

# Central Scotland



The country's historical roots are deeply embedded in the sandy soils of Central Scotland. Significant ruins and castles that chronicle the region's charismatic history pepper the landscape. Key battlegrounds shaped the country's fortunes around Stirling, and Perth is the former capital where kings were crowned on the Stone of Destiny.

Arriving from the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, visitors begin to get a sense of the country further north as the lowland belt gives way to Highland splendour. It is here that the majesty of Scotland's landscape unfolds in deep, dark steely blue lochs that hold the shimmering silhouettes of soaring, sentinel-like craggy peaks on a still day.

This part of Scotland is big-tree country, with pockets of ancient woodlands thriving side by side with regrowth forests, some planted by visionary landowners 300 years ago. Opportunities to enjoy the landscape abound and walking, cycling, mountaineering and wildlife safaris are all easy possibilities. Capping off the exhaustingly fresh outdoors are some of the country's best pubs and eateries, which greet weary visitors at the end of the day.

It's also the variety in the region that pulls the punters – learn all about crannogs, have a drink in an ancient pub that holds scrawlings from Robert Burns, throw a line into a picture-perfect loch and explore one of the country's most stunning wooded glens all in a day.

The coastline along the 'kingdom' of Fife offers quaint fishing villages along East Neuk and one of Scotland's most enjoyable towns – St Andrews. The township, touched with a gentle dignity, has a medieval shell that belies the sophistication and dynamism of a student population drawn from around the globe.

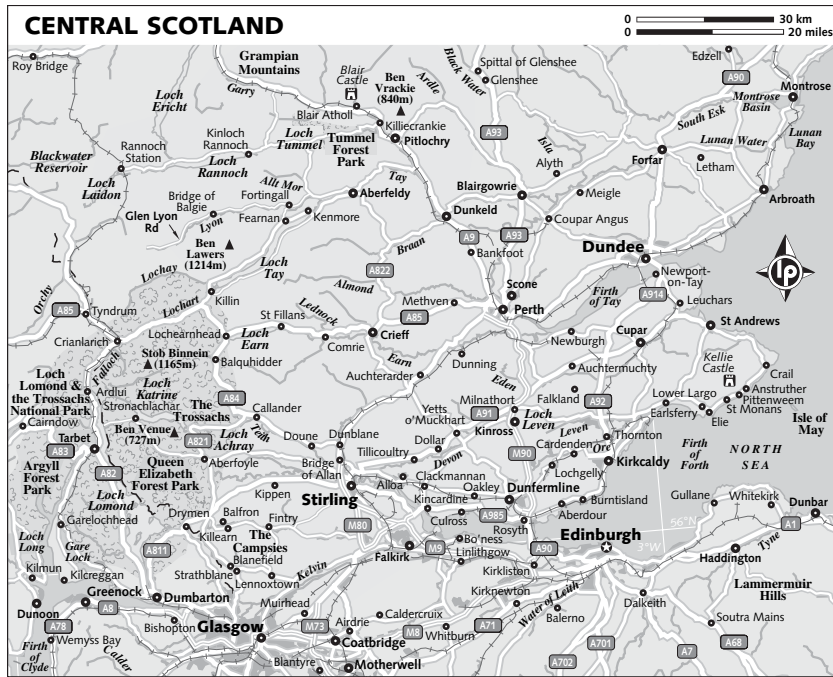
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Walking the eerie fields of Bannockburn and rambling through the imperious castle lording it over the city in **Stirling** (p193)
- Mixing history, nostalgia and, of course, golf on the hallowed fairways of **St Andrews Old Course** (p211)
- Bagging magnificent **Ben Lawers** (p224), and keeping an eye out for Neolithic rock art on the way
- Whizzing down the slopes of **Glenshee** (p230), one of the country's largest ski runs
- Nursing a pint of Ale of Atholl and toasting the toes by a roaring log fire at the **Moulin Inn** (p229), a pub dripping with Scottish character.



■ POPULATION: 764,000

■ AREA: 9254 SQ KM



## Getting Around

For public-transport info, call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233). **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050) connects the main towns in the area, and Perth is a major hub for its services. **Royal Mail postbuses** (☎ 01246-546329) serve many remote communities, such as those in West Perthshire, charging on average £2 to £5 for single journeys.

The Central Scotland Rover rail ticket (£30), valid for three days out of seven, allows train travel between Edinburgh, Glasgow, Falkirk and Stirling.

## STIRLING REGION

Stirling is one of those regions central Scotland specialises in. It provides a taste of both lowlands and Highlands; has a staggering share of landmark battlegrounds; is peppered with castles and tales of legendary figures; and contains a slice of natural beauty that will literally leave you gasping. And all that packed cheek by jowl into such a small and delightful area.

The capital, also named Stirling, controlled the main route into the Highlands and its strategic location meant it was the stage for some of Scotland's crucial battles of independence against the repressive English. The region was home to Rob Roy, and the legendary exploits of this champion of the poor still echo around the southern border of the Highlands.

The region has lured walkers and climbers since Victorian times, and the forests and wildlife in this unique environment are protected as part of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park (p267).

## Getting Around

For local transport information in the Stirling region, phone ☎ 01786-442707. The main bus operator is **First** (☎ 0870 872 7271). Its First-Day ticket (£5) gives one day's travel on all its services in the central Scotland region and through to Edinburgh or Glasgow.

From late May (although sometimes delayed until June or July) to early October the vintage **Trossachs Trundler** (☎ 01786-442707) is a useful bus service circling Aberfoyle, Callander and Trossachs Pier on Loch Katrine.

A day ticket per adult/child is £8/2.80. The bus is wheelchair accessible and can carry two bikes. It runs four times daily except Wednesday. Stirling town is the rail hub, but the lines only skirt the rest of the region.

## STIRLING

☎ 01786 / pop 45,500

Stirling lies at one of Scotland's most strategic sites and has been at the heart of many conflicts. There's a hustle and bustle on the streets and footpaths during the day, but at night it all disappears and a twilight walk of the old town can be magical. In the right light and away from the buzz of the retail calamity in the centre, there's something a bit fairy-tale-like about Stirling. For visitors the city rivals Edinburgh (but on a smaller scale) for historical attractions and the atmosphere of its old town.

Replete with winding cobblestone streets, the old town clings to the slopes beneath the castle and the fascinating remnants divulge tales of Stirling's historical development, stretching over a 500-year period. Another parallel with Edinburgh is the magnificent castle, perched high on a rocky outcrop gazing over the city. The old town slopes up from the train and bus stations to the castle, which sits 75m above the plain atop the plug of an extinct volcano.

## Information

**Post office** (Barnton St)

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (Barnton St) Has an ATM.

**Stirling Library** (Corn Exchange Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, to 7pm Tue & Thu, to 5pm Sat) Free internet access.

**Stirling Royal Infirmary** (☎ 434000; Livlands Rd) Hospital; south of the town centre.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0620; info@stirling.visitscotland.com; 41 Dumbarton Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat year-round, plus Sun Jun-mid-Sep; 📖) Plenty of brochures about Stirling's attractions and the region, but service from staff is patchy.

## Sights

### STIRLING CASTLE & ARGYLL'S LODGING

Hold Stirling and you control the whole country. This simple strategy has ensured that a **castle** (HS; ☎ 450000; adult/child incl Argyll's Lodging £9/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; ♿) has existed here since prehistoric times. The superb views it commands mean you cannot help drawing parallels with Ed-

inburgh Castle – but Stirling is better. Location, architecture and historical significance combine to make it one of the grandest of all Scottish castles.

There has been a fortress of some kind here for several thousand years, but the current building dates from the late 14th to the 16th century, when it was a residence of the Stuart monarchs. The Great Hall and Gatehouse were built by James IV; observe the hammer-beam roof and huge fireplaces in the largest medieval hall in Scotland and the result of 35 years' worth of restoration.

The spectacular palace was constructed in the reign of James V (1513-42); however, the Royal Lodgings may be temporarily closed to visitors as they are part of the last phase of the castle's massive restoration project.

James VI (r 1567-1625) remodelled the Chapel Royal and was the last king of Scots to live here.

In the King's Old Building is the **museum of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders** (admission free, donations encouraged), which traces the history of this famous regiment from 1794 to the present day. It has a great collection of ornately decorated dirks (daggers).

The **Royal Burgh of Stirling Visitor Centre** (☎ 479901; Castle Esplanade; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) has an audiovisual presentation and exhibition about Stirling, including the history and architecture of the castle.

There's a car park next to the castle (£2 for two hours).

Complete with turrets, spectacular **Argyll's Lodging** is the most impressive 17th-century town house in Scotland and you'll find it by the castle, at the top of Castle Wynd. It's the former home of William Alexander, Earl of Stirling and noted literary figure. It has been tastefully restored and gives an insight into lavish, 17th-century aristocratic life.

## OLD TOWN

Below the castle, the old town has a remarkably different feel to modern Stirling, its cobblestone streets packed with fine examples of 15th- to 17th-century architectural gems. Its growth began when Stirling became a royal burgh, about 1124, and in the 15th and 16th centuries rich merchants built their houses here. The steep slopes ensure visitors will enjoy recuperation in a nearby coffee shop or pub after exploring for a couple of hours.

### STIRLING

**INFORMATION**

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Mar's Wark	8	B3
Museum of Argyll & Southernland Highlanders	9	B2
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**SLEEPING**

Burnsview Guest House	12	C3
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**EATING**

Aura	(see 27)	
Barton Bar & Bistro	21	C3
Darnley Coffee House	22	C3
Italia Nostra	23	C3
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**DRINKING**

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**TRANSPORT**

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Stirling has the best surviving town wall in Scotland. It was built around 1547 when Henry VIII of England began the 'Rough Wooing' – attacking the town in order to force Mary, Queen of Scots to marry his son so that the two kingdoms could be united. The wall can be explored on the **Back Walk**, which follows the line of the wall from Dumbarton Rd (near the tourist office) to the castle, continuing around Castle Rock and back to the old town.

**Mar's Wark**, on Castle Wynd at the head of the old town, is the ornate façade of what was once a Renaissance-style town house commissioned in 1569 by the wealthy earl of Mar, regent of Scotland during James VI's minority.

The **Church of the Holy Rude** (St John St; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Easter-Sep) has been the town's

parish church for 600 years and James VI was crowned here in 1567. The nave and tower date from 1456, and the church has one of the few surviving medieval open-timber roofs. It's the only remaining church in Scotland that's seen a coronation. Stunning stained-glass windows and huge stone pillars create a powerful effect.

Behind the church is **Cowane's hospital** (☎ 472247; 49 St John St; admission free; ☎ no set hr). Built as an almshouse in 1637 by the merchant John Cowane, its medicinal methods now include hosting *ceilidhs* (evenings of traditional Scottish entertainment), banquets and exhibitions. There's a family-tree database where you can search for your ancestry if they were born around this area.

The **Mercat Cross**, in Broad St, is topped with a unicorn and was once surrounded by a bustling market. Nearby is the **Tolbooth**, built in 1705 as the town's administrative centre. A courthouse and jail were added in the following century, and it was renovated in 2001 to become the city's premier arts and music venue.

### BANNOCKBURN

On 24 June 1314, the greatest victory in the history of Scotland's struggle to remain independent took place at the Battle of Bannockburn. Robert the Bruce overcame superior numbers and sent Edward II's English force running for their lives. In the long and bitter struggle against the threat of English domination, this victory turned the tide of fortune sufficiently in favour of the Scots for the following 400 years.

**Bannockburn Heritage Centre** (NTS; ☎ 812664; Glasgow Rd; adult/child £5/4; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mar) tells the story of the battle in a simple and eloquent exhibition, including a 12-minute audiovisual display that stirs the imagination, helping to bring the historic battle to life. There are also interesting dioramas about medieval Scotland and the Battle of Stirling Bridge. Outside is the eerie Borestone site, said to have been Robert the Bruce's command post before the battle. Check out his grim-looking statue, dressed in full battle gear and mounted on a charger. The battle site itself never closes. Bannockburn is located 2 miles south of Stirling.

### WALLACE MONUMENT

Two and a half miles north of Stirling is Scotland's impressive Victorian **monument** (☎ 472140; Abbey Craig, Hillfoots Rd, Causewayhead; adult/child/family

£6.50/4/15; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-May & Oct, to 6pm Jun, 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Sep, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Feb) to Sir William Wallace, who was hung, drawn and quartered by the English in 1305. The view from the top, of no less than seven battlegrounds, is as breathtaking as the 67m climb up to it. The monument contains interesting displays, including a parade of other Scottish heroes and Wallace's mighty two-handed sword. Clearly, the man was no weakling.

### Tours

From April to October, **City Sightseeing** (☎ 446611; www.citysightseeing.co.uk) runs an open-top, hop-on, hop-off bus tour daily, departing every 45 minutes (hourly November to March). It runs between the castle and the Wallace Monument via Bridge of Allan. A day ticket costs £7.50/3 per adult/child.

### Sleeping BUDGET

**Willy Wallace Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 446773; www.willywallacehostel.com; 77 Murray Pl; dm £10-14, d £35) This is a friendly, grungy hostel in the middle of town, and the focal point of the traveller's scene. There are mixed, male and female dorms (quite cramped) generally accommodating six to 12 beds. The lounge area has comfy chairs and great views.

**Stirling Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1149; St John St; dm adult/child £15.50/12; ☎ ) The façade of an 18th-century church conceals this place, which is in a perfect location in the old part of town. It's a superb, modern hostel with 126 beds in four- to six-bed dorms. A less attractive annexe in Union St opens in summer only.

**Witches Craig Caravan Park** (☎ 474947; www.witchesraig.co.uk; Blairlogie; tent sites £12-16; ☎ Apr-Oct) In a

### WILLIAM WALLACE, SCOTTISH PATRIOT

William Wallace is one of Scotland's most endearing heroes and a patriot whose exploits helped revive interest in Scottish history. Born in 1270, he was catapulted into fame and a place in history as a highly successful guerrilla commander who harassed the English invaders for many years.

Wallace was knighted by Robert the Bruce and proclaimed Guardian of Scotland in March 1298. However, it was only a short time before English military superiority and the fickle nature of the nobility's loyalties would turn against the defender of Scottish independence.

Disaster struck in July of that year when King Edward's force defeated the Scots at the Battle of Falkirk. Wallace resigned as guardian, went into hiding, and travelled throughout Europe to drum up support for the Scottish cause. Many of the Scots nobility were prepared to side with Edward, and Wallace was betrayed after his return to Scotland in 1305.

Sir William Wallace was tried for treason at Westminster, and he was hanged, beheaded and disembowelled at Smithfield, London.

brilliant spot right at the foot of the Ochil Hills, which are begging to be walked, Witches Craig is 3 miles east of Stirling by the A91. It's a former 'national loo of the year' winner.

#### MIDRANGE

**Burnsview Guest House** (☎ 451002; www.burnsview-guesthouse.com; 1 Albert Pl; d per person £20-26) Burnsview has four renovated rooms, two with en-suite facilities. The breakfast has been recommended, as has the high standard of hospitality. It's not for party animals, though – the thoughtful owners enjoy hosting discerning guests.

**Mrs MacGregor's** (☎/fax 471082; www.sruighlea.com; 27 King St; d £40-50) This place feels like a secret hideaway, but it's conveniently located smack bang in the centre of town. You'll feel like a local staying here, and there are eating and drinking places practically on the doorstep. It's a B&B that welcomes guests with the kind of warmth that keeps them returning.

**Garfield Guest House** (☎ 473730; 12 Victoria Sq; s £26-56, d £50-60) This grand old Victorian dame has seen better days, but once a stunner always a stunner. Inside is detailed cornice work, floor to ceiling mirrors and, of course, floral carpets – it wouldn't be a guesthouse without them. The very comfy rooms are mostly palatial in size, and enormous bay windows overlooking the square opposite open onto lovely green views. It's a magnificent property in a peaceful, leafy area of town.

Two high-quality guesthouses sit side by side in a great central location about 10 minutes from the castle. **Munro Guest House** (☎ 472685; www.munroguesthouse.co.uk; 14 Princes St; s £28-40, d £46-54) is a family-run place with five en-suite rooms all bordering on luxurious, and friendly **Cairns** (☎ 479228; 12 Princes St; s £25, d & tw £50) next door has a double and a twin, both with en suite, and two single rooms. You can take a room here without breakfast.

Other recommendations:

**Neidpath** (☎ 469017; www.neidpath-stirling.co.uk; 24 Linden Ave; s/d £35/48) Spotless rooms and a filling breakfast.

**Linden Guest House** (☎/fax 448850; www.linden-guesthouse.co.uk; 22 Linden Ave; s £45, d £50-58) For those who like their creature comforts. High-standard accommodation.

**Castlecroft Guest House** (☎ 474933; www.castlecroft-uk.com; Ballengeich Rd; s/d/f £50/55/68) Brilliant location, nestled just under the castle and blessed with panoramic views of the countryside. Couples should go

or the family room; it's worth the extra coin for the stupendous views.

#### TOP END

**Stirling Highland Hotel** (☎ 272727; stirling@paramount-hotels.co.uk; Spittal St; r from £100; 🍷) The smartest hotel in town, Stirling Highland Hotel is a sympathetic refurbishment of the old high school. It's very convenient for the castle and old town and the rooms are deluxe, although staying in an old school may not generate good memories for everyone.

#### Eating

**Barnton Bar & Bistro** (☎ 461698; 312 Barnton St; mains £3.50-5.50; 🍷 daily until late) Opposite the post office, this is a very popular, grungy hang-out serving excellent all-day breakfasts, chilli, homemade lasagne and burgers. It is a great place to eat or drink, and there's something on most weeknights, including a Friday night disco. Good options for vegetarians, too.

**Varsity** (☎ 461041; 1 Corn Exchange Rd; mains £5; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Attracting the town's style-cats, this trendy, nouveau bar-café serves cheap food. The décor and furnishings are young at heart, as is the pop music on large TV screens. Pub mains plus hot melts and salads tickle the tastebuds.

**Darnley Coffee House** (☎ 474468; 18 Bow St; snacks £3.50-5; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Just down the hill from the castle, beyond the end of Broad St, Darnley Coffee House is a good pit stop for home baking and speciality coffees during a walk around the old town.

**No 2 Baker Street** (2 Baker St; mains £5-8; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Great pub options with a few innovations, such as wild mushroom Wellington (veggie option) or a Caerphilly cheese and leek burger, or crab and coldwater prawn salad. Excellent selection of real ales on tap.

**Aura** (☎ 470333; 51 King St; lunch mains £7-9, dinner mains £10-16; 🍷 breakfast weekends, lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Aura is an interesting mix – American deli by day dishing out giant sandwiches, and wine bar and restaurant day and night. Muted tones entice diners into its soft, relaxing environment, ideal for a wonderful meal. The early evening dinner special means small mains are only £7, including Moroccan beef or mussels in garlic sauce. There's plenty for vegetarians, too. On our visit the amateurish service was a letdown.

**Italia Nostra** (☎ 473208; 25 Baker St; pizza & pasta £11-16; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) The Nostra is a busy

Italian place popular with families. It has a warm, friendly atmosphere and is also good for women or solo travellers. There's a large menu, including delicious *gelato*, and it does takeaways.

Also recommended:

**Papa Joe's** (☎ 446414; 21 Dumbarton Rd; lunch mains £5.50, dinner mains £7-14; 🍷 lunch Sat, dinner daily) Dine on excellent pizzas, pasta and some Tex-Mex dishes among an eclectic collection of antiques, musical instruments and sporting paraphernalia. Good wine list. Friendly, efficient service.

**Mr Singh's** (☎ 472137; 16-18 Barnton St; starters £4, mains £6-8; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) Fine curry house with a terrific-value buffet lunch (£6). Four-course buffet dinner is £12 on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday nights. Dishes from all over India, including Goanese, Punjabi and Biryani dishes.

#### Drinking

**Portcullis** (☎ 472290; Castle Wynd) With a friendly atmosphere and a great location just below the castle, this is the best pub in Stirling. Excellent bar meals are served all day and there's a large range of malt whiskies, too.

**Settle Inn** (☎ 474609; 91 St Mary's Wynd) Established in 1733, the Settle Inn is the oldest pub in Stirling and is a good place to rest weary legs and enjoy a cosy drink, especially when the rain is lashing outside.

Barnton Bar & Bistro (opposite) is another popular place for a drink.

#### Getting There & Away

**BUS**  
Scottish Citylink runs frequent buses to/from Glasgow (£5, 45 minutes). Some buses continue to Aberdeen (£20, 3½ hours) via Perth (£6) and Dundee (£10); others go to Inverness. For buses to Inverness (£16, 3½ hours) you'll usually have to change at Perth. A four-times-daily service from Edinburgh to Fort William goes via Stirling once a day (with connections to Oban or Skye); fares to Edinburgh, Oban, Fort William and Portree are £5, £17, £17.50 and £30, respectively. All buses go from the bus station on Goosecroft Rd.

First runs local buses (to Callander, Aberfoyle – both £3.50 – for example) and operates an express service to Edinburgh (£4.50, one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday).

#### TRAIN

First ScotRail has services to/from Edinburgh (£6.20, 55 minutes, at least twice hourly Mon-

day to Saturday, hourly Sunday). Services run at least twice an hour from Glasgow (£6.50, 40 minutes, every two hours or so on Sunday), and there are regular services to Perth (£9.30, 35 minutes), Dundee (£14.30, 55 minutes) and Aberdeen (£35, 2¼ hours).

#### Getting Around

It's easy enough to walk around the central part of the town.

If you want wheels, you can hire a car from **Arnold Clark** (☎ 478686; www.arnoldclarkrental.co.uk; Kerse Rd). The cheapest deal is for an economy car at around £20 per day.

#### AROUND STIRLING

##### Bridge of Allan

☎ 01786 / pop 4600

This upbeat former spa town, just 2.5 miles north of Stirling, has an open street plan, giving it a laid-back sense of space. It's a good alternative to staying in Stirling.

At the **Bridge of Allan Brewery** (☎ 834555; Queen's Lane; admission free; 🍷 noon-5pm daily Jul-Sep, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Jun), just off Henderson St, you can learn about the microbrewing techniques behind traditional Scottish ales. This is a great spot to taste local beers – it's very friendly and the genuine quality microbrews are recommended, particularly the Wallace Monument (tastings are free).

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Ourpick Inverallan Lodge** (☎ 832791; david.thursby@tesco.net; 116 Henderson St; s/d/f £30/50/60) This is the best guesthouse in town and a travellers' favourite. Down to earth, perpetually friendly (but not overbearing) and good value, the lodge has decent-sized rooms, some with huge bay windows drawing in lots of light.

**Anam Cara** (☎ 832030; caringdown@hotmail.com; 107 Henderson St; s/d £35/50) A simple B&B with a double and a twin room, the attraction here is your host – she's a laughter therapist. If everything is a bit grey outside and your time in Scotland is getting you down, this may be just the place for you. Make sure you knock on the door of No 107 around the side of the house (No 109 is not the smiley place).

**Queen's Hotel** (☎ 833268; www.queenshotelscotland.com; 24 Henderson St; s/d £100/160) Gorgeous, modern, plush rooms here have a dark and fuzzy décor that makes you want to get naked and have a good roll around. All rooms have car-wash showers, but only some come with bath.

The rooms are different sizes, so ask to see a selection and ask about weekend specials. Even if you're not staying, drop in for lunch or dinner and taste the contemporary cooking in the bar; mains are £7 to £10.

**Clive Ramsay Café** (☎ 831616; Henderson St; mains £8-12; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a claim to 'sexy food', this little show pony also has a wonderful deli next door selling fresh local produce. The café has a very trendy vibe and somehow seems the centre of the town's universe. Thai fish cakes with Asian-style coleslaw or Catalan-style paella won't break your budget.

**Jekyll's Restaurant** (☎ 833268; www.queenshotel.scotland.com; 24 Henderson St; 2/3 courses £24/29; ☺ dinner) For serious foodies, this restaurant attached to the Queen's Hotel does delightful and imaginative things with Scottish produce.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can walk to Bridge of Allan from Stirling in just over an hour. Frequent local buses from Stirling stop in Henderson St. Trains to Dunblane, Stirling, Glasgow and Edinburgh depart frequently from the station at the western end of Henderson St.

### Dunblane

☎ 01786 / pop 8000

Dunblane is a very enjoyable town to wander, although the name will always be associated with the horrific massacre in which 16 children and a teacher were murdered in the local primary school in March 1996.

The main attraction is the fabulous **Dunblane Cathedral** (HS; ☎ 823388; Cathedral Sq; admission free; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar), which is well worth a detour. It's a superb, elegant sandstone building – a fine example of Gothic style. The lower parts of the walls date from Norman times, the rest mainly 13th to 15th

century. There is a sculpted Pictish stone on display (found on the site), suggesting that it was used as a centre of worship well before the current structure existed.

The musty old **Leighton Library** (☎ 822296; 61 High St; admission free; ☺ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Wed-Fri May-Oct), dating from 1684, is the oldest private library in Scotland. There are 4500 books in 90 languages.

You can walk to Bridge of Allan from Dunblane along Darn Rd, an ancient path used by monks, in about an hour. Alternatively, Scottish Citylink buses run to Stirling, Glasgow and Perth once every hour or two. Trains to Stirling and Glasgow or Edinburgh are more frequent – roughly three per hour, fewer on Sunday.

### THE CAMPSIES & STRATHBLANE

The beautiful Campsie Fells, commonly called the Campsies, reach nearly 600m and lie 10 miles north of Glasgow. The plain of the River Forth lies to the north; Strathblane and Loch Lomond lie to the west.

One of several villages around the Campsies, attractive **Killearn** is known for its 31m-high obelisk, raised in honour of George Buchanan, James VI's tutor. Eight miles to the east, **Fintry** has carved itself a gorgeous spot deep in the Campsies on the banks of Endrick Water, which has an impressive 28m waterfall, the **Loup of Fintry**. Six miles north of Fintry, **Kippen** has a very attractive **parish church** (☺ 9.30am-5pm). In the west (on the West Highland Way) is **Drymen**, a pretty village with lots of character, which is popular due to its close proximity to Loch Lomond.

### Activities

One of the best walks in the area is the ascent of spectacular Dumgoyne hill (427m) from Glengoyne distillery, about 2 miles south of

Killearn. Allow at least one hour for the ascent of Dumgoyne. It will take another hour to Earl's Seat, and 1½ hours to return from there to the distillery. The tourist office in Drymen and other local offices have detailed route information.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Embank B&B** (☎ 01360-661016; Stirling Rd, Drymen; s £28, d £23-27) Just off the square, this substantial property offers a variety of rooms and has a very friendly owner. The recommended rooms include the large double with en suite downstairs and the smallish double upstairs with king-size bed. The owner will happily do deals for singles and groups.

**Culcreuch Castle** (☎ 01360-860555; Fintry; r per person £60-90) Fancy a night in a 700-year-old castle? Culcreuch dates to 1296 and is a remarkably well-preserved historic building. The 14 rooms are individually styled with Victorian décor. Most rooms are sumptuous and look out onto the collage of greenery engulfing the surrounding estate. A little dowdy perhaps, and popular with groups, but this place, with its period furnishings, has real character. The castle is signposted from the village and is 600m off the B822 coming into Fintry.

**Black Bull Hotel** (☎ 01360-550215; www.blackbullhotel.com; 2 The Square, Killearn; s/d £75/110; ☎) The 15 rooms at this stylish, modern hotel are in a historic shell with plenty of character. It's a small, intimate family-run place. The excellent service and top-notch facilities ensure most visitors are repeat clientele.

**Clachan Inn** (☎ 01360-660824; The Square, Drymen; mains £7-18; ☺ lunch & dinner) The best place to eat in the area is the cosy Clachan Inn (opened in 1734). The extensive menu includes steaks, burgers, salads and vegetarian dishes. Try the seafood salad for lunch, washed down beautifully with a pint of St Andrews Ale.

Also recommended:

**Fintry Inn** (☎ 01360-860224; www.thefintryinn.com; 23 Main St, Fintry; r per person £25) Above the inn is a self-catering flat sleeping up to six. Continental breakfast only.

**Lander B&B** (☎ 01360-660273; www.bandb.labbs.com; 17 Stirling Rd, Drymen; s/d £25/40) Simple B&B lodgings, private access to guest rooms – very homely.

### Getting There & Away

First bus 10 runs from Glasgow to Killearn and Balforn every hour or two; change at Balforn for Aberfoyle (£4.50 from Glasgow). There are frequent daily services (except Sunday) between

Balforn and Drymen on First bus 8. A Royal Mail postbus runs twice on weekdays between Balforn and Fintry, once on Saturday.

### THE TROSSACHS

The Trossachs has been a major tourist draw since the early 19th century when Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *Rob Roy* brought eager visitors to the region. In the 21st century its natural beauty, variety of wildlife and fragile environment have been recognised with the establishment of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park (p267).

The narrow glen between Loch Katrine and Loch Achray is actually named the Trossachs, but the term is now used to describe a wider scenic area around the southern border of the Highlands.

### Aberfoyle & Around

☎ 01877

Crawling with visitors most weekends and dominated by a huge car park, Aberfoyle (population 576) is a hit with domestic tourists as it provides a convenient base to explore the beautiful Trossachs. It's a fairly uninteresting place though, easily overwhelmed by daytrippers and we'd recommend staying in Callander or other Trossach towns.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0604, 382352; Main St; ☺ 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar; ☎ ☎) is in the Trossachs Discovery Centre, which details a history of the Trossachs and provides a soft play area for kids.

Three miles east is the Lake of Menteith. A ferry takes visitors from Port of Menteith village (on the lake) to the substantial ruins of **Inchmahome Priory** (HS; ☎ 385294; Inchmahome Island; adult/child incl ferry ride £4.50/2.25; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep). Mary, Queen of Scots was kept safe here as a child during Henry VIII's 'Rough Wooing' (p31).

Half a mile north of Aberfoyle, on the A821, is the **David Marshall Lodge Visitor Centre** (☎ 382258; admission free, car-park fee £1; ☺ daily Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec, 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Feb; ☎) in the **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park**, which has info about the many walks and cycle routes in and around the park (many departing from the visitor centre). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has a display here on local bird life, the highlight being a live video link to the resident osprey family. The centre is worth visiting solely for the views.

### WORTH THE TRIP

**Doone Castle** (HS; ☎ 01786-841742; Castle Rd, Doone; adult/child £4/2; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar) is 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, but was also of great strategic importance because it controlled the route between the Lowlands and Highlands, and Mary, Queen of Scots stayed here. The inner hall was restored in 1883. There are great views from the castle walls, and the lofty gatehouse is very impressive, rising nearly 30m. If you're a Monty Python fan, you may recognise the castle from the *Holy Grail*.

Doone is 7 miles northwest of Stirling. First buses run every hour or two to Doone from Stirling (30 minutes), less frequently on Sunday.

## ACTIVITIES

Waymarked walking trails start from the David Marshall Lodge Visitor Centre on the hills above the town; the tourist office has a booklet for £1.

There's an excellent 20-mile circular cycle route that links up with the **Sir Walter Scott Steamship** (☎ 376316) along Loch Katrine. Following the southern shore of Loch Achray, you reach the pier on Loch Katrine; departures are at 10.30am daily April to October, as well as afternoon departures at 2.30pm on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. The ferry should drop you at Stronachlachar (adult/child one way £6/4.50) at the western end. From Stronachlachar, follow the B829 via Loch Ard to Aberfoyle.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Mayfield Guest House** (☎ 382962; randmhooks@btopenworld.com; Main St; s/d £30/50) Nothing is too much trouble for the friendly hosts at this guesthouse. There's a double and two twin rooms, all very well kept, and a garage at the back for bikes. Pets welcome.

**Cranraig House** (☎ 382276; www.cranraighouse.com; s/d £40/70; Ⓜ) An opulent Victorian house, Cranraig provides excellent B&B in four family rooms, a single and a twin room. Being a grandiose Victorian affair, all the rooms are a good size. The upstairs family room, with bay window and couch, is the pick of the bunch. There's a cot for youngsters and there are discounts for kids.

**Forth Inn** (☎ 382372; www.forthinn.com; Main St; bar meals £7, dinner mains £14; ☎ lunch & dinner; Ⓜ) In the middle of the village, the solid Forth Inn seems to be the lifeblood of the town, with locals and visitors alike queuing up for good honest pub fare. The tasty bar meals are the best in town. It also provides shelter and beer, with drinkers spilling outside into the sunny courtyard. Single/double rooms are available at the inn for £45/70.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

First has up to four daily buses from Stirling (£5) and connecting services from Glasgow (£4.50) via Balfroun.

A postbus does a return trip, Monday to Saturday, from Aberfoyle to Inversnaid Hotel on Loch Lomond, giving access to the West Highland Way long-distance footpath.

The Trossachs Trundler does a circuit starting from Stirling that includes Aber-

foyle, Port of Menteith, Trossachs Pier on Loch Katrine and Callander; a day ticket per adult/child is £8/2.80. It's wheelchair accessible and can carry two bikes. The bus runs daily (except Wednesdays) from late May to early October.

## GETTING AROUND

Bicycles can be hired from **Trossachs Cycle Hire** (☎ 382614; Trossachs Holiday Park; half-/full day £9/15).

## Callander

☎ 01877 / pop 3000

Callander has been pulling in the tourists for over 150 years, and has a laid-back ambience along its main thoroughfare. It's a far better place than Aberfoyle to spend time in, quickly lulling visitors into lazy pottering. There's also an excellent array of accommodation options.

## INFORMATION

**Bank of Scotland** (Main St) Has ATM.

**Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 722126; www.lochlomond-trossachs.org; 52 Main St; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) This place is a useful centre for specific information on the park and its inhabitants. Not for accommodation though – see Rob Roy & Trossachs Visitor Centre (below) for this.

**Post office** (Main St)

**Rob Roy & Trossachs Visitor Centre** (☎ 0845 225 5121; Ancaster Sq; audiovisual show on Rob Roy & the Trossachs £1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb; Ⓜ) This helpful centre has heaps of info on the area and runs an audiovisual show about the great man.

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (Main St) Has ATM.

## ACTIVITIES

The impressive **Bracklinn Falls** are reached by track and footpath from Bracklinn Rd (30 minutes each way from the car park). Also off Bracklinn Rd, a woodland trail leads up to Callander Crags, with great views over the surroundings; a return trip is about 4 miles from the car park. Note that at the time of research the bridge at the falls had been washed away, due to flooding, making the round trip back to Callander closed – you need to retrace your steps.

The Trossachs is a lovely area to cycle around. **Cycle Hire Callander** (Moulder Bikes; ☎ 331052; Ancaster Sq) rents bikes for £6 for two hours or £12 for a full day. Child seats are £3. It's right next to the visitor centre.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Trossachs Tryst Hostel** (☎ /fax 331200; info@scottish-hostel.com; Invertrossachs Rd; dm/f £15/70) This backpackers is in a beautifully isolated spot. To get there, take Bridge St off Main St, then turn right onto Invertrossachs Rd and follow the road, which runs on the southern side of the river draining Loch Vennachar, for a mile. The excellent dorms are very spacious with eight beds and their own bathroom. Rates include sheets.

**Callander Meadows** (☎ 330181; www.callandermeadows.co.uk; 24 Main St; r per person £28-30) Rooms are tastefully decorated here and have the best of modern convenience in Victorian elegance. Room 1 has a great view of the River Teith, while room 2 is a grandiose four-poster bed affair. The restaurant is small and personal, providing sophisticated dining, beautifully presented food and faultless service. A two-course lunch is £8, mains are £13 to £16 and it's open for lunch and dinner Thursday to Monday.

**Roman Camp Hotel** (☎ 330003; www.roman-camp-hotel.co.uk; s/d £85/135) Indulgent Roman Camp is the spot to spoil yourself. It's magnificently located by the River Teith and dates from 1625. There is complimentary sherry upon arrival, a first-class restaurant (reservations required) where you can indulge in a five-course dinner (£44) or à la carte mains (£25), and even a tiny chapel for weddings.

**Deli Ecosse** (10 Ancaster Sq; mains £2.50-5; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) Top spot for brekky or lunch, it dishes out paninis and baguettes. Lots of yummy

condiments on sale, too, such as Arran cheeses and plump green olives to sustain yourself walking up surrounding peaks.

**Cafe Circa Doune** (☎ 01786-841683; Buchany; lunch £8.50, 2/3-course dinner £16/20; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Sat) Worth the 6 mile drive/cycle from Callander (towards Doune) along the A84, this place, at the Scottish Antiques and Arts Centre, is gaining a reputation for fine Scottish dining using local produce and a touch of creativity. Try the roast loin or Rannoch Moor pork. Refined dining, it would suit couples or small groups.

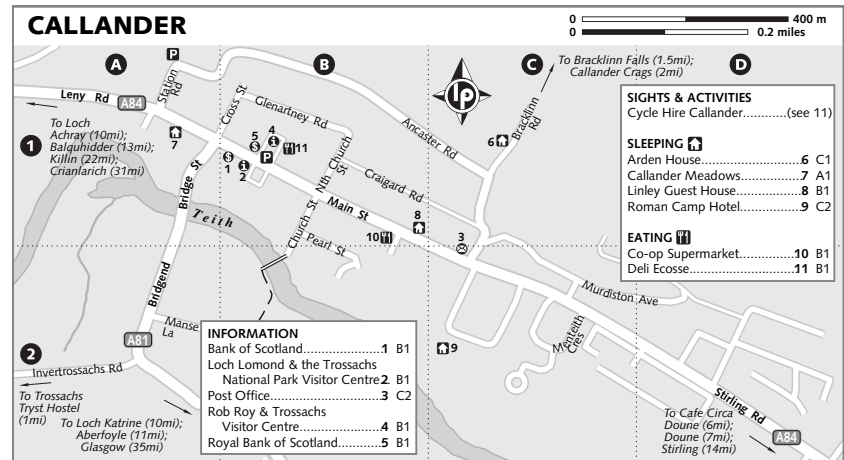
Along Main St you'll find a Co-op supermarket and lots of places offering meals and snacks for under £5.

Also recommended: **Linley Guest House** (☎ 330087; www.linleyguesthouse.co.uk; 139 Main St; r per person £17-22) A spick-and-span B&B with bright rooms and helpful owners. The double en suite is worth the extra. It's beautifully appointed with a large window drawing in lots of natural light.

**Arden House** (☎ /fax 330235; www.ardenhouse.org.uk; Bracklinn Rd; r per person £32.50-37.50; ☎ Apr-Oct) A wonderful place for grown-ups (no kids allowed) drowning in a deluge of red and purple flowers in summer. Guests are well looked after in luxury rooms.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

First operates buses from Stirling (45 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday) and Killin (45 minutes, three to six daily Monday to Saturday). There's also a daily Scottish Citylink bus from Edinburgh to Fort William



## LOCH LUBNAIG

When tracking north from Callander along the A84 towards Crianlarich, you'll skirt past the shores of gorgeous Loch Lubnaig. Not as famous as some of its cousins, it's still well worth a detour. Look for parking spots on the eastern shores of the loch, and go and have a chat to some of the local fishermen. If it's a sunny day there are bound to be some rods in the water and a few locals lurching by the water's edge. The surrounding views of forested mountains are sublime.

via Callander (£10.50, 1½ hours) with connections to Oban and Skye.

Royal Mail runs a postbus from Callander to Trossachs Pier linking with the sailing of the SS *Walter Scott* on Loch Katrine (see below).

The Trossachs Trundler calls at Callander (p200) and reaches the pier on Loch Katrine 26 minutes later four times daily, except Wednesday. A trip covering just the Trossachs area is £5/1.80 per adult/child.

Aberfoyle Coaches runs between Callander and Aberfoyle (half-hour, four times daily Monday to Saturday).

## Loch Katrine & Loch Achray

This rugged area, 6 miles north of Aberfoyle and 10 miles west of Callander, is the heart of the Trossachs. From April to October the SS **Sir Walter Scott** (☎ 01877-376315/6; www.lochkatrine.com; adult/child return from £7/5) chugs along Loch Katrine from Trossachs Pier at the eastern tip of the loch.

There are two good walks starting from Loch Achray. The path to the rocky cone called **Ben A'an** (460m) begins at a car park near the old Trossachs Hotel. It's easy to follow, and the return trip is just under 4 miles.

On the other side of the Trossachs lies the rugged **Ben Venue** (727m) – there is a path all the way to the summit. Start walking from Loch Achray Hotel, follow the Achray Water westwards to Loch Katrine, then turn left and ascend the steep flanks of Ben Venue. There are great views of the Highlands and the Lowlands from the top. The return trip is about 5.5 miles – allow around four to five hours.

## BALQUHIDDER & AROUND

Steeped in clan history, this mountainous and sparsely populated area is in the northern part of the Stirling administrative region. There are a few villages and lots of good hill walks.

### Balquhiddier

☎ 01567 / pop 50

In this small village (pronounced balwhidder), 2 miles off the A84, there's a churchyard with **Rob Roy's grave** (which has the words 'Despite Them' defiantly etched onto the headstone) – it's an appropriately beautiful spot in a deep, winding glen in big-sky country. There are some other interesting headstones in the graveyard, and a plaque on the old kirk wall helps unravel their origins. Rob Roy's wife and two of his sons are also interred here. In the church are the 8th-century **St Angus' stone**, probably a marker to the original tomb of St Angus, an 8th-century monk who built the first church here, a 17th-century church bell, and a free leaflet giving details on notable gravestones, artefacts and people of the area.

Four miles on from Rob Roy's grave is **Monachyle Mhor Hotel** (☎ 01877-384622; www.monachylemhor.com; r from £95), a luxury hideaway. The restaurant here is something special with ingredients sourced locally – including from the hotel's organic garden. Rooms are sumptuous and combine contemporary furnishings in a traditional setting.

**our pick** **Kings House Hotel** (☎ 01877-384646; www.kingshouse-scotland.co.uk; Balquhiddier; s/d £33/55, self-catering cottage per wk £180-425; 🍴), at the junction with the A84, is a classic inn built in 1779 for £40 at the request of the drovers. Nowadays it offers B&B in more salubrious surroundings; the upstairs rooms are lovely, with fine views. There's an ancient narrow, sloping passageway that reminds visitors they're treading in the 200-year-old-plus footsteps of many a passing traveller. Cots and children's beds are available. The **Rob Roy Bar** (mains £4-8) at the hotel is a tiny, rickety wood-and-stone affair providing food and shelter from the elements. There's everything from sandwiches to a roll-mop and smoked trout Highland platter. It also serves an outstanding pint of Guinness, best drunk by the open fire.

The minor road at the A84 junction continues along pretty **Loch Voil** to Inverlochlarig, where you can climb **Stob Binnein** (1165m) by its southern ridge. Stob Binnein is one of the

highest mountains in the area, and it has a most unusual shape, like a cone with its top chopped off.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses between Callander and Killin stop at the Kings House Hotel. On weekdays a postbus operates from Killin to Callander; it also stops at the Kings House Hotel. The daily Scottish Citylink bus from Edinburgh to Fort William stops here at 11.09am.

### Crianlarich & Tyndrum

☎ 01838 / combined pop 350

In good tramping country, and on the West Highland Way, these villages are little more than service junctions on the main A82 road, just north of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. There's a train station at Crianlarich. Tiny Tyndrum, just 5 miles along the road, is blessed with two stations and a very flash **tourist office** (☎ 400246; info@tyndrum.visitscotland.co.uk; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sep-Oct), which has piles of information and a bureau de change. Ask here about day walks along the West Highland Way and ascents of popular An Caisteal (995m), Ben More (1174m) and magnificent Ben Lui (1130m). The tourist office stocks the well-regarded Ordnance Survey (OS) maps from the British Mapping Agency and has detailed route information.

The **Green Welly Stop** (☎ 400271; www.thegreenwellystop.co.uk; Tyndrum; hot meals £7) is a shrine to tourism. This little shopping complex has a very good (if slightly pricey) outdoor store, ideal if you're looking for supplies before you grapple with your Munro. It's also a good fuel stop, with hot meals served all day.

### ROB ROY

As all the tourist literature repeatedly informs you, this is Rob Roy country. Rob Roy Macgregor (1671-1734) was the wild leader of one of the wildest of Scotland's clans, Clan Gregor. Although he claimed direct descent from a 10th-century king of Scots and rights to the lands the clan occupied, these Macgregor lands stood between powerful neighbours. Rob Roy became notorious for his daring raids into the Lowlands to carry off cattle and sheep – hence the clan's sobriquet, 'Children of the Mist' – and led to the outlawing of the clan.

He was eventually captured and sentenced to transportation, but was pardoned and he lived out the rest of his life in Balquhiddier. Although he achieved a 'Robin Hood'-type reputation as a champion of the poor and his life has been heavily romanticised, he was undoubtedly an infamous bandit and blackmailer. The tale of Rob Roy highlights the confrontation between the dying clan culture of the Highlands and the feudal culture of the lowland Scots. Rob Roy is buried in the churchyard at Balquhiddier, by Loch Voil.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Crianlarich Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1112; Station Rd; dm adult/child £14/10; 📶) This hostel is a modern bungalow with six-bed dorms. It has a good Highland setup – large kitchen, clean dining area and warm, comfy lounge. There's bike hire (£12 per day) and it's the best budget option (B&Bs tend to be expensive in Crianlarich).

**Auchtertyre Farm** (Strathfillan Wigwams; ☎ 400 251; www.sac.ac.uk/wigwams; Tyndrum; camp sites per person £5, small/large wigwam & 2 adults £25/30, lodge per week £190-320) This charismatic place, 3 miles from Crianlarich (and 2 miles from Tyndrum), is off the A82 and has 16 heated wigwams – essentially wooden A-frame cabins. They're a little squasy (each has five beds) but great value. Auchtertyre Farm also has camping with access to all facilities and a self-contained lodge, ideal for families.

**Tyndrum Lodge Hotel** (☎ 400219; Tyndrum; s/d £25/60) In Tyndrum you'll get quality home-spun accommodation and good cheer in this well-run, refurbished hotel. Walkers should head for rooms 1 to 12, which are towards the back and a bit quieter, ensuring a decent night's shut-eye. Bar meals are available for £7 for both guests and nonguests.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink runs several buses daily to Glasgow, Oban and Skye from both villages. A postbus service links Crianlarich, Tyndrum and Killin twice on each weekday (with connections to Callander) and once on Saturday.

First ScotRail runs train services from Tyndrum and Crianlarich to Fort William (£13.50, 1½ hours, four daily Monday to

Saturday, two on Sunday), Oban (£8, one hour, three daily Monday to Saturday) and Glasgow (£14.60, two hours, three or four daily).

## Killin

☎ 01567 / pop 700

Tumbling through the centre of this charming little village are the frothy **Falls of Dochart**. The canny locals have made the best of their unusual water feature, pulling in many a passing tourist coach. Killin is in the northeastern corner of the Stirling region and is a handy base for exploring the mighty mountains and glens that surround it.

## INFORMATION

The village has a post office and a Bank of Scotland ATM, both on Main St.

**Outdoor Centre** (☎ 820652; Main St) Hires out all sorts of equipment, including canoes (£40 per day), kayaks (£30 per day) and mountain bikes (£11/15 per half-/full day). Note that a child's seat is complimentary when two bikes are hired.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0627; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) In the Breadalbane Folklore Centre, by the River Dochart.

## SIGHTS

Bringing ancient magic and miracles to life is the **Breadalbane Folklore Centre** (☎ 820254; adult/child £2.75/1.80; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug), in an old water mill overlooking the falls. There is an audiovisual presentation about St Fillan, a local saint whose religious teachings are said to have helped unite the ancient kingdoms of the Scots and the Picts in the 8th century. Robert the Bruce carried a relic of the saint into battle at Bannockburn some 600 years later, which he used to inspire his followers. There are displays about local and clan history, including the Macgregors and MacNabs.

The **Clan MacNab burial ground** lies on an island in the river, crossed by the main road and just downstream from the falls; ask at the tourist office for the gate key.

## ACTIVITIES

Killin is at the northern end of the **Lochs and Glens cycle route** from Glasgow, which follows forest trails, small roads and disused rail routes via the Troscachs – the tourist office has detailed information.

Seven miles northeast of Killin, **Ben Lawers** (1214m) rises above Loch Tay. There's an

NTS visitor centre here and trails lead to the summit (see p224).

Glen Lochay runs westwards from Killin into the hills of Mamlor. You can take a **mountain bike** for about 11 miles up the glen to just beyond Batavaime. The scenery is impressive and the hills aren't too difficult to climb. It's possible, on a nice summer day, to climb over the top of **Ben Challum** (1025m) and descend to Crianlarich, but it's hard work.

For more information, pick up a copy of the *Walks Around Killin* leaflet (30p) from the tourist office.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**High Creagan** (☎ 820449; Aberfeldy Rd; camp sites per person £5) This place has a well-kept, sheltered camping site with plenty of grass set high on the slopes overlooking sparkling Loch Tay, just outside Killin. No children.

**Killin Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1131; dm adult/child from £13.50/10; ☎ Apr-Oct) At the northern end of the village, this lovely Victorian mansion has one family room and well-kept four- to 12-bed dorms. Dorms are an excellent size and most (such as dorm 3) have bay windows drawing in plenty of light. Common areas, including the kitchen, are very clean.

**Drumfin Guest House** (☎ 820900; www.drumfin.co.uk; Manse Rd; s/d from £35/56) This top guesthouse boasts pristine facilities. Two rooms share a bathroom while three have en suites. Have a look at a couple of rooms, as the view varies, although all are light and bright. But it's the friendly, enthusiastic owners who set this place apart. Besides, anyone who has frog musicians in the garden gets our vote – the garden gnome has met its match.

**Falls of Dochart Inn** (☎ 820270; Falls of Dochart; s/d £45/60) Overlooking the falls, the Dochart Inn has smallish, pristine upstairs rooms – try to request one with a view of the falls (such as room 2). Rooms at the back are quiet but have no real view. Downstairs is a very snug, atmospheric space with a roaring fire, a good beer and wine selection, and creative takes on traditional Scottish dishes; mains £10 to £15. The impressive service is friendly and efficient.

You'll find supermarkets along Main St, including Costcutter and Co-op.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

First runs a service from Stirling (£5.50, 1½ hours, once or twice daily Monday to Friday, once on Saturday) via Callander. There's a

postbus to Crianlarich and Tyndrum twice on weekdays and once on Saturday. There's a postbus service between Aberfeldy and Killin (1¼ hours to Aberfeldy, Monday to Saturday). A Scottish Citylink bus leaves for Oban twice a day (1½ hours).

# CLACKMANNANSHIRE

Inviting Clackmannanshire has some great attractions that are worth a detour if you're in the Stirling region. The tiny district is a top spot for day trips from the city of Stirling.

## DOLLAR

☎ 01259 / pop 2900

About 11 miles east of Stirling, in the lower Ochil Hills, is the charming town of Dollar. **Castle Campbell** (HS; ☎ 742408; Dollar Glen; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar) is a 20-minute walk up **Dollar Glen**, into the wooded hills above the town. It's a spooky old stronghold of the dukes of Argyll and stands between two ravines; you can clearly see why it was known as Castle Gloom. There's been a fortress of some kind on this site from the 11th century, but the present structure dates from the 15th century. The castle was sacked by Cromwell in 1654, but the tower is well preserved. There's a great ramble with sweeping views over Castle Campbell and the surrounding country from the little car park near the castle. Note that it can get boggy if it's been raining.

There are regular First buses to Dollar from Stirling; other services run from Alloa (every two hours Monday to Friday).

## CLACKMANNAN

☎ 01259 / pop 3500

This quiet village (you really could hear a pin drop) lies 2 miles southeast of Alloa and has several interesting sights. **Clackmannan Stone** (Main St) sits on top of a large shaft – it's sacred to the pagan deity Mannan and predates Christian times.

Next to the stone is a 17th-century **cross** engraved with the Bruce coat of arms; the lower part is heavily worn, due to prisoners' chains. Also adjacent is the striking **Tolbooth**, built in 1592 for £284, which served as court and prison. **Clackmannan Tower**, uphill from the church and about 450m from Main St, was a residence of the Bruce family from 1365

to 1772. In 1787, the widow of the last laird knighted Robert Burns in the tower with the sword of Robert the Bruce. The five-storey tower has structural problems due to subsidence and it isn't open to the public, but the exterior is well worth a look. The idyllic views aren't bad either.

First buses run to/from Stirling (40 minutes, about every 20 minutes) and frequently to Alloa.

# FALKIRK REGION

The little administrative district of Falkirk contains one of Scotland's modern marvels of engineering – the Falkirk Wheel. The region also covers some interesting areas to the east, including Bo'ness. If you're here in early May, check out **Big in Falkirk** (www.biginfalkirk.com), a free street art festival.

## FALKIRK

☎ 01324 / pop 32,500

Falkirk, a large town about 10 miles south-east of Stirling, is home to the famous Falkirk Wheel – an astounding achievement of modern engineering. Watching it spin its boat-bound occupants around has become a major tourist attraction. Drop into the **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0614; 2 Glebe St; ☎ Mon-Sat year-round) for more information, and see the boxed text, p206.

First runs regular buses to Stirling and Edinburgh. Trains go to Stirling, Dunblane, Perth, Glasgow (£5.50) and Edinburgh (£5) from Falkirk Grahamston station. Glasgow-Edinburgh express trains stop at Falkirk High station every 15 to 30 minutes.

## BO'NESS & KINNEIL RAILWAY

The town of Bo'ness on the Firth of Forth is best known for the steam train that shuttles to and fro on the **Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway** (☎ 01506-822298; Bo'ness Station, Union St; adult/child return £5/2.50). The train runs from April to October, with three or four departures each weekend. In July and August the train runs during the week as well. Tickets costing £8/4.50 per adult/child include admission to the **Birkhill Fireday Mine**, 130 steps down in the Avon gorge; guided tours run in conjunction with train arrivals. There's also a free **railway exhibition** at the station in Bo'ness.

Direct buses to Bo'ness from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Falkirk and Stirling are run by First.



## MODERN MARVELS

The Union Canal, linking central Edinburgh to the Forth and Clyde Canal at Falkirk, was completed in 1822, allowing cheap coal from the mines of western-central Scotland to be carried by barge to the Scottish capital. Slate and stone for Edinburgh's New Town were also carried via the canal. However, the expansion of the railways in the mid-19th century rendered the canals obsolete and they fell into disuse.

A £84.5-million Millennium Link Project has restored the Forth and Clyde Canal, and Union Canal to full working order, linking Edinburgh with west and central Scotland. The centrepiece is the Falkirk Wheel, a unique engineering structure designed to replace the flight of locks that once linked the two canals at Falkirk. It is the world's first rotating boat lift, raising vessels (plus almost 300 tonnes of water) 35m in one steel caisson, while descending boats are carried down in the second caisson on the opposite side of the wheel.

Visitors can take boat trips on the **Falkirk Wheel** (☎ 0870 050 0208; www.thefalkirkwheel.co.uk; adult/child/family £8/4.25/21.50, car-park fee £2; 🚗 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jul & Sep-Oct, until 7pm Sat & Sun Aug), spinning around on its giant gondolas. Boats leave every half-hour (hourly in winter) and travel from the visitor centre into the wheel, getting delivered to the Union Canal, high above. Boats then go through Roughcastle Tunnel before the descent on the wheel and return trip to the visitor centre. Anyone with an interest in engineering marvels should not miss this boat ride – it's great for kids, too. The nearby visitor centre explains the workings of the mighty wheel – it only takes the power of about eight toasters for a full rotation!

## FIFE

A chubby finger of land jutting out into the icy North Sea, Fife, or 'the kingdom of Fife', as it likes to be known – it was home to Scottish kings for 500 years – is a treasure-trove of attractions waiting to be explored. Highlights include a string of delightful fishing villages perched on the East Neuk coast, and, further north, one of the most appealing towns in the country: St Andrews. Despite integration with the rest of Scotland, Fife has held onto its unique Lowland identity. Many people enter 'the kingdom' via the Forth Road or Tay Bridges – perhaps traversing these enormous gateways adds to the sense of entering a new realm. The Fife Coastal Path links these two bridges along 80 miles of glorious coastal scenery, and the laid-back, serene countryside with its rolling, lush farmland invites exploration.

### Getting Around

Fife Council produces a useful transport map, *Getting Around Fife*, available from tourist offices – good links for public-transport information can be found at www.fifedirect.org.uk. The main bus operator is **Stagecoach Fife** (☎ 01334-474238). For £5.50 you can buy a Fifiedayrider ticket, which gives unlimited travel around Fife on Stagecoach buses.

If you are driving from the Forth Road Bridge to St Andrews, a slower but much more scenic route than the M90/A91 is along the signposted **Fife Coastal Tourist Route**.

Note that at the time of writing a trial hovercraft service was operating from Portobello to Kirkcaldy (£4.50 return, 20 minutes, departs hourly). If successful this might be a permanent service by the time you read this.

### CULROSS

☎ 01383 / pop 500

A thicket of forest above the town wedges Culross (pronounced coo-ross) between the firth and wooded slopes. An enchanting little town, it's Scotland's best-preserved example of a 17th-century Scottish burgh, and the NTS owns 20 of the buildings, including the palace. Small, red-tiled, whitewashed buildings line the cobbled streets, and the winding Back Causeway to the abbey is embellished with whimsical stone cottages.

### Sights

You can visit **Culross Palace** (NTS; ☎ 880359; palace, town house & study adult/child £8/5; 🚗 noon-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-May & Sep, noon-5pm daily Jun-Aug, noon-4pm Thu-Mon Oct), more a large house than a palace, which features extraordinary decorative painted woodwork, barrel-vaulted ceilings and an interior largely unchanged since the early 17th century. It's dark and spooky inside on

an overcast day. The **town house** (visitor centre downstairs) and the **study**, also completed in the early 17th century, are open to the public, but the other NTS properties can only be viewed from the outside.

Ruined **Culross Abbey** (admission free; 🚗 9am-7pm Easter-Aug, other times by arrangement), founded by the Cistercians in 1217, is on the hill in a lovely peaceful spot with vistas of the firth; the choir of the abbey church is now the parish church. In the northeastern corner of the north transept there's an unusual sight – statues of eight children kneeling in front of their parents' memorial.

### Sleeping

**Burnbank Cottage** (☎ 880240; Blairburn, Low Causeway; rper person £20) This cottage has one double and one twin, both with shared bathroom. It's home-grown Scottish hospitality at its best, and the cosy private living room for guests is great for an evening snuggle.

### Getting There & Away

Culross is 12 miles west of the Forth Road Bridge. Stagecoach Fife buses run roughly hourly between Stirling (one hour) and Dunfermline (20 minutes), less often on weekends, via Culross.

### ABERDOUR

☎ 01383 / pop 1700

It's worth stopping in this popular seaside town to ramble around impressive **Aberdour Castle** (HS; ☎ 860519; adult/child £4/2; 🚗 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar, closed Thu & Fri). The castle was built by the Douglas family in 1342, but by the 18th century it was partly in ruins and abandoned by its owners. There's an interesting account of James Douglas, the fourth earl of Morton, giving an insight into treachery among the nobility. **St Fillan's Church**, by the castle, was founded in 1123, but the current building is mostly 17th century. It's believed to have been visited by Robert the Bruce and there's certainly a sense of the ancient inside, where harsh grey stone walls contrast vividly with stunning stained-glass windows.

With real ales and good vegetarian choices on the menu, the family-run **Aberdour Hotel** (☎ 860325; www.aberdourhotel.co.uk; 38 High St; s/d £52/75) is not only a good place to stay, but also the best place to eat in town. Mains are £7 and there is an emphasis on hearty home-cooked food.

There are trains to Edinburgh (£4.30, one hour, at least hourly weekdays, every two hours on Sunday).

### KIRKCALDY

☎ 01592 / pop 47,000

Kirkcaldy (kir-kod-ay) sprawls along the edge of the sea for several miles and has a rather shabby promenade with spectacular pounding surf on windy days. It's worth stopping in town to visit the excellent museum.

The **tourist office** (☎ 267775; kirkcaldy@visitfife.com; Merchant House, 339 High St; 🚗 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is at the eastern end of High St.

Just a short walk east from the train and bus stations, in the War Memorial Gardens, you'll find the **Kirkcaldy Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 412860; War Memorial Gardens; admission free; 🚗 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; ♿ ♿), which combines historical accounts with contemporary exhibits. The kids will have a ball as there are plenty of hands-on attractions. There's also an impressive collection of Scottish paintings from the 18th to the 20th century, including work from the Scottish Colourists and the Glasgow Boys.

You're better off staying in Edinburgh, East Neuk or St Andrews, but you could try **Ashgrove B&B** (☎ 561354; www.ashgrovebnb.co.uk; 213 Nicol St; s/d £38/58; ♿). The bustling, likeable Scot who runs this joint is as quirky as the layout of the rabbit warren inside. Rooms are smallish but well setup and exude a comforting homely warmth. Book in advance over summer.

Frequent buses (usually hourly) run from Hill St bus station to St Andrews (one hour), Anstruther (one hour 15 minutes) and Edinburgh (one hour). Kirkcaldy is on the main railway line between Edinburgh (£5.60, 45 minutes) and Dundee (£9.50, 40 minutes); there are two to four trains an hour.

### FALKLAND

☎ 01337 / pop 1200

Below the soft ridges of the Lomond Hills in the centre of Fife is the charming village of Falkland. Although overrun with tourists in summer, it's a captivating town and there are many heritage-listed conservation buildings.

Rising majestically out of the town centre and dominating the skyline is the outstanding 16th-century **Falkland Palace** (NTS; ☎ 857397; adult/child £10/7; 🚗 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Mar-Oct), a country residence of the Stuart monarchs.

## WORTH THE TRIP

Dunfermline is an unappealing large regional town with a couple of great attractions reflecting its historical importance.

Queen Margaret founded a Benedictine priory on the hill here in the 11th century, and later her son King David I built **Dunfermline Abbey** (HS; ☎ 739026; St Margaret St; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Wed & Sat, to 12.30pm Thu & 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) in a commanding but sheltered position on the site. Six Scottish kings are buried at Dunfermline Abbey. You can explore the wonderful Norman nave with its ornate columns and superb stained-glass windows. Note the picture of Robert the Bruce standing over the devil (England perhaps?). The Bruce is buried under the pulpit.

Next to the abbey are the ruins of **Dunfermline Palace**, rebuilt from the abbey guesthouse in the 16th century for James VI. If it's quiet you'll get a guided tour from staff, which is well worthwhile as their commentary brings a previously wealthy and thriving royal court to life.

The award-winning **Abbot House Heritage Centre** (☎ 733266; Maygate; adult/child £4/free; ☎ 10am-5pm), near the abbey, dates from the 15th century. History buffs could get lost for hours among the absorbing displays about the history of Scotland, the abbey and Dunfermline.

Dunfermline is easy to visit on a day trip from Edinburgh (40 minutes) or St Andrews (1¼ hours), with frequent buses at least hourly. There are also trains to/from Edinburgh (£4, 30 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, less frequently Sunday).

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 was built between 1501 and 1541 to replace a castle dating from the 12th century; French and Scottish craftspeople were employed to create a masterpiece of Scottish Gothic architecture. The king's bedchamber and the chapel, with its beautiful painted ceiling, have both been restored. Don't miss the prodigious 17th-century Flemish hunting tapestries in the hall. One feature of the royal leisure centre still exists: the oldest royal tennis court in Britain, built in 1539 for James V. It's in the grounds and still in use.

Opposite the palace, the very cosy little **Hunting Lodge** (☎ 857226; timeles@huntinglodge.fs.business.co.uk; High St; s/d from £27.50/45) dates back to 1607. The homely rooms, exuding warmth and character, are upstairs, while pints and chattering locals furnish the downstairs area.

An 18th-century coaching inn, on the square opposite the palace, **Covenanter Hotel** (☎ 857224; www.covenanterhotel.co.uk; The Square; s/d/ste £46/64/72) is a snug, classy little abode with fine rooms that are often discounted when things are quiet (it's worth asking!). The three-person suite is the best.

Falkland is 11 miles north of Kirkcaldy. There are Stagecoach Fife buses roughly hourly Monday to Saturday to/from Perth (one hour) and Cupar (30 minutes).

## ST ANDREWS

☎ 01334 / pop 14,500

Anyone who's belted a little white ball around a fairway will probably have heard of St Andrews. Apart from its historical links with golf though, this is one of Scotland's most charming and enjoyable towns to explore. Walking around The Scores, with the wide sweep of St Andrews Bay set against the surprisingly intact medieval layout and dramatic ruins of the town, evokes a feeling of being on a film set – it's all so picture perfect. The town is blessed with a thriving café and pub/bar scene and many fine restaurants, no doubt due to its burgeoning student population, which injects the streets with a real energy. You'll hear just as many English accents around town as you will Scottish; it's also home to an ancient university where wealthy English undergraduates rub shoulders with Scottish theology students.

## History

St Andrews is said to have been founded by St Regulus, who arrived from Greece in the 4th century bringing the bones of St Andrew – Scotland's patron saint. The town soon grew into a major pilgrimage centre and St Andrews developed into the ecclesiastical capital of the country. The university was founded in 1410, the first in Scotland. By the mid-16th century there were three colleges, St Salvator's, St Leonard's and St Mary's.

St Andrews is perhaps most famous for its historical links to golf. It's the headquarters of golf's governing body, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. It's also the location of the world's most famous golf course, the Old Course. The British Open Championship has taken place regularly at St Andrews since 1873.

## Orientation

St Andrews preserves its medieval plan of parallel streets with small closes (alleys) leading off them. The most important parts of the old town, lying to the east of the bus station, are easily explored on foot. Like Cambridge and Oxford, St Andrews has no campus – most university buildings are integrated into

the central part of the town. There's a small harbour near the cathedral, and two sandy beaches: East Sands extends south from the harbour and the wider West Sands is north of the town.

## Information

Parking in the central area requires a voucher (60p per hour), which is on sale in many shops and at the tourist office.

**Bank of Scotland** (South St) Has ATM.

**J&G Innes** (☎ 472174; 107 South St) Plenty of local-interest books, such as Fife's history of burning witches.

**Library** (Church Sq; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon, Fri & Sat, to 7pm Tue-Thu) Free internet access – drop-in only; no bookings.

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (South St)

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**St Andrews Memorial Hospital** (☎ 472327; Abbey Walk) Minor injuries only; located south of Abbey St.  
**Tourist office** (☎ 472021; www.visit-standrews.co.uk; 70 Market St; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 9.15am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct-Mar) Helpful staff with good knowledge of St Andrews and Fife.

## Sights

### ST ANDREWS CATHEDRAL

Situated at the eastern end of North St is the ruined western end of **St Andrews Cathedral** (HS; ☎ 472563; The Pends; adult/child £4/2, incl St Andrews Castle £7/3.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar; 🏰), once the largest and one of the most magnificent cathedrals in Britain; the striking ruins convey a sense of its immensity. Although it was founded in 1160, it wasn't consecrated until 1318. It was a focus of pilgrimage until the Reformation, when it was pillaged in 1559.

St Andrew's bones lie under the high altar. Until the cathedral was built, they had been enshrined in the nearby Church of St Rule. All that remains is the **St Rule's Tower** – well worth the climb for the view across St Andrews and a great place for taking photographs. In the same area are parts of the ruined 13th-century priory.

The **St Andrews Cathedral Visitors Centre** includes the **calefactory**, the only room where the monks could warm themselves by a fire; masons' marks on the red sandstone blocks, identifying who shaped each block, can still be clearly seen. There's also a collection of Celtic crosses and gravestones that were found on the site. The highlight is the carved stone **sarcophagus**. It was carved in the 8th century and the detail is simply amazing. What survives is mainly a woodland hunting scene with the animals seemingly about to leap off the stone. Although it's Pictish, it shows definite Mediterranean influence.

### ST ANDREWS CASTLE

Not far from the cathedral and with dramatic coastline views, **St Andrews Castle** (HS; ☎ 477196; The Scores; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar) is mainly in ruins, but the site itself is evocative. The most intriguing feature is the complex of siege tunnels, said to be the best surviving example of siege engineering in Europe. You can walk along the damp, mossy tunnels, now lit by electric light – but be warned, it helps if you're short. The castle was founded around 1200 as the fortified

home of the bishop. A visitor centre gives a good audiovisual introduction and also has a small collection of Pictish stones.

### ST ANDREWS MUSEUM

Near the bus station, **St Andrews Museum** (☎ 412690; Kinburn Park, Doubledykes Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) has interesting displays that chart the history of the town from its founding by St Regulus to its growth as an ecclesiastical, academic and sporting centre. Local preservation work is a focal point of the museum.

### BRITISH GOLF MUSEUM

Golfers shouldn't miss the **British Golf Museum** (☎ 460046; Bruce Embankment; adult/child £5.25/2.90; ☎ 10am-4pm Jan-Mar, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb; 🏰), an interesting (even for nongolfers), modern museum charting the history of the game and its intimate association with St Andrews. It's equipped with audiovisual displays and touch screens, as well as golf memorabilia.

Opposite the museum is the clubhouse of the **Royal & Ancient Golf Club**. Outside the club is the **Old Course**, and beside it stretch the West Sands, the beach made famous by *Chariots of Fire*.

## Activities

St Andrews is famous for its links to golf and its world famous Old Course – see opposite.

The tourist office has a list of local walks and also sells OS maps. The **Fife Coastal Path** (www.fifecoastalpath.com), stretching from the Forth Road Bridge to the Tay Bridge (Dundee) – a distance of 78 miles – is a wonderful long-distance walk, but the section between St Andrews and just north of Crail is recommended for experienced walkers (particularly the section between St Andrews and Boarhills), as the path is not as clearly defined and includes tidal and rough terrain. The tourist office has a detailed map.

Kellie Castle (p215) is within easy cycling distance. You can also cycle north to the forest, beach and nature trail at Tentsmuirs Sands (8 miles).

## Walking Tour

The best place to start is **St Andrews Museum** (above). Turn left out of the museum driveway and follow Doubledykes Rd back to the roundabout on City Rd. Turn right, then left

## PLAY THE OLD COURSE

Golf has been played at St Andrews since the 15th century, and by 1457 it was apparently so popular that James II had to ban it because it was interfering with his troops' archery practice. Few people realise that anyone can play the Old Course, the world's most famous golf course. Although it lies beside the exclusive, all-male Royal & Ancient Golf Club, the Old Course is a public course and is not owned by the club.

Getting a tee-off time is – literally – something of a lottery. Unless you book months in advance, the only chance you have of playing here is by entering a ballot before 2pm on the day before you wish to play. Be warned that applications by ballot are normally heavily oversubscribed, and green fees are a mere £125. There's no play 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 significantly cheaper. Their fees are: New £65, Jubilee £65, Eden £35, Strathtyrum £24 and Balgove £12. See the tourist office for more information on playing these courses.

Bookings for the Old Course can be made online or by letter, fax or email to the **Reservations Office, St Andrews Links Trust** (☎ 466666; www.standrews.org.uk; Pilmour House, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9SF). A booking form is on the website.

onto South St. You'll pass through **West Port**, formerly Southgait Port, the main entrance to the old town. Built in 1589, it was based on Netherbow Port in Edinburgh. Walking east along South St, you pass **Louden's Close** on the right, a good example of the closes built according to the city's medieval street plan. Continue along South St to see the apse of the 16th-century **Blackfriars Chapel**, which stands in front of Madras College.

Further along South St, opposite the Victorian **town hall**, is **Holy Trinity Church**, the town's parish church, built in 1410. Positioned on the same side of the street as the town hall is **St Mary's College**, founded in 1537; beside it is the university library. The oak tree in the courtyard is over 250 years old.

Go left along Church St to cobbled Market St. Street markets are held around the **Mercat Cross**, although the cross is now a fountain. The tourist office is nearby at 70 Market St.

## Tours

There is a **Witches Tour** (☎ 655057; adult/child £7/5) that recounts the history and folklore of the town in an unusual fashion, with tales of ghosts and witches enlivened by theatrical stunts. It starts at 8pm (7.30pm September to April) on Friday (also Sunday in June, July and August and Thursday in July and August). Meet outside Greyfriars Hotel on North St.

## Festivals & Events

The Royal and Ancient Golf Club is the body that organises the annual **Open Golf Champion-**

**ship**, which takes place in July. However, the tournament venue changes from year to year, and the Open only comes to St Andrews itself every five or six years – the venue for future championships can be found on the Open's official website (www.opengolf.com).

**St Andrews Highland Games** (☎ 476305) are held on the North Haugh on the last Sunday in July.

**St Andrews Week** is five days of festivities held around St Andrews Day (30 November), the feast day of Scotland's patron saint. The celebrations include a festival of Scottish food and drink, and various arts events.

## Sleeping

Bear in mind that St Andrews accommodation is often heavily booked year-round (especially in summer), so you're well advised to book in advance.

## BUDGET

**St Andrews Tourist Hostel** (☎ 479911; www.standrews.hostel.com; Inchcape House, St Mary's Pl; dm £12-14) This place has had a thorough refurbishment injecting some much needed TLC into four- to eight-bed dorms. It's not particularly cheery, but it is the only year-round hostel in town and has a good, modern kitchen and a large lounge ideal for flopping around.

**Cairnsmill Caravan Park** (☎ 473604; cairnsmill@aol.com; Largo Rd; tent sites for 2 from £14; ☎ Apr-Oct; 🏠) About a mile west of St Andrews on the A915, this camping ground is on a crest with brilliant views over the town. There's not much

space between sites – they pack 'em in. Fly-fishing reservoir on site.

**St Andrews Summer Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 476726; reservations@syha.org.uk; David Russell Apartments, Buchanan Gardens; s/d £25/38) This very good hostel is unfortunately only open in July and August. It provides accommodation in shared apartments, each with five en-suite double rooms, lounge and kitchen.

#### MIDRANGE

Note that single rooms are extremely hard to come by and should be booked in advance. Almost every house on Murray Park and Murray Pl is a guesthouse. The area couldn't be more convenient, but prices are on the high side.

**our pick Meade B&B** (☎ 477350; annmeade10@hotmail.com; 5 Albany Pl on Playfair Tce; r per person £25-27.50; ⚧) This family home has two rooms on offer – one red and one yellow – and they're absolute bargains. The red room is the best – large and airy. It's in a great location and has free parking just across the road. Children are very welcome – under 16s are charged £17.50; under fours are free. Single supplement £10.

**Lorimer House** (☎/fax 476599; www.lorimerhouse.com; 19 Murray Park; r per person £25-45; ⚧) This well-run, cheerful, spick-and-span place has cosy, well-furnished rooms, most admitting a flood of natural light. There are two larger doubles (see if one of those is available first), spacious family rooms, and single rooms. Wi-Fi is available.

**Fairnie House** (☎ 474094; www.fairniehouse.com; 10 Abbey St; r per person £28-38) A relaxed and friendly B&B in a Georgian town house near the Byre Theatre, Fairnie House has one double and two twin rooms. Although it has recently modernised its furnishings, giving rooms a classy look, there's still a very homely feel to this place, and the communal dining room encourages conversation.

**Cameron House** (☎ 472306; www.cameronhouse-sta.co.uk; 11 Murray Park; r per person £35-45) Cameron House is a soft and cuddly place (with a cheery owner) that makes you feel right at home, especially with the teddy bears hanging off the bedposts. Single rooms are available.

**our pick Old Fishergate House** (☎ 470874; www.oldfishergatehouse.co.uk; North Castle St; d £90) This historic 17th-century town house, furnished with period pieces, is in a great location – the oldest part of town – close to the cathedral and castle. The two twin rooms are very spacious and even have their own sitting room

and cushioned ledges on their window sills. On a scale of one to 10 for quaintness, we'd rate it about a 9½.

#### TOP END

**Inn on North Street** (☎ 473387; relax@theinnonorthstreet.com; 127 North St; s/d £80/120) If you want to eat, drink and sleep in the same stylish place then this classy inn could be for you. Effortlessly dashing with a Gaelic twist, rooms 1 to 3 come with Jacuzzi and more space, while all rooms have DVD player, crisp white linen and large windows giving them an airy feel. The Oak room is the place for breakfast and a read of the paper, the bar is perfect for a snug tittle, and the Lizard Lounge in the basement is a late-night bar that gets cranked with live gigs and regular DJs.

**Hazelbank Hotel** (☎/fax 472466; www.hazelbank.com; 28 The Scores; s/d £90/140) The elegant Hazelbank is a small (10 rooms) but comfy family-run hotel in a fine 1898 Victorian town house. Every room is different at this affable place – room 7 has stupendous views, while 3 also has fine views and is huge. Book ahead, as it's very popular.

#### Eating BUDGET

**B Jannetta** (☎ 473285; 31 South St; 1-3 dip cone £1-3) This is a St Andrews institution. On a hot weekend there's a constant stream of people outside the place feverishly licking a delicious cone before it becomes a puddle. You can choose from 52 varieties of ice cream. The most popular flavour? Vanilla. The weirdest? Irn Bru!

**Cherries** (91 South St; baguette £2.50-3.50; ☎ lunch) Best place for a roll or a baguette in town. The creative combinations give a fresh injection to lunchtimes and there are good options for vegetarians.

**Zest** (95 South St; dishes £2-4; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Serving toasties, paninis and filled rolls along with a good coffee selection, this slick place is popular with students. The French doors opening onto the street make it a great spot for people-watching on a breezy summer day. Specialises in smoothies and juices.

Some self-catering options:

**Tesco** (138 Market St) A good centrally located supermarket.

**IJ Mellis** (149 South St) Traditional cheesemonger.

#### MIDRANGE

**Byre Theatre Cafe-Bar** (☎ 468720; Abbey St; lunch mains £5, dinner mains £7-10; ☎ 10am-8.45pm) A happy,

buzzy spot with comfy couches, works of art on the wall and a well-developed menu that encompasses some delicious fusion cooking. Sandwiches at lunch come with interesting fillings, such as hummus and red pepper. Dinner gets more sophisticated, featuring dishes such as seared tuna steak on sultana and nutmeg couscous with smoked tomato dressing.

**Tapas** (☎ 471111; 177 South St; tapas £6-10, paella for 2 £25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Now who doesn't like tapas? This place dishes out some terrific little tidbits and it makes a cosy spot for dinner.

**Ziggy's** (☎ 473686; 6 Murray Pl; mains £6-14; ☎ lunch & dinner; ⚧) This small, darkened restaurant has an offbeat recording-studio theme. There's an open kitchen and a menu that does a bit of everything, including pizza, burgers, a range of steaks, and Mexican, seafood and veggie dishes. Good kids menu.

**Doll's House** (☎ 477422; 3 Church Sq; mains £11-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) With its high-backed chairs, bright colours and creaky wooden floor, the Doll's House tries to be rustic and modern at the same time. The result is a surprising warmth and no pretensions. The menu makes the most of local fish and other Scottish produce. The two-course lunch for £6.95 is unbeatable value, and the early-evening two-course deal for £12.95 isn't bad either.

#### TOP END

**Peat Inn** (☎ 840206; 3-course lunch/dinner £16/32; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) The Peat Inn is one of the best restaurants in Scotland. Housed in a rustic country inn about 6 miles west of St Andrews, its award-winning menu is culinary heaven and demonstrates a French influence. To get there, head west on the A915 then turn right on the B940.

**Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 479475; The Scores; 3-course dinner £35; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Seafood Restaurant occupies a stylish glass-walled room, built out over the sea, with plush navy carpet, crisp white linen, an open kitchen and panoramic views of St Andrews Bay. It offers top seafood and an excellent wine list, and has won a clutch of awards. Look out for its special winter menu – three-course lunch for £15, weekdays only.

#### Drinking

**Central Bar** (Market St) The Central Bar is all polished brass and polished accents, full of students from south of the border, tourists and locals. This is the most popular pub in town with an impressive array of beers.

**Victoria** (☎ 476964; 1 St Mary's Pl; ☎ closes midnight Sun-Wed, 1am Thu-Sat) Upstairs at the Victoria is popular with all types of students and serves good bar meals. There's a grungy café-bar with plenty of natural light or a classier lounge bar where you can sink into a sofa. Check out the jazz on Sunday night.

**our pick Aikman's – The Cellar Bar** (☎ 477425; 32 Bell St) Want to get away from clipped accents and enjoy a real beer or two? Any bar that has spent 19 years in the CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) *Good Beer Guide* is all right by us. Here you'll find the best selection of real ales in town and a dimly lit cellar bar to enjoy them in. It's worn around the edges (and in the middle too), but geez the beer is good. An antithesis to the more prissy bars in town.

#### Entertainment

Check the local *What's On* guide, published weekly and available from the tourist office or its website (www.visit-standrews.co.uk).

**Byre Theatre** (☎ 475000; www.byretheatre.com; Abbey St) This theatre company started life in a converted cow byre in the 1930s, and is now in a flashy premises making clever use of light and space. Contact the tourist office or check the website for details of performances.

**New Picture House** (☎ 473509; North St; tickets £3.50-5.50) This two-screen cinema shows current films.

#### Getting There & Away

St Andrews is 55 miles north of Edinburgh and 13 miles south of Dundee.

#### BUS

Stagecoach Fife operates a bus service from Edinburgh to St Andrews via Kirkcaldy (£7, two hours, hourly). Buses to Dundee (30 minutes, three hourly) also run frequently. Bus 23 runs to Stirling (£6, two hours, five daily Monday to Saturday). Frequent services to East Neuk destinations include Crail (30 minutes) and Anstruther (40 minutes). All buses leave from the bus station on Station Rd.

#### TRAIN

There is no train station in St Andrews itself, but you can take a train from Edinburgh (try to get a seat on the right-hand side of the carriage for great firth views) to Leuchars, 5 miles to the northwest (£10, one hour, hourly), and then a bus (£2) or taxi into town.

From Leuchars, buses 94, 96 and 99 leave every 20 minutes during the day (hourly in the evening) for St Andrews.

## Getting Around

**Ian Cowe Coachworks** (ICC Rentals; ☎ 472543; carhire@iccrentals.com; 76 Argyle St) hires out small cars for £25 per day with unlimited mileage.

There are taxi ranks at the bus station and at Holy Trinity Church on South St. To order a cab, call **Golf City Taxis** (☎ 477788; Argyle St). **Town & Country** (☎ 840444) has taxis with wheelchair access. A taxi between Leuchars train station and the town centre costs around £10.

**Spokes** (☎ 477835; 37 South St) hires out mountain bikes for £6.50/10.50 per half-/full day.

## EAST NEUK

The section of the southern Fife coast that stretches from Crail westwards to Largo Bay is known as East Neuk (neuk means 'corner' in Scots). There are several picturesque fishing villages and some good coastal walks in the area.

### Crail

☎ 01333 / pop 1700

One of the prettiest East Neuk villages and a favourite with artists, Crail has a much-photographed and painted harbour ringed by stone cottages with red-pan tiled roofs.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 450869; 62 Marketgate; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Easter-early Oct) is at the museum.

There are far fewer fishing boats here now than there once were, but you can still buy fresh lobster (£20 per kilogram) and crab (£3 per serving) from a **kiosk** (☞ usually noon-4pm Sat & Sun) at the harbour.

The village's history and involvement with the fishing industry is outlined in the **Crail Museum** (☎ 450869; 62 Marketgate; admission free; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr & May).

**Crail Gallery** (☎ 450316; www.craillgallery.com; 22 High St; ☞ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) is a local gallery with some terrific artists' impressions of Crail and East Neuk and framed prints of St Andrews.

The 18th-century **Selcraig House** (☎ 450697; www.selcraighouse.co.uk; 47 Nethergate; s/d £30/60) is a gold mine for antiquaries and very friendly. Some of the rooms are just fantastic, especially on the 1st floor, where you get a four-poster, bucket-loads of space and beautiful furnishings.

The **Marine Hotel** (☎ 450207; marinerosbery@tiscali.co.uk; 54 Nethergate South; s/d £30/55) is a cracking

small hotel overlooking the sea. Rooms are neat and furnished to a high standard, although en suites are old fashioned and could do with some work. The bistro here specialises in fine seafood creations (lobster and crab from Crail harbour); mains cost between £10 and £14. Best of all, the large garden area overlooking the sea provides the perfect place for a cold drink on a summer afternoon.

Crail is 10 miles southeast of St Andrews. Stagecoach Fife bus 95 between Leven, Anstruther, Crail and St Andrews passes through Crail hourly every day (30 minutes to St Andrews).

### Anstruther

☎ 01333 / pop 3500

Anstruther is a vivacious former fishing village with lots of twisting streets, interesting wynds (lanes) and knick-knack shops lining Rodger and High Sts. The waterfront is popular in summer with tourists and locals chomping down on fish and chips while enjoying the sunshine.

The **tourist office** (☎ 311073; Fisheries Museum, St Ayles, Harbourhead; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct) is the best in East Neuk. There are banks with ATMs in the town centre.

### SIGHTS

The displays at the excellent **Scottish Fisheries Museum** (☎ 310628; www.scotfishmuseum.org; St Ayles, Harbourhead; adult/child £5/free; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ☞) include the Zulu Gallery, which houses the huge, partly restored hull of a traditional Zulu-class fishing boat, redolent with the scent of tar and timber. Afloat in the harbour outside the museum lies the *Reaper*, a fully restored Fifie-class fishing boat, built in 1902.

The mile-long **Isle of May**, 6 miles southeast of Anstruther, is a stunning nature reserve. Between April and July the intimidating cliffs are packed with breeding kittiwakes, razor-bills, guillemots, shags and around 40,000 puffins. Minke whales have also been spotted around the island in early summer. Inland are the remains of the 12th-century **St Adrian's Chapel**, dedicated to a monk who was murdered on the island by the Danes in 875.

The five-hour trip to the island on the **May Princess** (☎ 310103; www.isleofmayferry.com; adult/child £16/8), including two to three hours ashore, sails from three to seven times weekly (weather

permitting) from mid-April to September (daily July to September). You can make reservations and buy tickets at the harbour kiosk near the museum at least an hour before departure. Departure times vary depending on the tide – check times for the coming week or so by calling, or check the website.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Finding reasonably priced B&B accommodation in Anstruther is difficult – for solo travellers almost impossible.

**Shelling** (☎ 310697; 32 Glenogil Gardens; r per person £20-25) This place offers two genteel, elegantly furnished rooms with shared bathroom and a homespun vibe. It also has an excellent breakfast menu. Good for solo travellers.

**Middlemarch B&B** (☎ 311140; www.middlemarchbandb.co.uk; Crail Rd; r per person £30-35) With two double bedrooms awash with fabrics, cushions and exotic memorabilia, Middlemarch is a pretty special place. Couples looking for a romantic break will enjoy indulging here – nothing is too much trouble for the friendly hosts.

**Spindrift** (☎ /fax 310573; www.thespindrift.co.uk; Pit-tenweem Rd; s/d £45/70; ☞) This is a top place to spoil yourself – it's a luxury, licensed small hotel in a 19th-century sea-captain's house. Couples should go for the captain's room on the top floor. The hosts ensure you'll enjoy their sumptuous accommodation, which is a cut above the other guesthouses on this street.

**our pick** **Dreel Tavern** (☎ 310727; 16 High St West; mains £9; ☞ lunch & dinner) This charming old pub on the banks of the Dreel Burn has bucket-loads of character and serves excellent bar meals (try the smoked-fish pie); chow down in the outdoor beer garden in summer. There are also some top-quality cask ales here.

**Cellar Restaurant** (☎ 310378; 24 East Green; 3-course set dinner £39; ☞ lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat) Tucked away in an alley behind the museum, the Cellar is famous for its seafood – try the prime east coast halibut with greens, pinenuts, bacon and hollandaise – and fine wines. Inside it's elegant and upmarket. Advance bookings are essential.

**Anstruther Fish Bar** (☎ 310518; www.anstrutherfishbar.co.uk; 44 Shore St, fish & chips £6.50) Renowned chippie selling classy takes on an old favourite, such as organic Shetland cod, or grilled rainbow trout – with chips, of course.

There's a fresh-seafood kiosk situated on the waterfront selling dressed crab (£2.70 per serving), mussels and jellied eel.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Anstruther is located 9 miles south of St Andrews. Stagecoach Fife bus 95 runs daily from Leven (more departures from St Monans) to Anstruther and on to St Andrews (40 minutes, hourly) via Crail.

## Around Anstruther

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

The castle is 3 miles west of Anstruther on the B9171. Stagecoach bus 95A runs from Anstruther to Grangemuir (two daily Monday to Saturday); from here it's about a 1.5 mile walk to the castle.

Three miles north of Anstruther, off the B9131 to St Andrews, is **Scotland's Secret Bunker** (☎ 01333-310301; www.secretbunker.co.uk; Troy Wood; adult/child £9/5; ☞ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct; ☞). This fascinating Cold War relic was to be one of Britain's underground command centres and a home for Scots leaders in the event of nuclear war. Hidden 30m underground and surrounded by nearly 5m of reinforced concrete are the austere operation rooms, communication centre and dormitories. It's very authentic and uses artefacts of the period, which make for an absorbing exploration. The Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has an exhibit, bringing home the realities of Britain's current nuclear Trident policy. The bunker is a gripping experience and highly recommended.

Take Stagecoach bus X26, which goes from Anstruther to St Andrews, jump off at the Drumrack crossroads and walk east for about 1.5 miles along the B940 to reach the bunker.

## Pittenweem

☎ 01333 / pop 1650

This is now the main fishing port on the East Neuk coast, and there are lively fish sales at the harbour from 8am. On a sunny day, buy an ice cream and stroll the short, breezy promenade, admiring the picturesque waterfront.

The village name means 'place of the cave', referring to **St Fillan's cave** in Cove Wynd, which was used as a chapel by a 7th-century missionary. The saint reputedly possessed miraculous powers – apparently, when he wrote his sermons in the dark cave, his arm would throw light on his work by emitting a luminous glow. The cave is protected by a locked gate, but a key is available from a nearby house (see sign on gate).

**Harbour Guest House** (☎ 311273, 312937; 14 Mid Shore; s/d £30/60) has en-suite rooms overlooking the harbour. Prices depend on time of year and how many nights you stay.

Drop into **Heron Gallery & Bistro** (☎ 311014; 15a High St; mains £5-7; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Thu-Tue, to 2pm Wed) for a snack or meal. Dressed crab and homemade smoked mackerel pâté feature on the menu, and you dine among local works of art that inject some real colour into this pretty harbour town – it's good for a browse and everything is for sale. Bus details are as for Anstruther.

### St Monans

☎ 01333 / pop 1450

This ancient fishing village is just over a mile west of Pittenweem and is named after a local cave-dwelling saint who was probably killed by pirates.

The **parish church**, at the western end of the village, was built in 1362 on the orders of a grateful King David II, who was rescued by villagers from a shipwreck in the Firth of Forth. A model of a full-rigged ship, dating from 1800, hangs above the altar. The church commands sweeping views of the firth, and the past echoes inside its cold, whitewashed walls.

**St Monans Heritage Collection** (5 West Shore; admission free; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun Easter-Oct), on the harbour, is a wonderful small gallery devoted to the history of the St Monans' fishing industry through a collection of 20th-century B&W photos and several artefacts. Most of the photos were taken by a local photographer and the collection changes monthly.

You're better off staying in Anstruther as there is little accommodation in St Monans.

**Harbour Howff Café** (☎ 730901; 6 Station Rd; light meals £3-4; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun; ☎) is a community-run café promoting healthy eating and serving excellent sandwiches and fresh cakes.

**our pick** **Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 730327; 16 West End; 3-course lunch/dinner £24/35; ☎ lunch & dinner, winter closed Mon & Tue) is an outstanding restaurant just west of the harbour and within salt-spray distance of the sea. It commands sweeping harbour views and has been highly commended for its delectable seafood (try the spiced collops of monkfish). In winter a three-course lunch is available for £15.

Stagecoach Fife bus 95 runs daily from St Monans to St Andrews (50 minutes, at least hourly), via Anstruther.

### Elie & Earlsferry

☎ 01333 / pop 1500

These two attractive villages mark the south-western end of East Neuk. There are great sandy beaches and good walks along the coast.

**Elie Watersports** (☎ 330962; www.eliewatersports.com), on the harbour at Elie, hires out windsurfers (£30 for two hours), sailing dinghies (Lasers £15 per hour, Wayfarers £20 per hour), canoes (£9 an hour) and mountain bikes (£12 a day), and provides instruction as well.

**Ship Inn** (☎ 330246; The Toft, Elie; mains £9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎), down by Elie harbour, is a pleasant and popular place for a bar lunch. Seafood and Asian dishes feature on the menu and, on a sunny day, you can tuck in at an outside table overlooking the wide sweep of the bay.

## PERTSHIRE & KINROSS

Pertshire and Kinross is the living, breathing heart of Scotland in more ways than one: the region is the former home of the Stone of Destiny, Aberfeldy is the geographical centre of the country and Perth is the former capital of Scotland.

The region is a joy to explore with its hulking castles, historic roots, medieval cathedrals and – perhaps its greatest drawcard – stunning countryside. Scenically, Pertshire and Kinross contain, in miniature, as many variations in terrain as Scotland itself. In an area that has a thriving logging industry, Pertshire is also home to big-tree country too, where ancient woodlands survive among younger, prosperous regeneration forests. Loch Tay in western Pertshire is a highlight with picture-perfect Kenmore at its eastern head, Ben Lawers (1214m) standing guard over its northern bank and remote, magical Glen Lyon on the other side of the strapping Ben Lawers.

### Getting Around

Perth and Kinross Council produces a useful public-transport map showing all services in the region; it's available at tourist offices. The major bus operators in the region:

**Aberfeldy postbus** (☎ 01887-820400) Serves remote west Pertshire.

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050)

**Stagecoach Fife** (☎ 01383-511911)

**Stagecoach Perth** (☎ 01738-629339)

**Strathgry Scottish** (☎ 01382-227201)

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).

### KINROSS & LOCH LEVEN

☎ 01577 / pop 4700

Kinross is best known as the access point for Loch Leven Castle, a quintessential Scottish treasure – a castle that sits on a small island.

The helpful **Heart of Scotland tourist office** (☎ 863680; kinross@perthshire.co.uk; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, to 6pm Jul & Aug, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct), by junction 6 of the M90, has an exhibition on the area.

Evocative **Loch Leven Castle** (HS; ☎ 07778 040483; adult/child incl Kinross ferry £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, last sailing 4.15pm Apr-Sep) served as a fortress and prison from the late 14th century. Its most famous captive was Mary, Queen of Scots, who spent almost a year incarcerated here from 1567. Her infamous charms bewitched Willie Douglas, who managed to get hold of the cell keys to release her, then rowed her across to the shore. The castle is now roofless but basically intact.

**Roxburghe Guest House** (☎ 862498; www.roxburghe.guesthouse.co.uk; 126 High St, Kinross; s/d/tr £30/60/70) is a lovely guesthouse with cool, tastefully furnished rooms in a rickety old property; Roxburghe feels like a home away from home. Prices may be up for negotiation for small groups.

**Turffills House B&B** (☎ 863881; turffillshouse@aol.com; s/d £40/70) is a sumptuous, genteel, musty old Georgian house with grand Victorian furnishings, set in some lush gardens. It's next to the tourist office and makes an excellent overnight stop if you're whizzing up the M90 motorway. Note that no singles are available in July and August.

Scottish Citylink has bus services between Perth (30 minutes, hourly) and Kinross. In the other direction buses go to Edinburgh (1½ hours, hourly).

### PERTH

☎ 01738 / pop 44,000

Lodged snugly in a lush valley alongside the M90, Perth's biggest drawcard is historical Scone Palace, but the city's grand Georgian buildings by the banks of the River Tay possess their own splendour. This market town was once a weaving, dyeing and glove-making centre and Scotland's capital. Today it exudes a demure pride, suggesting the town walls have not forgotten their past significance. Perth is not simply quaint, though; embedded in the centuries-old architecture skirting the cobblestone streets is a cosmopolitan vibe, reflected in imaginative cuisine, welcoming pubs, historical sites and a gallery or two.

### History

Perth's rise in importance derives from Scone (pronounced sconon), 2 miles north of the town. In 838, Kenneth MacAlpin became the first king of a united Scotland and brought the Stone of Destiny (see the boxed text, p81) to Scone. An important abbey was built on the site. From this time on, all Scottish kings were invested here, even after Edward I of England stole the sacred talisman, carting it off to London's Westminster Abbey in 1296. In 1996 Prime Minister John Major persuaded the Queen to promise to return it to Scotland, but it went to Edinburgh Castle rather than back to Scone. There's actually some doubt about whether Edward I stole the real stone – he might have stolen a fake!

From the 12th century, Perth was Scotland's capital, and in 1437 James I was murdered here. There were four important monasteries in the area and the town was a target for the Reformation movement in Scotland.

### Orientation

Most of the town lies on the western bank of the River Tay; Scone Palace and some of the B&Bs are on the eastern bank. There are two large parks: North Inch, the scene of the infamous Battle of the Clans in 1396, and South Inch. The bus and train stations are close to each other, near the northwestern corner of South Inch.

### Information

**Lloyds TSB** (King Edward St) Has an ATM.

**Perth Library** (AK Bell Library; ☎ 444949; York Place; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, to 8pm Tue & Thu, to 4pm Sat) Free internet access; lots of terminals.

**Perth Royal Infirmary** (☎ 623311; Taymount Tce) Hospital; west of the town centre.

**Tourist office** (☎ 450600; Lower City Mills, West Mill St; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Jun, 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, call for rest of year) An efficient tourist office that can assist with tracking down accommodation in the local area.

## Sights

### SCONE PALACE

Decadent **Scone Palace** (☎ 552300; adult/child £7.50/4.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct; 🚗), located 2 miles north of Perth and just off the A93 near Old Scone, was constructed in 1580 on a site intrinsic to Scottish history. It is one of Perthshire's premier tourist attractions.

The interior is a gallery of historical treasures and fine French furniture, including Marie Antoinette's writing table and a 16th-century needlework hanging, worked by Mary, Queen of Scots. Superb antique Chinese vases mingle with 18th- and 19th-century porcelain, and the walls drip with regal portraits of earls and countesses. Even the cornices, ceilings and walls are exquisite (the drawing-room wallpaper is silk!). The earl and countess of Mansfield have owned the palace for almost 400 years and the incumbents still host family functions in their sumptuous abode.

Outside, the resident peacocks unfold their splendid plumage in the magnificent grounds, which incorporate a pinetum, a wild garden, a butterfly garden and the all-important cricket

pitch. Bus 3 from Perth comes here roughly hourly most of the day.

### ST JOHN'S KIRK

Daunting **St John's Kirk** (admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat May-Sep plus 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep), founded in 1126, is surrounded by cobbled streets and is still the centrepiece of the town. In 1559 John Knox preached a powerful sermon here that helped begin the Reformation, inciting a frenzied destruction of Scone abbey and other religious sites.

### JD FERGUSSON GALLERY

Within the original Perth waterworks building, aptly titled the Round House, the **JD Fergusson Gallery** (☎ 441944; cnr Marshall Pl & Tay St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) contains the most extensive collection of work by notable Scottish Colourist and Perthshire local JD Fergusson. Pieces reflect heavy French (due to Fergusson's prolonged stay across the channel) and postimpressionist influences.

## Sleeping

**Comely Bank Cottage** (☎ 631118; comelybankcott@hotmail.com; 19 Pitcullen Cres; s £30, d & tw per person £24-27) A bit cheaper than other places on this strip, but with no sacrifice in room quality or level of hospitality. Comely Bank has a really personal touch with lovely rooms that reveal a woman's influence. Room 1 is an excellent double.

**Heidl Guest House** (☎ 635031; www.heidl.co.uk; 43 York Pl; s/d from £25/50) A solid old favourite, close to the centre, the Heidl offers an excellent range of rooms and serves up a decent brekky, too. Ask for room 3 or 4 in the 'tower' at the top of the building; they share a bathroom and have lots of space. Heidl is a little lacking in atmosphere, but the friendly hosts try their best.

**Aberdeen Guest House** (☎ /fax 633183; buchana@aberdeenguesthouse.fsnet.co.uk; 13 Pitcullen Cres; d £55) A cheery place with terrific, spacious rooms and thoughtful hosts – if you find a friendlier guesthouse than this, take it. Rooms are well furnished and homely, and have that extra touch that comes from people who enjoy their work. French and German spoken.

**Parklands** (☎ 622451; www.theparklandshotel.com; 2 St Leonard's Bank; standard/superior incl dinner £160/172; 🚗) The former home of lord provosts (mayors), Parklands is one of the most luxurious places to stay in Perth, and a great little hideaway. It's

a small hotel with 14 sumptuous rooms and a restaurant. There are often cheaper package deals available.

Also recommended:

**Marshall House** (☎ 442886; gallagher@marshall-guest-house.freereserve.co.uk; 6 Marshall Pl; s/d £30/50) One of the superior-value places along this stretch. The downstairs twin is clean as a whistle, spacious and cheerfully decorated.

**Iona Guest House** (☎ /fax 627261; 2 Pitcullen Cres; s/d £30/55) Room 2 is a favourite here.

## Eating

Perth has an exceptionally good dining scene and a strong café and outside-dining culture.

**Bothy** (☎ 449792; 33 Kinnoull St; lunch mains £5-11, dinner mains £12-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Bothy is a comfy leather couch and wooden wine rack affair with a certain intimacy – it attracts couples and older diners. For lunch, sandwiches like baked mozzarella and grilled aubergine with olive and natural yogurt feature. Tuck into braised beef olives with white pudding for dinner.

**Dean@Let's Eat** (☎ 643377; 77 Kinnoull St; starters £6-8, mains £15-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Noted for its excellent service, this award-winning bistro is the best place in town for splashing out on a special meal. Outstanding cuisine comes in the form of creative dishes such as a spicy roast cashew nut salad with couscous and char-grilled vegetables. Enjoy an apéritif on the comfy couches before indulging your palate.

**Keracher** (☎ 449777; 168 South St; 2/3 course dinner £15/19; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) This classic seafood restaurant keeps things simple. They combine fresh seafood with ingredients that add hints of flavour to complement but not overpower the dishes; this is a recipe for success. Try the seared Skye scallops and Scottish black pudding garnished with cape gooseberry.

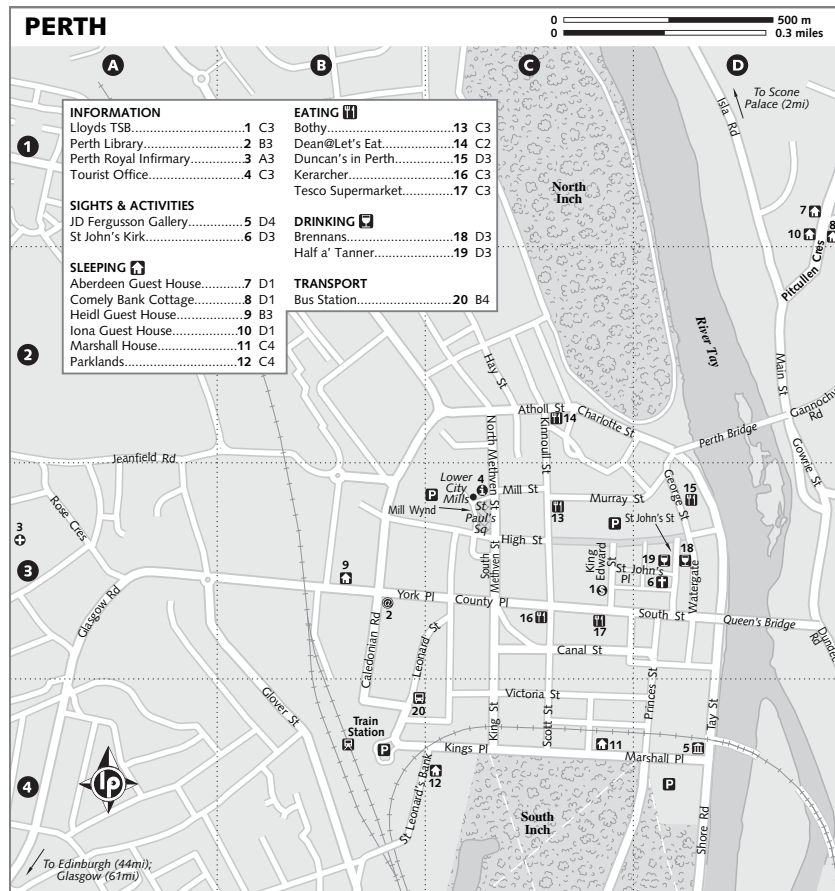
Also in town:

**Tesco supermarket** (South St)

**Duncan's in Perth** (☎ 626016; 33 George St; mains \$14; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The cool, clean interior here is ambient and relaxed, and the food is pretty good too. Produce is sourced from around the country – how can you not be drawn to seared wood pigeon?

## Drinking

Perth has a healthy pubs-per-capita ratio and in the courtyard situated around St John's Kirk you won't have to stray far to change draughts.



**Half a' Tanner** (St John's Pl) A warm, popular and hospitable place, on fine days the crowd spills into the courtyard.

**Brennans** (St John's St) This pub is small in size but big on personality – there's live music on weekends and a happy buzz every night. It's a bit of a warren inside, with a low ceiling, but it's very friendly and there are good ales on tap.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Scottish Citylink operates regular buses from Perth to Glasgow (£8, 1½ hours), Edinburgh (£7.70, 1½ hours), Dundee (£5, 35 minutes), Aberdeen (£15.70, 2¼ hours) and Inverness (£14, 2¼ hours).

Stagecoach buses serve Dunkeld (30 minutes, every hour or two Monday to Saturday), Pitlochry (1¼ hours, every hour or two Monday to Saturday) and Aberfeldy (1¼ hours, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday). Citylink also serves Dunkeld and Pitlochry regularly.

Stagecoach also serves Crieff (45 minutes, at least hourly), St Fillans (1¼ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday – some services change in Crieff) via Crieff and Comrie, and Dunning (40 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday) via Forteviot.

Strathray Scottish buses travel from Perth to Blairgowrie (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday) and Dundee (£3.50, 1¼ hours, hourly).

### TRAIN

There's a train service from Glasgow's Queen St (£11.60, one hour, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday), and a service from Edinburgh (£11.60, 1½ hours, at least hourly Monday to Saturday). Other rail destinations include Stirling (£9.30, 30 minutes, one or two per hour) and Pitlochry (£10, 30 minutes, two hourly, fewer on Sunday).

## STRATHEARN

West of Perth, the wide strath (valley) of the River Earn was once a great forest where medieval kings hunted. The whole area is known as Strathearn, a very attractive region of undulating farmland, hills and lochs. The Highlands begin in the western section of Strathearn.

### Dunning

☎ 01764 / pop 900

If you think you've entered spooky country around here, you may just be right. On the

way into Dunning, about a mile west of the town by the B8062, there's a strange **cross** on a pile of stones with the words 'Maggiewall burnt here 1657 as a witch'. Keep away from bonfires.

The village is dominated by the 12th-century Norman tower of **St Serfs church** (☎ 684497; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), but most of the building dates from 1810. The magnificent 9th-century **Dupplin Cross**, one of the earliest Christian stone crosses in Scotland, was originally near Forteviot (3 miles from Dunning). It's now the regal centrepiece of St Serfs Church. Historic Scotland provides a guided talk on the mysterious monolith.

A wonderful, eccentric little nook-and-cranny pub, **Kirkstyle Inn** (☎ 684248; Kirkstyle Sq; mains £7-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) is an atmospheric inn with a warm glow and a local touch – the food's not half bad either. Try the Spitfire brew. Book ahead at weekends as it's very popular.

Historic Dunning is about 8 miles southwest of Perth. Stagecoach bus 17 runs from Perth to Forteviot and Dunning (40 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday). Docherty's Midland Coaches runs between Dunning and Auchterarder (15 minutes, up to 10 times daily Monday to Saturday).

### Auchterarder

☎ 01764 / pop 4000

Four miles west of Dunning, the small, neat town of Auchterarder meanders along a winding High St.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; 90 High St; ☎ Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Sun Jul & Aug) with a **heritage centre** (admission free) detailing wide-ranging aspects of local history. There are absorbing B&W pictures of the town and nearby Dunning.

Just up the road, 3 miles from Auchterarder on the A9, you'll find **Tullibardine** (☎ 682252; Blackford; tours £5; ☎ 10am-5.30pm), Scotland's newest distillery. It's just off the A9 and reopened in 2004 after being closed for 10 years. Tours are short and sweet, which means 'tasting time' comes around nice and quick.

The highly rated **Gleneagles Hotel** (☎ 662231; www.gleneagles.com; Auchterarder; r from £370; ☎ ☎), just over 2 miles west of Auchterarder, is a splendid place with three championship golf courses. Room charges include full use of the extensive leisure facilities. The priciest room is the £1900 Royal Lochnagar Suite, complete with antiques, silk-lined walls and

hand-woven carpets. The hotel even has its own train station, 50 minutes (£11.50) from Glasgow, and there's free transport between the station and the hotel. However, if you can afford to stay here, you can afford the limousine from Glasgow airport (£160). Gleneagles has also earned a reputation as a very child-friendly hotel, making it ideal for families. There's plenty here to keep kids entertained, including a nursery with all the latest gizmos. Check the website for special deals.

Docherty's Midland Coaches runs buses from Auchterarder to Dunning (15 minutes, up to 10 times daily Monday to Saturday), Stirling (45 minutes, three daily Monday to Friday) and Perth (40 minutes, at least hourly).

### Around Auchterarder

If you want to throw a line in and have a good chance of being rewarded for your efforts, drop by **Orchill Loch Trout Fishery** (☎ 01764-682287; www.orchillloch.bravehost.com; Braco; ☎). The main loch (fly fishing) is regularly stocked with rainbow trout and there's bait fishing too in a separate pond, particularly good for the kids. A four-hour ticket allows three fish and costs £13.50; a full day allows five fish and is only £22. Orchill is on the backroad between Gleneagles and Braco; access is off the A822 or A823.

### Crieff & Around

☎ 01764

Scraping the edge of the Highlands, elegant Crieff (population 6579) is an old, resort-style town, as popular with tourists today as it was in Victorian times.

### INFORMATION

**Bank of Scotland** (Lodge St) Has ATM.

**Library** (☎ 653418; 6 Comrie St; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue, 10am-1pm Thu, 10am-12.30pm Sat) Free internet access.

**Police station** (King St)

**Post office** (High St)

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (West High St) Has ATM.

**Tourist office** (☎ 652578; criefftic@visitscotland.com; Town Hall, High St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Mar, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug) In the clock tower.

### SIGHTS

In the basement at the tourist office, **Stones, Stocks & Stories** (☎ 652578; High St; admission free) is a small but interesting exhibition of the town

stocks (leg clamps used as a form of punishment), the Drummond Cross (1400-1600) and a formidable 9th-century Pictish cross slab.

The highly rated **Famous Grouse Experience** (☎ 656565; The Hosh; tours from £4.50; ☎ 9am-6pm), at the Glenturret Distillery, 1 mile north of town, has a range of tours of the traditional malting process. Visitors are also treated to a hi-tech bonanza that includes a virtual giant jigsaw and 'flying with the grouse'.

**Innerpeffer Library** (☎ 652819; Innerpeffer; adult/child incl tour £2.50/50p; ☎ 10am-12.45pm & 2-4.45pm Wed-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Mar-Oct, by appointment only Nov-Feb), about 4 miles southeast of Crieff on the B8062, is Scotland's first lending library (founded in 1680). There's a huge collection of rare, interesting and ancient books, some of them 500 years old.

### SLEEPING

**our pick Comrie Croft** (☎ 670140; www.comriecroft.com; dm/d from £13/30) A friendly, rustic place to stay with great facilities, this croft is suited to backpackers (with wheels) or families. There's mountain-bike hire, fishing, walking routes, lots of games for the kids and plenty of places to just laze about. The Croft is by Crieff, 4 miles out on the A85 towards Comrie.

**Comely Bank Guest House** (☎ 653409; www.comelybank.demon.co.uk; 32 Burrell St; r per person £22-26; ☎) This is a top Scottish guesthouse, welcoming, homely and neat as a pin. The downstairs double is huge, frilly and velvety, while upstairs rooms have a more modern décor and are still a good size. All rooms are en suite except for one double.

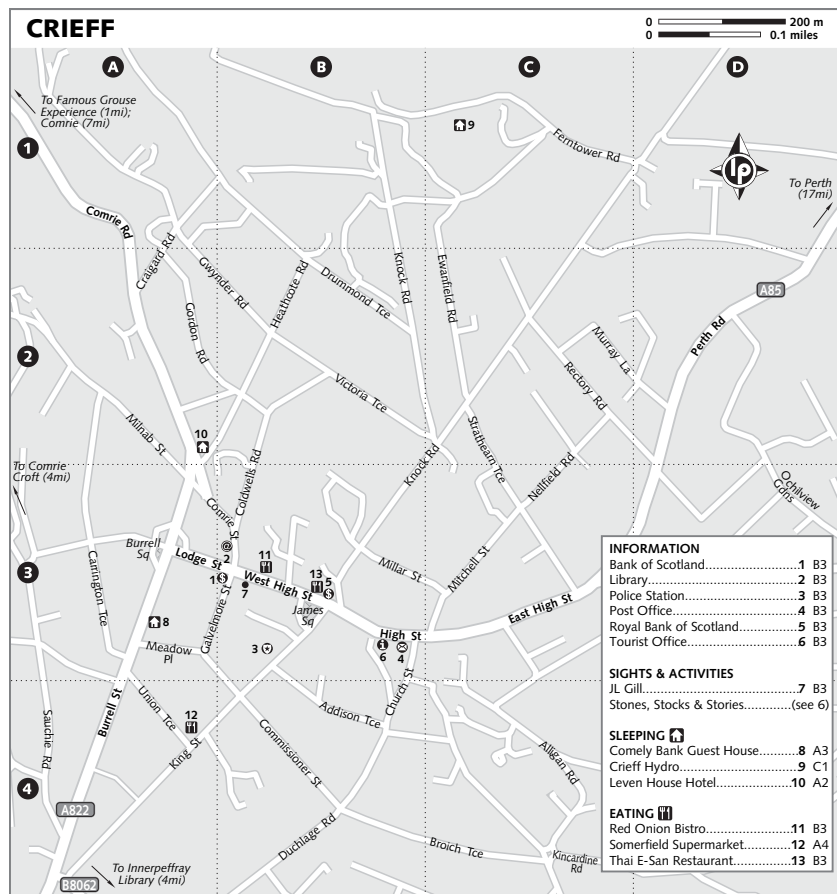
**Leven House Hotel** (☎ 652529; Comrie Rd; r per person £23-25) Probably trading since Victorian times, the best way to describe Leven House is floral, floral, floral. The décor may not win any design awards, but this 1970s-era hotel offers good-value rooms and the friendly hosts make you feel right at home.

**Crieff Hydro** (☎ 655555; www.crieffhydro.com; Fern-tower Rd; dinner, bed & breakfast per person £40-190; ☎ ☎) An upmarket, classy hotel that's refreshingly unpretentious. It caters well for kids, including an excellent childcare facility.

### EATING

**Thai E-San Restaurant** (☎ 652652; Waverley Hotel, 7 James Sq; starters £3.50, mains £6-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) Locals rave about the Thai food at this simple eatery. Check out the banquets, too – great value.





**Red Onion Bistro** (☎ 654407; 1 West High St; 🍴 lunch mains £10-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat) Going from strength to strength, the Red Onion has dishes showing a lot of flair. The simple, pleasing dining room is perfect for tucking into a roasted rump of lamb with caramelised red cabbage and rosemary jus. Vegetarian dishes are also available (such as butternut squash, chilli and ginger risotto).

For local produce, **JL Gill** (☎ 653011; www.scot-tishproduce.co.uk; 26 West High St) is an old-fashioned shop specialising in whisky and cheese. It's a good spot to pick up whisky specials, including some you may have trouble sourcing elsewhere (such as the Caol Ila Signatory Vintage). For self-catering, there's a **Somerfield supermarket** (Union Tce).

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Hourly Stagecoach buses link Crieff with Perth (45 minutes), less frequently on Sunday. Other buses run to Comrie (20 minutes, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday), St Fillans (35 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday) and Stirling (50 minutes, four to eight daily).

### Upper Strathearn

☎ 01764

The two Highland villages of **Comrie** (population 1839) and **St Fillans** (population 350), in upper Strathearn, are surrounded by forests and craggy, bare mountain tops where deer and mountain hares both live in abundance.

Comrie has a rather tattered elegance hinting at its previous heyday. St Fillans enjoys an excellent location at the eastern end of **Loch Earn**, which reflects the silhouettes of distant, towering peaks in its glittering waters.

The **Four Seasons Hotel** (☎ 685333; www.the-fourseasonshotel.co.uk; St Fillans; standard/superior £48/58) is a refined hotel with a touch of elegance, with two beautifully appointed sitting rooms and a small bar with loch views – great places to relax. There is a ton of activities to choose from here, including water-skiing, quad biking and pony trekking. There are also six secluded chalets nestled in the slopes behind the hotel.

Comrie is 24 miles west of Perth, and St Fillans is about 5 miles further west. Stagecoach operates daily buses from Perth, via Crieff, to Comrie and St Fillans (see opposite).

### WEST PERTSHIRE

This remote area of Perthshire is a jewel in central Scotland's crown. It's difficult to reach via public transport – buses are usually once-a-day postal services; however, these fabulous hills and lochs are well worth making an effort to see.

### Aberfeldy

☎ 01887 / pop 1900

The happening heart of Scotland: adventure sports, art and castles all feature on the menu here. Aberfeldy is slightly shabby and rough around the edges, but with some great attractions nearby, and a spot deep in forest country, it's well worth a linger.

The helpful, knowledgeable **tourist office** (☎ 820276; The Square; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter), in an old church, is an exceptionally efficient and friendly place. The **Royal Bank of Scotland** (8 The Square) has an ATM.

### SIGHTS

The **Watermill** (☎ 822896; www.aberfeldywatermill.com; Mill St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; 🏰) is an unusual and much-needed attraction in the centre of town. Incorporating a bookshop (the largest in the Highlands) with a great Scottish collection, gallery with contemporary works of art and a coffee shop, you could while away several hours in this old mill. Bucket-loads of character are thrown in for good measure and the highlight is perhaps the working mill machinery, giving the gallery a unique space to exhibit its works of art.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Ourpick Adventurers Escape Hostel** (☎ 820498; www.adventurers-escape.co.uk; Weem; beds £13-16) A top-notch hostel just outside Aberfeldy, it has a range of rooms for different size groups (starting with two). All are warm and well looked after. You can also self-cater, and if you're into kayaking, you're in the right place as the National Kayak School runs from the hostel. Best of all though, you're right next to a great pub.

**Tigh'n Eilean Guest House** (☎ /fax 820109; www.tighneilan.com; Taybridge Dr; s £35-40 d £55-64) Everything about this property screams comfort – it's a gorgeous place overlooking the Tay. Individually designed rooms all have a unique sense of space. For couples our fave is the Jacuzzi room (it's huge!) and for solo travellers the wood-lined twin with private bath is very snug.

**Guinach House** (☎ 820251; www.guinachhouse.co.uk; Urlar Rd; s/d £95/110) More like a boutique hotel, Guinach has modish rooms and a casual, laid-back ambience. Rooms have private access from the rest of the house and are individually styled – our favourite is the zebra room, although the red room with freestanding bathtub runs a close second. The whole place is set on a large estate, so there's plenty of rambling options just beyond the front doorstep.

Also recommended:

**Balnearn House** (☎ 820431; www.balnearnhouse.com; Crieff Rd; s/d from £40/50) A sedate, refined and quite luxurious option. Most rooms have great natural light. Rooms upstairs are better.

**Black Watch Inn** (☎ 820699; Bank St; mains £6-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Good range of pub food dabbling in Thai and Scottish dishes.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Stagecoach runs buses from Aberfeldy to Pitlochry (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, less on Sunday), Blairgowrie (1½ hours, two daily Monday to Friday) and Perth (1½ hours, 10 daily Monday to Saturday).

Local bus operators run a circular route from Aberfeldy through Loch Tay (Crannog Centre), Kenmore, Forthingall and back to Aberfeldy up to five times daily Monday to Friday. There's also a service through to Killin (one hour) up to five times daily Monday to Saturday (although it only operates on a Saturday from June to September when there's a connecting service through to Oban).

## Around Aberfeldy

**Castle Menzies** (☎ 01887-820982; Weem; adult/child £4/2; ☞ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-mid-Oct), 1.5 miles west of town by the B846, is the impressive restored 16th-century seat of the chief of the clan Menzies. The Z-plan tower house is magnificently located against a backdrop of Scottish forest. And inside it doesn't disappoint. The place smells just like a castle should – musty and lived in. It reeks of authenticity despite extensive restoration work and is a highly recommended ramble. Check out the fireplace in the dungeon-like kitchens and the gaudy great hall upstairs, with windows unfurling a ribbon of lush, green countryside extending into wooded hills beyond the estate.

**Glenlyon Gallery** (☎ 01887-820202; www.glenlyon-gallery.com; Boltachan; ☞ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue Mar-Oct, closed Tue & Thu Nov, Dec & Feb), near Aberfeldy, brings the wildlife and startling natural beauty of Perthshire to life with vivid paintings and sketches by a talented local artist. Some of Scotland's most priceless treasures are captured on canvas and, if you're interested, can be shipped anywhere in the world. The gallery is signposted off the B846, 1 mile north of Aberfeldy.

**Highland Adventure Safari** (☎ 01887-820071; www.highlandadventuresafaris.co.uk; B846; 🚐) is ideal for those wanting to spot some wildlife or simply enjoy Perthshire's magnificent countryside. Standard trips include the 2½-hour Adventure Safari for £35/13.50 per adult/child, which includes a dram in the wilderness, and the Safari Hike for £60, which includes a walk in the mountains and a picnic. Wildlife you may spot includes golden eagles, osprey and red deer. There's also gold-panning for kids at the visitor centre. It's on the B846, just past Castle Menzies.

## Loch Tay

The greater part of mighty Ben Lawers (1214m), Scotland's ninth-tallest peak, looms over Loch Tay. Traces of rock art that could date back to the Neolithic period 5000 years ago have recently been uncovered. Drop into the **visitor centre** (NTS; ☎ 01567-820397; adult/child £2/1, parking donation £2; ☞ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) high on the slopes of the mountain; the access road is off the A827, on the northern shore of the loch, and continues over a wild pass to Glen Lyon. A trail leads to the summit from the centre, but you should take a good map (OS

map 51). There is also a much easier nature trail from the visitor centre and ranger-guided walks in summer. Call by for the jaw-dropping views if nothing else.

A stout little water-bus, **MV Glen Lyon** (☎ 01567-820111) takes passengers on one-hour cruises of Loch Tay. The departure point is the Tay Forest Park car park at the eastern end of the loch, near Kenmore. Cruises depart hourly, weather permitting, and cost £7/5 per adult/child.

## Kenmore

The wealthy village of Kenmore, at the eastern end of Loch Tay, is about 6 miles west of Aberfeldy. It's a small but pretty place dominated by a church and clock tower. Don't forget the camera, as it's the perfect place for some happy snaps. Just a quarter of a mile along the south Loch Tay road from the village, the **Scottish Crannog Centre** (☎ 01887-830583; adult/child £5/3.50; ☞ 10am-5.30pm mid-Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov) has a fascinating reconstruction of an artificial, Iron Age island-house. There are exhibits from archaeological dives of crannogs (see the boxed text, below) and artistic impressions of what they may have looked like. Tours run hourly.

**ourpick Kenmore Hotel** (☎ 01887-830205; www.kenmorehotel.com; The Square; s/d £70/100), touched with a quiet sense of dignity, claims to be Scotland's oldest inn and dates from 1572. Its quaint, spacious rooms are generously furnished and full of character. On the chimneypiece in the bar look out for the romantic description of the countryside written by Robert Burns in 1787. After a few drinks in the bar, watch out for the low doorways on your way upstairs. The **Taymouth Restaurant** (starters

£6, mains £12-16; ☞ dinner) overlooks Loch Tay and the mouthwatering menu uses Scottish produce in simple but tasty combinations; the service is first class.

See the Aberfeldy section (p223) for your public-transport options.

## Fortingall & Glen Lyon

Fortingall is one of the prettiest villages in Scotland, with 19th-century thatched cottages in a very tranquil setting. The **church** (admission free; ☞ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) has impressive wooden beams and a 7th-century **monk's bell**. In the churchyard, there's a 5000-year-old **yew**, probably the oldest tree in Europe. This tree was already ancient when the Romans camped in the meadows by the River Lyon. It's also famous as the reputed birthplace of Pontius Pilate. Today the tree is a shell of its former self – at its zenith it had a girth of over 17m! But souvenir hunters have reduced it to two much smaller trunks.

Rickety Roman bridges, Victorian lodges, a Caledonian pine forest, and sheer peaks splashed with pink and purple heather that poke through swirling clouds mark the drive along the tiny road into the wonderful **Glen Lyon**. The longest enclosed glen in Scotland, it becomes wilder and more uninhabited as it snakes its way west towards Loch Lyon – few visitors penetrate its remote upper reaches, where capercaillie live in patches of pine forest. You'll need wheels, preferably the motorised kind, but if you're keen and you've the time, cycling through Glen Lyon would be a great way to experience this special place. Stop at the **Glenlyon Post Office, Shop & Tearoom** (Bridge of Balgie; dishes £2-5; ☞ lunch Fri-Tue) for sandwiches, soup, homemade savoury tarts and sweetie-treaties.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Fortingall Hotel** (☎ 01887-830367; www.fortingall-hotel.com; s/d from £85/120; 🏠) This completely refurbished hotel is winner of the 2007 Small Scottish Hotel of the Year award. And it's easy to see why. Rooms are sumptuous, beds the sink-in-and-smile variety and the en suites fit for royalty. If you've got the coin, go for the Glen Lyon Superior room – you may have to be dragged out kicking and screaming when it's time to leave. There are special offers if you stay more than one night. Meals are available for guests and nonguests and mains cost £16 to £20.

**ourpick Milton Eonan** (☎ 01887-866318; www.milton-eonan.com; Bridge of Balgie; r per person £35) Tucked away just over the Bridge of Balgie from the tiny Glen Lyon hamlet is an absolute gem of a property. It was part of a much larger estate in the hands of the Wills family (Wills Tobacco), but was mostly sold off in the '70s. It's location, next to a small waterfall and surrounded by mountain views, is stunning. Inside, Milton Eonan is exceedingly comfortable, with well-furnished rooms and vintage furniture giving it a touch of class. You can also rent the property out as a private, self-catering option.

Behind Milton Eonan is **Ben Lawers Bunkhouse** (www.benlawersbunkhouse.com; bed £12.50; 🏠), excellent for hikers or cyclists and sleeping up to six people. It's clean and very well kitted out. It would also work well for families seeking a cheaper option than Milton Eonan.

See the Aberfeldy section for public-transport options (p223).

## Lochs Tummel & Rannoch

The route along Lochs Tummel and Rannoch is worth doing any way you can – by foot, bicycle or car – just don't miss it. Hills of ancient birch and forests of spruce, pine and larch make up the **Tay Forest Park** – the king of Scotland's forests. These wooded hills roll into the glittering waters of the lochs, and while tracking along the southern side of Loch Tummel you'll be greeted by Highland cattle, grand houses and startling views – a reminder of the undeniable raw beauty of Perthshire. A visit in autumn is recommended, when the birch trees are at their finest.

**Queen's View Visitor Centre** (☎ 01796-473123; Strathummel; car-park fee £1; ☞ 10am-6pm late-Mar-mid-Nov), at the eastern end of Loch Tummel, has a magnificent outlook towards Schiehallion (1083m). There are displays and audiovisual programmes about the area. The centre highlights the brilliant forward thinking of the replanting of Tay Forest 300 years ago. The results are all around.

Waterfalls, towering mountains and a shimmering loch greet visitors to the hidden treasure of **Kinloch Rannoch**. It's a great base for local walks (you can walk up Schiehallion from Braes of Foss – see www.jmt.org for more information) or cycle trips around **Loch Rannoch**. There is a Spar supermarket with an ATM in town. **Dunalastair Activity Centre** (☎ 07884-492920; activities@dunalastair.co.uk) has a

## CRANNOGS

Usually built in a loch for defensive purposes, a crannog (from the Gaelic word *crann*, meaning 'tree') consists of an artificial rock island with timber posts and struts supporting a hut above high-water level. Crannogs were used on many lochs, including Lochs Awe, Earn and Tay, from prehistoric times up to the 18th century. Some crannogs had curious underwater causeways that could zigzag or had traps, making night-time assaults without a boat extremely difficult.

plethora of activities on offer, such as fishing, kayaking (£15), canyoning (£35) and white-water rafting (£35). You can also hire bikes for £15 a day. If you prefer an easy stroll, try the **dan trail** around the loch, which has roadside notice boards about local clans. Beyond the western end of the loch you enter bleak Rannoch Moor, which extends all the way to Glen Coe. The rivers and lochs on the moor are good for fishing.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Garden B&B** (☎ 01882-632434; jimwilson@onetel.com; Kinloch Rannoch; r per person £35) Right off the beaten track between Kinloch Rannoch and Tummel Bridge, this place has just two rooms. But both come with private bathroom and private sitting room (for each room!). The double is better than the twin – much larger. If you're looking for solitude and a touch of eccentricity, this is the place.

**Bunrannoch House** (☎ /fax 01882-632407; www.bunrannoch.co.uk; Kinloch Rannoch; r per person with/without dinner £60/35) Grand Bunrannoch House is a former shooting lodge, set back from the edge of town. A collage of flowering purple rhododendrons and the smell of homecooking (rhubarb pie if you're lucky) greets visitors up the driveway. The two family rooms at the top are the best rooms but all have lovely views. Renovation plans include restoration of the original two-level verandah, and the opening of a bar-café. Meals are available; a set-course dinner costs £27.50.

**Post Taste** (☎ 01882-632333; The Square, Kinloch Rannoch; paninis £5, mains £11-15; ☎ 10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; ☒) The local post office, café, tourist information centre, internet and gift shop – there's not much they don't do. Open for lunch and light snacks through the afternoon and for dinner. Try the Rannoch venison casserole.

**Loch Tummel Inn** (☎ 01882-634272; Strathtummel; bar suppers £6, restaurant mains £10-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) This old coaching inn is a snug spot for a decent feed from a menu featuring seafood. The bar is open all day for a leisurely pint in the beer garden overlooking Loch Tummel. The inn is about 3 miles from Queen's View.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Elizabeth Yule Transport** (☎ 01796-472290) operates a service between Kinloch Rannoch and Pitlochry (50 minutes, up to five a day Monday to Saturday) via Queen's View and Loch

Tummel Inn. The Pitlochry–Rannoch Station postbus has a once-daily service (Monday to Saturday) via Kinloch Rannoch and both sides of the loch.

ScotRail runs two to four trains daily from Rannoch station north to Fort William (£8, one hour) and Mallaig, and south to Glasgow (£18, 2¾ hours).

### PERTH TO AVIEMORE

There are a number of major sights strung along the A9 – which becomes a scenic treat after Pitlochry. It's the main route north to Aviemore (p330) and Inverness (p318) in the Highlands.

### Dunkeld & Birnam

☎ 01350 / pop 1000

Ever been to a feel-good town? Well, Dunkeld and Birnam, with their enviable location nestled in the heart of Perthshire's big-tree country, await. The towns happily throb with tourists, and so they should – there are architectural delights to enjoy here, including a magnificent cathedral. It is walkers in the surrounding area, though, who really grease the wheels of tourism, even through the winter months. Dunkeld's **tourist office** (☎ 727688; dunkeldti@visitscotland.co.uk; The Cross; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) has to be one of the friendliest in all of the country. Pick up its leaflet on local walks.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Situated between open grassland between the River Tay on one side and rolling hills on the other, **Dunkeld Cathedral** (HS; ☎ 727601; High St; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Apr) is one of the most beautifully sited cathedrals in Scotland. Don't miss it on a sunny day, as there are few more lovely places to be. Half the cathedral is still in use as a church; the rest is in ruins, and you can explore it all. The oldest part of the original church is the choir, completed in 1350. The 15th-century tower is still standing. The cathedral was damaged during the Reformation and burnt during the Battle of Dunkeld in 1689.

If you're looking to entertain the kids for a few hours, drop by **Going Pottie** (☎ 728044; www.goingpottie.com; Cathedral St; activities from £5; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun; ☒) where kids can get a paintbrush in their hand and create colourful ceramics...and mayhem.

Across the bridge is Birnam, made famous by *Macbeth*. There's not much left of Birnam Wood, but there is a small, leafy **Beatrix Potter Park** (the children's author spent childhood holidays in the area). In the park you'll find some local history on the life of Beatrix Potter who wrote the evergreen story of *Peter Rabbit*.

**Loch of the Lowes Wildlife Centre** (☎ 727337; Loch of the Lowes; admission £3; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep), 2 miles east of Dunkeld off the A923, has wildlife displays mostly devoted to the majestic osprey. There's also an excellent bird-watching hide with binoculars provided, where you can see the birds nesting during breeding season.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Taybank** (☎ 727340; www.thetaybank.com; Tay Tce, Dunkeld; s/d £25/50) The Taybank is a live-music bar fielding musos from around the area who specialise in late-night jamming. There are simple rooms upstairs with shared bathroom. Traditional Scottish food includes the beloved stovie; mains range from £5 to £8. It's very friendly and once you gaze out over the Tay from the breakfast room nursing your hangover, you may not want to leave at all.

**Birnam House Hotel** (☎ 727462; www.birnamhousehotel.co.uk; Perth Rd, Birnam; r per person from £40) This grand-looking place with crow-stepped gables has undergone major renovations (damn, we liked it the way it was – unrenovated and proud of it). Tastefully fitted rooms differ in size and quality of furnishings, so have a look at a few. Most, fortunately, retain the character of the building. Dishes at the adjoining Tap Inn (mains £6 to £9) display a distinctive creative flair.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Dunkeld is 15 miles north of Perth. Scottish Citylink buses between Glasgow/Edinburgh (£10, two hours, at least three daily) and Inverness stop at Birnam House Hotel. Birnam to Perth (£5.50) or Pitlochry (£5.50) takes 20 minutes.

Strathtay Scottish has a bus between Blairgowrie (30 minutes) and Aberfeldy (40 minutes), via Dunkeld, twice daily Monday to Friday; there's no bus to Aberfeldy during school holidays.

Trains run to Glasgow (£12, 1½ hours, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) and to Inverness (£19.50, two hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

### Pitlochry

☎ 01796 / pop 2600

Pitlochry is a tourist magnet – the place is swamped in summer. But somehow it doesn't detract from this most charming of Highland towns. It's an excellent place to base yourself if you want to explore the region, and it has good transport connections if you're long on time and short on wheels.

### INFORMATION

**Computer Services Centre** (☎ 473711; 67 Atholl Rd; per min 5p; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Internet access; opposite the Royal Bank.

**Police station** (Atholl Rd)

**Post office** (Atholl Rd)

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (Atholl Rd) Has ATM.

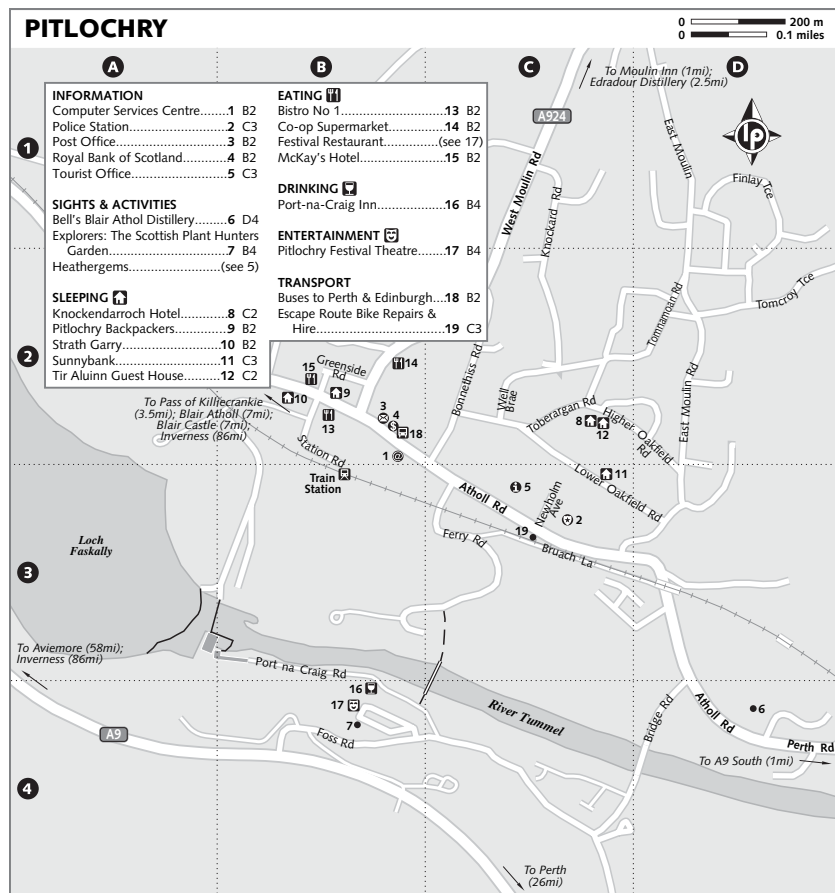
**Tourist office** (☎ 472215; pitlochrytic@visitscotland.com; 22 Atholl Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat year-round) Inconsistent service when we were there; sells the useful publication *Pitlochry Walks* (50p), which lists four short and four long local walks.

### SIGHTS

If you fancy a tour of a whisky distillery, Pitlochry has two. **Bell's Blair Athol Distillery** (☎ 482003; Atholl Rd; tour incl voucher redeemable against purchases £5; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri Jan-Easter, Nov & Dec, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Sep & noon-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct) is at the southern end of town. The **Edradour Distillery** (☎ 472095; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, call to confirm winter hr) is proudly Scotland's smallest distillery, 2.5 miles east of Pitlochry on the A924.

At the Pitlochry Festival Theatre, the excellent **Explorers: The Scottish Plant Hunters Garden** (☎ 484600; adult/child £3/1; Foss Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) commemorates 300 years of plant collecting and those who hunted down 'new' species. The new-age landscaping in the 2.5-hectare garden includes a couple of pavilions built from Scottish timber and an amphitheatre. The whole collection is based on plants brought back to Scotland by Scottish explorers. In their words: 'These men would put Indiana Jones to shame'. There is plenty of seating to drink in the views over town.

Just behind the tourist office is **Heathergems** (☎ 474391; 22 Atholl Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), the factory outlet of a most unusual and beautiful form of Scottish jewellery. The jewellery is made from natural heather stems and the Celtic designs in particular are very good. You can actually



view the jewellery being made through windows into the workshop. Definitely worth a browse.

## SLEEPING

**Pitlochry Backpackers** (☎ 470044; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 134 Atholl Rd; dm/tw/d £13.50/33/37) This is a cracking hostel smack-bang in the middle of town with three- to eight-bed dorms that are in mint condition, and there's no extra charge for linen. Couples should grab the excellent en-suite double, a real bargain. Friendly, laid-back and very comfortable.

**Sunnybank** (☎ 473014; thomas@tszeller.fsnet.co.uk; 19 Lower Oakfield Rd; r per person £25-35) Austrian-run Sunnybank certainly has a sunny aspect and offers fresh, good-value rooms in a large

modern house. Some rooms have that alpine thing going on.

**Our pick** **Tir Aluinn Guest House** (☎ 473811; www.tiraluinn.co.uk; 10 Higher Oakfield Rd; s/d £27/54) This place is a real find – there are three extremely well-kept, bright rooms and the hosts *sooo* have the right attitude. Apart from being thoughtful and charming, they don't levy a surcharge at solo travellers because in their words 'we've too many single friends and it's not their fault'. Right on. The brilliant breakfast includes something for everyone (like healthy options and herbal teas). Highly recommended and great value for Pitlochry.

**Strath Garry** (☎ 472469; www.strathgarryhotel.co.uk; 113 Atholl Rd; s/d £40/60) Recently refurbished and with a top location, Strath Garry makes you

never want to leave. Why? Well, it's a (small) hotel-bar-café-restaurant – you'll never want for anything, and it's all done pretty well, although we'd recommend venturing further afield for dinner. En-suite rooms are very snug and have some luxurious touches – we lost a researcher who sunk into one of the beds and was never seen again.

**Knockendarroch Hotel** (☎ 473473; www.knockendarroch.co.uk; Higher Oakfield Rd; dinner, bed & breakfast per person £75) Geez, we like this place. Knockendarroch lures visitors with its grace, ornate grandeur and old-world charisma. Sumptuous rooms vary – room 3 is the largest and has gorgeous views, although top-floor rooms have the real stunners. Take your partner here – they won't forget it. To cap it off the restaurant is outstanding.

## EATING

**Bistro No 1** (☎ 472660; 100 Atholl Rd; mains £9-13; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The new kid on the block serves up a good selection of dishes with a couple of veggie options for dinner. Inside is a comfortable set up with modern booth seating ideal for couples or families. Tuck into whole plaice stuffed with a salmon mousse, with lemon and dill oil. Gourmet sandwiches furnish the menu for lunch.

**McKay's Hotel** (☎ 473885; 138 Atholl Rd; mains £9; ☎ lunch & dinner) This place is one big pub-restaurant serving basic, filling Scottish pub fare – it'll stick to ya ribs. There's a huge open fireplace, perfect for toasting the tush in winter. The boisterous barn of a bar in the rear serves the same food with more atmosphere and live bands. A pie and a pint is £6 from noon to 5pm.

**Festival Restaurant** (☎ 484626; Foss Rd; 2-/3-course set dinner £19.50/22.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) Admire views from floor-to-ceiling windows and watercolour paintings of Highland scenes in this elegant restaurant at the Pitlochry Festival Theatre. Dishes such as the grilled corn-fed

chicken breast on a potato cake with baby beetroot and snowpeas, followed by Scottish cheeses and oatcakes, go down a treat.

There's a **Co-op supermarket** (West Moulin Rd) if you're self-catering.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

**Port-na-Craig Inn** (☎ 472777; www.portnacraig.com; Port na Craig Rd) The Fisherman's Bar, right on the water's edge, is the best place for a drink on a warm evening. In front of the Festival Theatre, you may even see local fishermen land salmon from the River Tummel.

**Pitlochry Festival Theatre** (☎ 484626; Foss Rd; tickets £5-30; ☎) This well-known theatre stages a different play for six nights out of seven during its season from May to mid-October.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink runs approximately hourly or two-hourly buses between Inverness and Glasgow/Edinburgh via Pitlochry. Prices and journey times to destinations from Pitlochry are: Inverness (£11, two hours), Aviemore (1¼ hours), Perth (45 minutes), Edinburgh (£11, two hours) and Glasgow (£11, 2¼ hours).

Stagecoach runs buses to Aberfeldy (30 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, three Sunday), Dunkeld (25 minutes, up to 10 daily Monday to Saturday) and Perth (one hour, up to 10 daily Monday to Saturday).

Pitlochry is on the main rail line from Perth to Inverness. There are nine trains a day from Perth (£10, 30 minutes), fewer on Sunday.

## GETTING AROUND

**Escape Route Bike Repairs & Hire** (☎ 473859; 3 Atholl Rd; half-/full day from £10/18; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) rents out bikes; discounts on rentals of three or more days. For a taxi, call **Elizabeth Yule Transport** (☎ 472290); a taxi to Blair Castle will cost you £12.

## BEST PUB IN SCOTLAND?

**Moulin Inn** (☎ 01796-472196; Moulin; starters £3.50-6.50, mains £7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just a mile north of Pitlochry, the Moulin is a gem with plenty of great nooks and is one of our fave pubs in the country. Fireplaces, a low roof, stained glass, lots of unpolished wood – it's an atmospheric little inn that was trading here long before visitors arrived in nearby Pitlochry. It makes a great spot to escape the crowds for a meal or an afternoon drink – you could walk here from town. There's a reasonably priced menu with simple, home-cooked food served in generous portions and a specials board that changes regularly; try the seafood pancake. The hotel brews its own ales – the smooth, ruby-coloured Ale of Atholl is particularly good.

## Pass of Killiecrankie

Drop into the **Killiecrankie Visitors Centre** (NTS; ☎ 01796-473233; Killiecrankie; admission free, car-park fee £2; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct; 📍) in this beautiful, rugged gorge, 3.5 miles north of Pitlochry. It has great interactive displays on the Jacobite rebellion, and local flora and fauna. There's plenty to touch, pull and open – great for kids. There are some stunning walks into the wooded gorge; keep an eye out for red squirrels.

Winner of a plethora of awards and almost exactly between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl, **Killiecrankie House Hotel** (☎ 01796-473220; www.killiecrankiehotel.co.uk; Killiecrankie; standard/superior dinner, bed & breakfast £89/99, bed & breakfast £65; 2-/3-course dinner £22/28) is brilliant for treating that someone special.

Local buses run between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl via Killiecrankie (10 minutes, three to seven daily).

## Blair Castle & Blair Atholl

☎ 01796

One of the most popular tourist attractions in Scotland, magnificent **Blair Castle** (☎ 481207; Blair Atholl; castle & grounds adult/child/family £7.50/4.70/19.50; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, call Pitlochry tourist office for winter hr) is the seat of the duke of Atholl. Set beneath forested slopes above the River Garry, this impressive whitewashed castle plays host (in May) to the parade of the Atholl Highlanders – the only private army in Europe.

Thirty rooms are open to the public, and they are packed with paintings, arms and armour, china, lace, and embroidery, presenting a near-complete picture of upper-class life in the Highlands from the 16th century to the present. One of the most impressive rooms is the ballroom. A piper plays at the entrance to the castle three times a day in summer. Blair Castle is located 7 miles north of Pitlochry, and a mile from Blair Atholl village.

For a great cycle, walk or drive, take the stunning road to **Glenfender** from Blair Atholl village. It's about 3 miles on a long, windy up-hill track to a farmhouse; the views of snow-capped peaks along the way are spectacular.

The gothic **Atholl Arms Hotel** (☎ 481205; Blair Atholl; s/d from £50/65), a pub near the train station, is convenient for the castle and sometimes does special deals. The fussy rooms are of a high standard. Book ahead on weekends. The Bothy Bar here is very reminiscent of the Moulin Inn in Pitlochry – even the locally brewed

beers are the same. Snug with booth seating, low-slung roof, bucket-loads of character and an enormous fireplace. There's no better place to be when the rain is lashing outside.

Local buses run a service between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl (25 minutes, three to seven daily). Four buses a day (Monday to Saturday) go directly to the castle. There's a train station in the village, but not all trains stop here.

For a continuation of this route, as it moves north up the A9, see the Cairngorms section (p329).

## BLAIRGOWRIE & GLENSHEE

The route along the A93 through Glenshee is one of the most spectacular drives in the country. The meandering burns and soaring peaks, splashed with blinding-white snow, tend to dwarf open-mouthed drivers – it's surprising that there aren't more accidents along this road. Blairgowrie (population 8500) and Braemar (see p255) are the main accommodation centres for the Glenshee ski resort, although there is a small settlement 5 miles south of the ski runs at **Spittal of Glenshee**.

There's a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01250-872960; blairgowrietic@visitscotland.com; 26 Wellmeadow; 🕒 daily Apr-Oct, Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) with plenty of walking information. You'll find two banks with ATMs on High St, just behind the tourist office.

## Skiing

**Glenshee ski resort** (☎ 01339-741320; www.ski-glenshee.co.uk), on the border of Perthshire and Aberdeenshire, has 38 pistes and is one of Scotland's largest skiing areas. After a good fall of snow and when the sun burns through the clouds, you will be in a unique position to drink in the beauty of this country; the skiing isn't half bad either. The chairlift can whisk you up to 910m, near the top of the **Cairnwell** (933m). Whenever there's enough snow in winter it opens daily (it's usually closed in summer, but check with the tourist office). A half-/one-day lift pass costs £18/24, although prices are cheaper for beginners.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Spittal of Glenshee Hotel** (☎ 01250-885215; www.spittalofglenshee.co.uk; Spittal of Glenshee; dm £16, r per person from £32, with en suite from £38; 📍) This hotel is a very 'Scottish experience' – it's a great old country lodge that has burnt down numerous times,

but don't worry; the insurers have calculated that it is likely the next fire won't be until 2029. There's a good bar and a bunkhouse (without cooking facilities).

**Rosebank House** (☎ 01250-872912; colhotel@rosebank35.fsnet.co.uk; Balmoral Rd, Blairgowrie; s/d £25/50) This fine Georgian property is a great deal. Good-sized rooms upstairs are well kept and have small but clean en suites, and there's a large front garden. The friendly owners take good care of guests, and no surcharge is levied on solo travellers. Try to get a room overlooking the garden. Note that rooms do not have TVs as the owners like to encourage communal conversation.

**Slipstream** (Tannage St; mains £4.50; 🍷 lunch) Younger folk may prefer this cool place across the road from Angus Hotel. Come here for cheap, simple lunches such as paninis, burgers and Mexican chilli. You can eat outside overlooking the river.

## Getting There & Away

Strathtay Scottish operates a service from Perth to Blairgowrie (50 minutes, three to seven daily). There's also a bus from Blairgowrie to Dundee (50 minutes, hourly, less frequent on Sunday).

The only service from Blairgowrie to the Glenshee area, about 30 miles away, is the postbus to Spittal of Glenshee (no Sunday service).

## AROUND BLAIRGOWRIE

**Alyth** is a charming little village with a small canal and some exquisite stone bridges about 5 miles east of Blairgowrie. Ask at Blairgowrie's tourist office for the *Walk Old Alyth* leaflet; there are lots of historical buildings, including church ruins dating from 1296. If you're looking to escape the rain, perusing the displays on local history at **Alyth Museum** (☎ 01738-632488; Commercial St; admission free; 🕒 1-5pm Wed-Sun May-Sep) is a fine way to pass an hour or so.

**Alyth Hotel** (☎ 01828-632447; 6 Commercial St, Alyth; s/d £45/65) is a classic town pub that has had an excellent refurbishment. Old-style rooms upstairs are better than renovated ones though, with a lot more space and a user-friendly design. Either way try and get a room overlooking the Square; room 1 is a good choice. The downstairs bar and restaurant is infinitely cosy with low-slung roof, stone walls and all manner of clutter giving it a homely feel. Mains range between £9 and £14.

Off the A94 and 8 miles east of Blairgowrie, **Meikle** is worth the trip for those with a fascination for Pictish stones. The tiny **Meikle Museum** (HS; ☎ 01828-640612; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Apr-Sep) has 26 such carved stones from the 7th to the 10th century, all found in the local area. The pieces range from the Nordic to the exotic – they include a Viking headstone and, bizarrely, a carving of a camel.

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