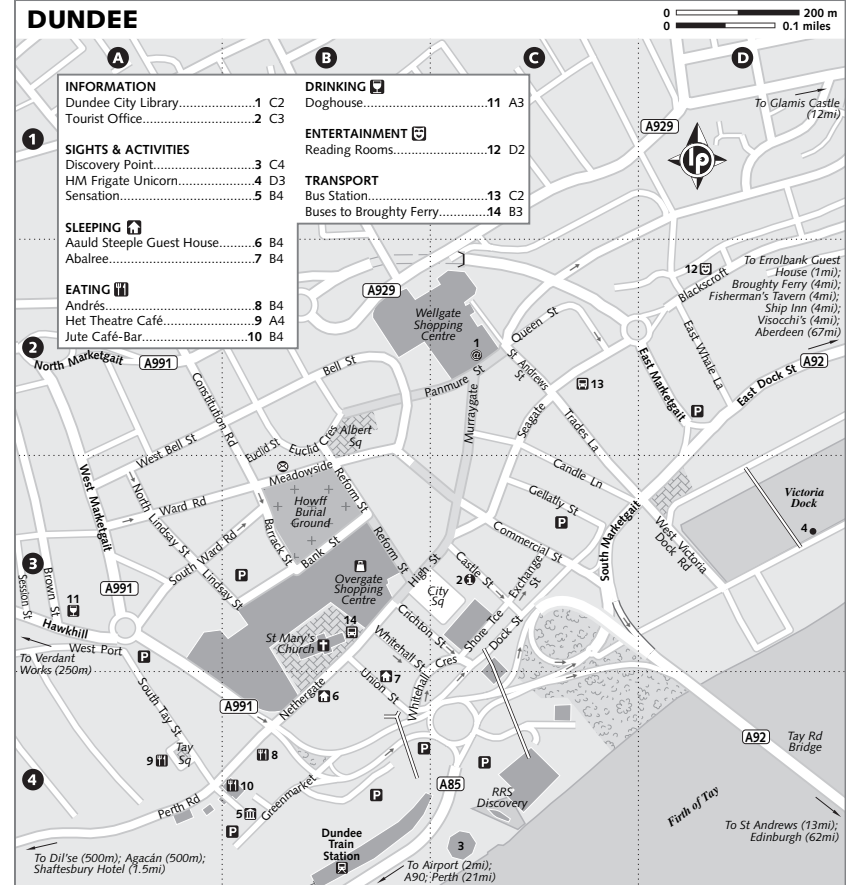
Dundee City Library (Wellgate Shopping Centre, Panmure St; ☎ 9.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 527527; enquires@angusanddundee.co.uk; 21 Castle St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) Helpful. Internet access £1 for 15 minutes.

Sights

VERDANT WORKS

One of Britain's best museums, **Verdant Works** (☎ 225282; www.verdantworks.com; West Henderson's Wynd; adult/child £5.95/3.85, combined ticket with Discovery Point £10.95/7; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun Nov-Mar; ♿) brings the history of Dundee's jute industry dramatically to life. The museum is housed in a restored jute mill; your visit begins with a charismatic guided tour, with plenty of atmosphere given by recorded voices with impenetrable Dundonian accents. The whole process of jute making is explained, and staff demonstrate the working of the production line with functioning machines. There's a display of social history that gives the visit so much more meaning than just jute; the museum as a whole makes powerful statements about the rise and fall of heavy industry and its effect on the ordinary population. There's plenty here to keep the kids entertained as well, and the enthusiasm and humour of the staff make it a memorable experience.



DISCOVERY POINT

It's worth checking out **Discovery Point** (☎ 201245; www.rrsdiscovery.com; adult/child £6.45/3.85, combined ticket with Verdant Works £10.95/7; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Nov-Mar), centred on Captain Scott's famous polar expedition vessel, *Discovery*, which was constructed here in 1900 with a hull more than half a metre thick to survive the Antarctic pack ice. Scott sailed for the Antarctic in 1901 and, in a not uneventful voyage, spent two winters trapped in the ice as the endeavour ended in disaster. There are some excellent displays on Antarctic exploration and the expedition, and you can then go on board the ship to see the cabins used by Scott and his crew.

HM FRIGATE UNICORN

Constructed in 1824, the **Unicorn** (☎ 200900; www.frigateunicorn.org; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, noon-4pm Wed-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is the oldest British-built warship still afloat – perhaps that's because it never saw action.

Wandering around the frigate's four decks gives a good impression of what it must have been like for the 300-strong crew to live in such cramped conditions. The *Unicorn* is berthed in Victoria Dock, east of the Tay Rd Bridge. The entry price includes a guided tour.

SENSATION

Another impressive Dundee attraction is this modern **museum** (☎ 228800; www.sensation.org.uk; Greenmarket; adult/child £6.50/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm; ♿)

designed for the young and the energetic. It's a great place for kids, tired perhaps of art galleries and noble buildings, to reclaim the holiday. As the name suggests, the place is designed interactively, with dozens of hands-on attractions in five halls based on each of the senses. A giant head gives you the chance to slide down the nostril; elsewhere you can experience zero-gravity in a gyroscope (be prepared to queue) or explore the innards of a leaf.

BROUGHTY FERRY

This pleasant suburb, known to locals simply as 'the Ferry', is 4 miles east of Dundee. There's a long, sandy beach and great views across the Firth of Tay to Fife.

Broughty Castle Museum (HS; ☎ 436916; Castle Green; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, closed Mon Oct-Mar) is a reconstructed 16th-century tower guarding the entrance to the Firth of Tay. Its historical exhibitions includes information on Dundee's whaling industry and great views.

The easiest way to get to Broughty Ferry is to take buses 40, 75, 76 or 80 from Nethergate.

Sleeping

Broughty Ferry is quite a good place to base yourself, with a high number of B&Bs, particularly along Monifieth Rd.

BUDGET

Abalree (☎ 223867; fax 229239; 20 Union St; s/d without bathroom £20/34) Right in the city centre, this is a very sound budget guesthouse run by enthusiastic, dyed-in-the-wool Dundonians who love a chat. The building's dark staircase gives no clue of the colourful and comfortable rooms with TV inside. Shared bathrooms are small but clean, and there's 24-hour access. It's easier to get a room at weekends. Great value.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Aauld Steeple Guest House (☎ 200302; 94 Nethergate; s/d £23/40) This is extremely central, and great for buses and shops. Rooms are simple, clean and tidy with tartan blankets and decent beds; there's a variety of them, some with their own shower. Some doubles are particularly spacious and overlook St Marys Church. The only problem can be noise from the pissed and disorderly outside at weekends.

Ashley House (☎ 776109; www.ashley-house.com; 15 Monifieth Rd, Broughty Ferry; s/d £25/50; ☎) This comfortable guesthouse has long been one of the

best of the Broughty Ferry B&Bs and, under cheery new ownership, will hopefully continue to be. There are four excellent rooms, equipped with DVD player and top-notch beds; one has a particularly grand bathroom. It's a short walk from here to the centre of Broughty Ferry – along Brook St.

Erralbank Guest House (☎/fax 462118; 9 Dalgleish Rd; s/d to £32/52; ☎) This quiet family home is a mile east of the centre in a quiet leafy street. It's a friendly, peaceful hideaway with easy bus access to and from the centre and Broughty Ferry. Some rooms have a view of the firth, and are decorated with flowery cheeriness. The breakfasts are also worthy of praise. No credit cards accepted.

Fisherman's Tavern (☎ 775941; 10 Fort St, Broughty Ferry; s/d £35/56) No more wondering how to get home after a night at the Ferry's best pub; there are rooms to crash in! Modern and stylish, with soft colours and textures, they are on the small side but attractive and comfortable, with good bathrooms. A very atmospheric place to stay, although perhaps not for the light sleeper. Breakfast is available for an extra £4.

Shaftesbury Hotel (☎ 669216; www.shaftesbury-hotel.co.uk; 1 Hyndford St; s/d £60/88; ☎) This former jute baron's mansion is in a quiet spot in the west of town and is Dundee's most interesting hotel. There's a quirky range of rooms, many preserving much period character. Number 12 is the most appealing, and can be set up for a family. Easy streetside parking.

Eating

Nearly all the best places to eat are on and around Perth Rd.

Visochi's (☎ 779297; 40 Gray St, Broughty Ferry; pasta & pizza £6-10; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Thu, to 9.30pm Fri & Sat, to 5.30pm Sun) This ice-cream shop and café is an institution in the Ferry. It's all things to all people, whether you're after a tasty vanilla cone to lick on the beach, a quick pizza before a night out or a seriously strong double espresso the morning after.

our pick Jute Café-Bar (☎ 909246; Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, Nethergate; mains £7-13; ☎ food 10am-4pm, 5-9.30pm, bar open till midnight; ☎) The Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre is a great place, with cinemas, galleries and this cracker of a spot to eat and drink. The open-plan area exudes a welcoming buzz, there's outdoor seating, and a big range of edibles, from tasty panini sandwiches to elegant Asian-Mediterranean fusion dishes at dinnertime.

Dil'se (☎ 221501; 99 Perth Rd; mains £7-14; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 4.30-11pm Sun-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat; ☎) This busy and boisterous star of the Dundee eating scene is a Bangladeshi restaurant offering dishes that just burst with flavour. It's a large, glass-fronted spot as innovative in its modern lines as its mouth-watering menu. Old favourites are irresistibly flavoursome, while innovations such as Mas Bangla, which is an unexpected take on Scottish salmon, are equally unforgettable.

André's (☎ 224455; 134a Nethergate; 2-course lunch £7.50, mains £8-11; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sat, 1-10pm Sun) This loveable little place is a gem, with authentic and tasty French food at very palatable prices. You walk past André himself, working away in the kitchen, on your way to the small, attractive dining area. With friendly, unobtrusive service and some decent wines, it's a real winner.

Other good spots:

Het Theatre Café (☎ 206699; Tay Sq; mains £7-11; ☎ café 10am-late Mon-Sat, restaurant lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎) Chic arty hang-out at the Dundee Rep Theatre, a great place for coffee, snack or meal. Many veggie choices.

Agacán (☎ 644227; 113 Perth Rd; mains £9-12; ☎ 5-9.30pm Tue-Sun) Bags of charisma and great Turkish food in an intimate setting.

Drinking & Entertainment

Some of the best spots for a few pints are in Broughty Ferry. In Dundee, the Jute Café-Bar and Het Theatre Café are also relaxed places to sip a glass of something.

our pick Fisherman's Tavern (☎ 775941; 12 Fort St, Broughty Ferry) This community pub serves good cask ales and is a terrific little nook-and-cranney pub; once you order a drink you won't want to leave. There's also a beer garden, scene of a rowdy and thoroughly enjoyable beer festival every June, the proceeds of which go to the local lifeboat association.

Doghouse (☎ 227080; 13 Brown St; admission £3-15; ☎ 7pm-2am) This big, tall barn of a bar, Dundee's alternative headquarters and best venue for live music, is a great place to go. Dark, spacious, and atmospheric, there's live music – mostly rock – every weekend, and well-attended comedy nights on Monday. There are pool tables, a long bar, good crack, and also a few tables outdoors.

Ship Inn (☎ 779176; 121 Fisher St, Broughty Ferry) Located on the seafront, this cabin-style wooden pub is small, intimate, and full of nautical fittings. It does fine bar meals; it's very cosy,

and you can look out across the Firth of Tay, and see the local lifeboats launching for drills or rescues.

Reading Rooms (☎ 0790 535 3301; www.thereadingrooms.co.uk; 57 Blackscroft; cover £2-5; ☎ 10.30pm-2.30am Wed-Sun) Some of Scotland's best club nights, as well as regular live music, take place in this innovative venue. You can hear everything from big band and jazz to punk and the latest electronic sounds. Check the website for upcoming events.

Getting There & Away

If you're driving over the Tay Rd Bridge from Fife, it's toll-free in that direction only; leaving Dundee it costs 80p (a longstanding joke is that otherwise nobody would live there!).

AIR

The **airport** (☎ 643242; Riverside Dr) is roughly 1.5 miles west of the centre; daily flights head to London City Airport with **Scot Airways** (☎ 0870 606 0707; www.scotairways.co.uk).

BUS

There are Citylink services to/from Edinburgh (£9, two hours, hourly), Glasgow (£9.40, 2½ hours, hourly), Perth (£4.20, 35 minutes, half-hourly) and Aberdeen (£9.40, two hours, more than hourly).

TRAIN

There is no shortage of services from Edinburgh (£17.40, 1¼ hours, one or two hourly) and Glasgow (£19.60, 1½ hours, at least hourly). Trains for Aberdeen (£20.70, 1¼ hours, two hourly) run via Arbroath and Stonehaven.

AROUND DUNDEE Glamis Castle

Looking every bit a Scottish castle, with turrets and battlements, **Glamis Castle** (Glamis; ☎ 01307-840393; adult/child castle & grounds £7.30/4.10, grounds only £3.70/2.70; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Dec; ☎ grounds only) was the legendary setting for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Grampians and an extensive park provide a spectacular backdrop for this family home of the Earls of Strathmore and Kinghorne. The daughter of one of the earls, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, better known as the Queen Mother, grew up here.

Entry is by guided tour, and the guides do a good job of making them interesting for

children; last admission is at 4.30pm and only the grounds have disabled access. The most impressive room is the drawing room, with its arched plasterwork ceiling, while the frescoes on the roof of the chapel (haunted, naturally) are magnificent. There's a display of armour and weaponry in the crypt (also haunted).

The castle is 12 miles north of Dundee in the village of Glamis. There are Strathtay Scottish buses from Dundee (35 minutes, one to three daily) to the castle itself, and a couple more that stop in the adjacent village. The Dundee tourist office has a leaflet on reaching the castle by bus.

ARBROATH

☎ 01241 / pop 22,800

Arbroath is one of those Scottish coastal towns that seems to change mood according to the weather. When the sun shines, it's a great place for a day out, especially for fans of smoked fish – the famous Arbroath smokie (haddock) is a real delicacy. The town also takes great pride in its football team, world record holders from the day in 1885 when they beat hapless Bon Accord 36-0. The **tourist office** (☎ 872609; Market Pl; 🕒 daily Jun-Aug, Mon-Sat Sep-May) is worth visiting.

The town was established as a fishing port in the 12th century, and the settlement grew up around **Arbroath Abbey** (HS; ☎ 878756; adult/child £4/1.60; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; 🚶 almost all). King William the Lion, who is buried here, founded the abbey in 1178. It was

at the abbey where Robert the Bruce signed Scotland's famous declaration of independence from England in 1320, which contained the oft-quoted words: 'It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom'. Closed following the Dissolution, the fortified abbey fell into ruin but enough survives to make this a very impressive sight. The **visitors centre** next door outlines the turbulent history of the abbey, as well as providing a good virtual tour of how it might have looked in its prime. It makes a laudable effort to provide accessible information for kids too.

Harbour Nights Guesthouse (☎ 434343; www.harbournights-scotland.com; 4 Shore; s/d from £40/45) is right on Arbroath harbour and is a very appealing place to stay. It's a stylish place of some character, and offers handsome themed rooms, the best of which overlook the harbour (doubles £55 to £65). Breakfast is also a cut above the average.

The **Old Brewhouse** (☎ 879945; 3 High St; mains £5-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a pub right on the harbour wall, a perfect place to try a smokie, which is very tasty here. There's cosy indoor seating, tables outside for a sunny day and the addictive Orkney Dark Island on tap.

Strathtay Scottish has buses from Dundee (45 minutes, frequent), as does Citylink from Edinburgh/Glasgow. However, the scenic trip along the coast from Dundee (20 minutes, up to three an hour) makes the train journey worthwhile.

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