

# Central & Western Highlands



From the high, subarctic plateau of the Cairngorms and the great, humpbacked hills of the Monadhliath to the more rugged, rocky peaks of Glen Coe, the Mamores and Ben Nevis, the central mountain ranges of the Scottish Highlands are testimony to the sculpting power of ice and weather. Here the Scottish scenery is at its grandest, with soaring hills of rock and heather bounded by rugged glens, rushing waterfalls and stands of Scots pine, remnants of the Caledonian forest that once covered the whole country.

Not surprisingly, this part of the country is an adventure playground for outdoor sports enthusiasts. Aviemore, Glen Coe and Fort William draw hordes of hill walkers and rock climbers in summer, and skiers, snowboarders and ice climbers in winter. There are purpose-built mountain-biking trails at Nevis Range and Laggan (near Newtonmore), the world's biggest indoor ice-climbing wall at Kinlochleven, and three of Scotland's five ski resorts at Nevis Range, Cairngorm and Glen Coe.

Inverness, the Highland capital, provides a spot of urban rest and relaxation before you strike south through the forests and lochs of the Great Glen, stopping perhaps to check Loch Ness for monsterish disturbances. The glens to the northwest of Loch Ness – Strathfarrar, Strathglass and Glen Affric – are among the most beautiful in the country, and offer a wealth of scenic low-level hiking.

From Fort William, the base camp for climbing Ben Nevis, the aptly named Road to the Isles skirts one of Europe's last great wilderness areas before reaching the gorgeous beaches of Arisaig and Morar and the ferry port of Mallaig, jumping-off point for exploring the isles of Eigg, Rum, Muck and Canna.

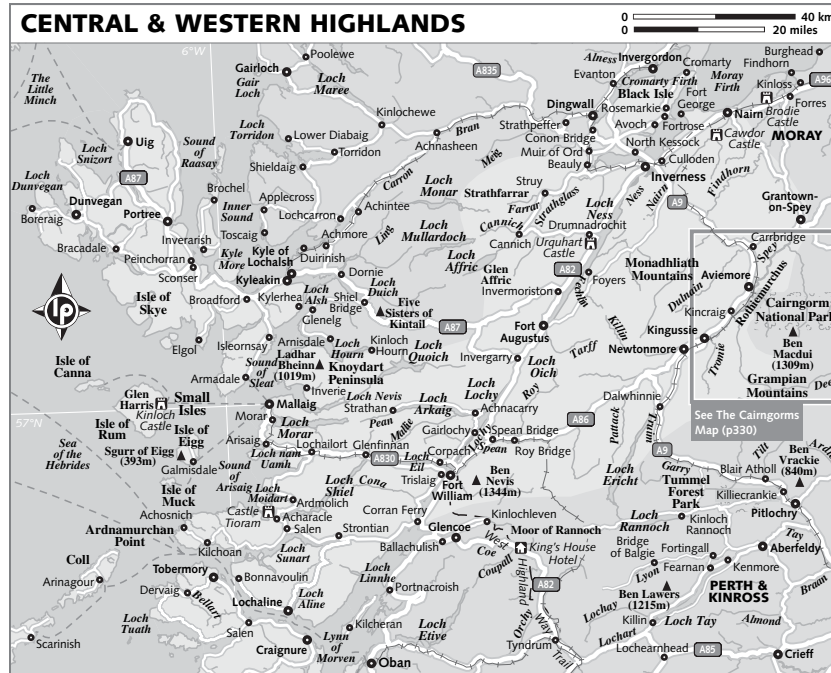
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking among the hills, lochs and forests of beautiful **Glen Affric** (p324)
- Wandering through the ancient Caledonian forest at **Rothiemurchus** (p331)
- Making it to the summit of **Ben Nevis** (p345) – and being able to see the view
- Rattling your teeth loose on the championship downhill mountain-bike course at **Nevis Range** (p344)
- Taking in the stunning panorama from the summit of the **Sgurr of Eigg** (p351)



■ POPULATION: 140,000

■ AREA: 9660 SQ KM



## Getting Around

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; [www.citylink.co.uk](http://www.citylink.co.uk)) runs buses from Perth to Inverness and from Glasgow to Fort William, and links Inverness to Fort William along the Great Glen. The **Nevis'n'Coe Roverbus** (☎ 01463-710555; [www.rapsons.co.uk](http://www.rapsons.co.uk)) is the main regional bus company, with offices in Aviemore, Inverness and Fort William. Roverbus tickets are valid for unlimited travel on Rapsons/Highland Country buses in various regions, including Inverness–Nairn (one day £9), Aviemore (one day/three days £6/15) and Fort William–Glencoe (one day/three days £6/15).

From mid-May to September, the Speyside Stroller (bus 500) runs from Cullen, on the Banffshire coast, to the Cairngorm Mountain Railway via Elgin, Dufftown, Tomintoul, Grantown-on-Spey, Carrbridge and Aviemore (3¼ hours, once daily, Saturday and Sunday only). The Heather Hopper (bus 501) links Grantown-on-Spey to Ballater via Tomintoul and Strathdon (1½ hours, twice daily mid-May to September).

Two railway lines serve the region: the Perth–Aviemore–Inverness line in the east,

and the Glasgow–Fort William–Mallaig line in the west.

For timetable information, call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233).

## INVERNESS & THE GREAT GLEN

Inverness, one of the fastest growing towns in Britain, is the capital of the Highlands. It's a transport hub and jumping-off point for the central, western and northern Highlands, the Moray Firth coast and the Great Glen.

The Great Glen is a geological fault running in an arrow-straight line across Scotland from Fort William to Inverness. The glaciers of the last ice age eroded a deep trough along the fault line that is now filled by a series of lochs – Linnhe, Lochy, Oich and Ness. The glen has always been an important communication route – General George Wade built a military road along the southern side of Loch Ness in the early 18th century, and in 1822 the various lochs were linked by the Caledonian Canal to

create a cross-country waterway. The modern A82 road along the glen was completed in 1933 – a date that coincides neatly with the first modern sightings of the Loch Ness Monster (see the boxed text Strange Spectacle On Loch Ness, p328).

## INVERNESS

☎ 01463 / pop 55,000

Inverness, the primary city and shopping centre of the Highlands, has a great location astride the River Ness at the northern end of the Great Glen. In summer it overflows with visitors intent on monster hunting at nearby Loch Ness, but it's worth a visit in its own right for a stroll along the picturesque River Ness and a cruise on the Moray Firth in search of its famous bottlenose dolphins.

The city was probably founded by King David in the 12th century, but thanks to its often violent history few buildings of real age or historical significance have survived – much of the older part of the city dates from the period following the completion of the Caledonian Canal in 1822.

## Orientation

The broad and shallow River Ness, which flows a short 6 miles from Loch Ness into the Moray Firth, runs through the heart of the city. The city centre lies on the eastern bank, at the foot of the castle hill, with the bus and train stations next to each other a little to the north.

## Information

**Leakey's** (☎ 239947; Greyfriars Hall, Church St; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) An excellent second-hand bookshop with a good café.

**Main post office** (☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat) On Queensgate.

**New City Laundrette** (☎ 242507; 17 Young St; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) Charges £3 per load, £1.40 to dry; internet access for £1 per 20 minutes.

**Tourist office** (☎ 234353; www.visithighlands.com; Castle Wynd; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am–5pm Mon–Sat Apr & May, limited hr Nov–Mar) Bureau de change and accommodation booking service; also sells tickets for tours and cruises. Internet access for £1 per 20 minutes.

**Waterstone's** (☎ 714744; 50–52 High St; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon & Wed–Sat, 9.30am–5.30pm Tue, 10.30am–5pm Sun) The city's biggest bookshop.

## Sights & Activities

The hill above the city centre is topped by the picturesque Baronial turrets of **Inverness Castle**, a pink-sandstone confection dating from 1847 that replaced a medieval castle blown up by the Jacobites in 1746; it serves today as the Sheriff's Court. Between the castle and the tourist office is **Inverness Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 237114; Castle Wynd; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat), with wildlife dioramas, geological displays, period rooms with historic weapons, Pictish stones and a missable art gallery.

But save the museum for a rainy day – the main attraction in Inverness is a leisurely stroll along the river to the **Ness Islands**. Planted with mature Scots pine, fir, beech and sycamore, and linked to the river banks and each other by elegant Victorian footbridges, the islands make an appealing picnic spot. They're a 20-minute walk south of the castle – head upstream on either side of the river (the start of the Great Glen Way, see p327), and return on the opposite bank. On the way you'll pass the red-sandstone towers of **St Andrew's Cathedral**, dating from 1869, and the modern Eden Court Theatre, which hosts regular art exhibits, both on the west bank.

If the rain does come down, you could opt for a spot of retail therapy in the **Victorian Market**, a shopping mall that dates from the 1890s and has rather more charm than its modern equivalents.

## Tours

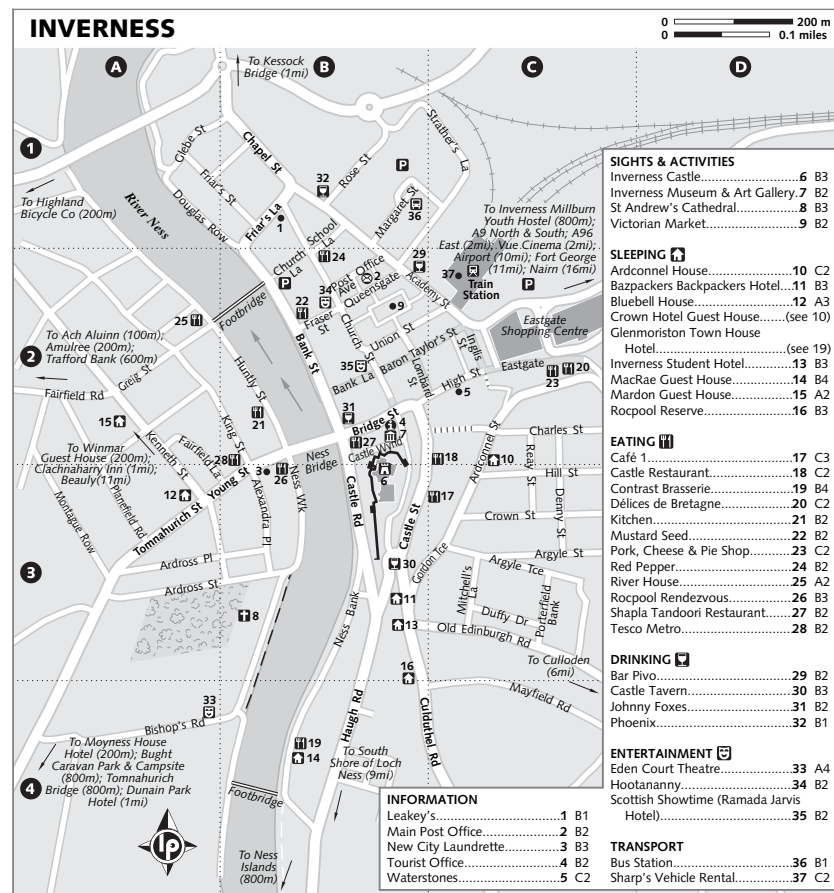
### WALKING TOURS

Guided walking tours of the city (adult/child £4/2) leave from outside the tourist office and last 1¼ hours; check with the tourist office for details.

**Davy the Ghost Tours** (☎ 07730 831069; adult/child £7.50/5) offers 1¼-hour tours led by an '18th-century ghost' in period costume. Expect tales of the city's horrific past, including ghosts, witches, murders and hangings. Tours depart at 7pm from the blackboard outside the tourist office.

### BUS & TAXI TOURS

**City Sightseeing** (☎ 07765 834825; adult/child £6/3; ☎ 10am–4pm) From late May to September, 45-minute, hop-on, hop-off bus tours around Inverness, departing from Bridge St near the tourist office once an hour. The ticket is also valid on a 1¼-hour route that takes in Culloden, Cawdor Castle and Fort George (every two hours, 9.30am to 3.30pm).



**Inverness Taxis** (☎ 222900; www.inverness-taxis.co.uk) A wide range of day tours to Urquhart Castle, Loch Ness and Culloden, and as far away as Skye. Fares per car (with up to four people) range from £40 (two hours) to £170 (all day).

**John O'Groats Ferries** (☎ 01955-611353; www.jog ferry.co.uk; ☎ departs 7.30am) From May to September, daily tours (lasting 13½ hours; adult/child £47/23.50) by bus and passenger ferry from Inverness to Orkney.

**CRUISES**

**Jacobite Cruises** (☎ 233999; www.jacobite.co.uk; Glenurquhart Rd) Cruise boats depart at 10.35am and 1.35pm from Tomnahurich Bridge for a 3½-hour trip along Loch Ness, including visits to Urquhart Castle and Loch Ness 2000 Monster Exhibition (adult/child £21/15 including admission fees). You can buy tickets at the tourist office

and catch a free minibus to the boat. Other cruises, from one to 6½ hours, available.

**Moray Firth Cruises** (☎ 717900; Shore St Quay, Shore St; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm Mar–Oct, plus 6pm cruises Jul & Aug) Offers 1½-hour wildlife cruises (adult/child £12.50/9) to look for dolphins, seals and bird life. Sightings aren't guaranteed, but the commentaries are excellent, and on a fine day it's good just being out on the water. Follow the signs to Shore St Quay from the far end of Chapel St or catch the free shuttle bus that leaves from the tourist office 15 minutes before sailings (every 1½ hours).

## Sleeping

Inverness has a good range of backpacker accommodation, and there are lots of guest-houses and B&Bs along Old Edinburgh Rd and Ardconnel St on the east side of the river,

and on Kenneth St and Fairfield Rd on the west bank; all are within 10 minutes' walk of the city centre.

The city fills up quickly in July and August, so either prebook your accommodation or get an early start looking for somewhere to stay.

## BUDGET

**Bught Caravan Park & Campsite** (☎ 236920; www.invernesscaravanpark.com; Bught Lane; tent site per person £6, campervan £13; ☹ Easter–mid-Oct) A mile southwest of the city centre near Tomnahurich Bridge, this camping ground is hugely popular with backpackers.

**our pick** **Bazpackers Backpackers Hotel** (☎ 717663; 4 Culduthel Rd; dm/tw £13/35; ☒) This may be Inverness's smallest hostel (30 beds), but it's the most popular with readers – a friendly, quiet place with a convivial lounge centred on a wood-burning stove, a small garden and great views, though the dorms can be a bit cramped. No email or online bookings.

**Inverness Student Hotel** (☎ 236556; www.scotlands-top-hotels.com; 8 Culduthel Rd; dm £13.50; ☒) Set in a rambling old house with comfy beds and views across the River Ness, this hostel has more of a party atmosphere than chilled out Bazpackers, and runs organised pub crawls in town. They're both a 10-minute walk from the train station, just past the castle.

**Inverness Millburn Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1127; Victoria Dr; dm £14-16; ☹ Apr–Dec; ☒) Inverness' modern 166-bed hostel is 10 minutes' walk northeast of the city centre. With its comfy beds and flashy stainless-steel kitchen, some reckon it's the best hostel in the country. Booking is essential, especially at Easter and in July and August.

## MIDRANGE

**Crown Hotel Guest House** (☎ 231135; www.inverness-guesthouse.info; 19 Ardconnell St; s/d £35/54; ☹) Similar in layout to the ever-popular Ardconnell next door, but child-friendly, the Crown has kind and helpful owners; two of the six bedrooms are family rooms (with a double, single, and folding bed in each), and there's a spacious lounge equipped with games consoles, DVDs and board games.

**Ach Aluinn** (☎ 230127; www.achaluinn.com; 27 Fairfield Rd; s/d £35/60; ☒) This large, detached Victorian house is bright and homely, and offers all you might want from a guesthouse – private bathroom, TV, reading lights, comfy beds with

two pillows each, and an excellent breakfast. Five minutes' walk from city centre.

**Ardconnell House** (☎ 240455; www.ardconnell-inverness.co.uk; 21 Ardconnell St; s £40-55, d £56-70) The six-room Ardconnell is another readers' favourite – a terraced Victorian house with six comfortable en-suite rooms, a dining room with crisp white table linen, and a breakfast menu that includes Vegemite for homesick Antipodeans. Kids under 10 not allowed.

**MacRae Guest House** (☎ 243658; joycemacrae@hotmail.com; 24 Ness Bank; s/d £45/64; ☒) This pretty, flower-bedecked Victorian house on the eastern bank of the river has smart, tastefully decorated bedrooms – one is wheelchair accessible – and vegetarian breakfasts are available. Minimum two-night bookings in July and August.

**our pick** **Trafford Bank** (☎ 241414; www.traffordbankguesthouse.co.uk; 96 Fairfield Rd; s £60-75, d £80-104; ☒) Lots of word-of-mouth rave reviews for Trafford Bank, an elegant Victorian villa that was once home to a bishop, just a mitre-toss from the Caledonian Canal and only 10 minutes' walk from the city centre. The luxurious rooms include fresh flowers and fruit, bathrobes and fluffy towels – ask for the Tartan Room, with its wrought-iron king-size bed and Victorian roll-top bath.

Other recommendations:

**Mardon Guest House** (☎ 231005; www.mardonguesthouse.co.uk; 37 Kenneth St; r per person £26-30; ☒) Friendly B&B, with six cosy rooms (all en suite), just five minutes' walk from the city centre.

**Bluebell House** (☎ 238201; www.bluebell-house.com; 31 Kenneth St; r per person £27-35; ☒) Warm and welcoming hosts, top breakfasts, close to city centre.

**Winmar Guest House** (☎ 239328; www.thewinmar.co.uk; 78 Kenneth St; s/d £35/70; ☒) Another readers' recommendation; spacious sandstone villa with comfortable lounge, and kippers, croissants and fry-up on the breakfast menu.

**Moyness House Hotel** (☎ 233836; www.moyness.co.uk; 6 Bruce Gardens; r per person £36-40; ☒) Elegant Victorian villa with a beautiful garden and peaceful setting, 10 minutes' walk southwest of the city centre.

**Amulree** (☎ 224822; amulree@btinternet.com; 40 Fairfield Rd; s/d £36/54) Comfortable, four-bedroom Victorian B&B less than 10 minutes' walk west of the city centre.

## TOP END

**Dunain Park Hotel** (☎ 230512; www.dunainparkhotel.co.uk; Dunain Park; d £138-198; ☒) This sumptuous country house hotel offers more traditional décor, with its Victorian four-poster

beds, Georgian-style furniture and Italian marble bathrooms, all set in beautiful wooded grounds just five minutes' stroll from the Caledonian Canal and River Ness. The hotel is a mile southwest of Inverness on the A82 to Fort William.

**our pick** **Rocpool Reserve** (☎ 240089; www.rocpool.com; Culduthel Rd; d £140-280; ☒) Boutique chic meets the Highlands in this swanky and sophisticated little hotel, where an elegant Georgian exterior conceals an oasis of contemporary cool. A gleaming white entrance hall lined with contemporary art leads to designer rooms in shades of chocolate, cream and coffee; expect lots of hi-tech gadgetry in the more expensive rooms, ranging from iPod docks to balcony hot tubs with aquavision TV.

Also recommended:

**Glenmoriston Town House Hotel** (☎ 223777; www.glenmoriston.com; 20 Ness Bank; d £130-170; ☒) Luxurious boutique hotel on the banks of the River Ness. Can organise golfing and fishing for guests.

## Eating

### BUDGET

**Pork, Cheese & Pie Shop** (☎ 237776; Eastgate; pies £1.50-2; ☹ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, to 4pm Mon) This deli sells a wide range of quality Scottish produce, but the main event as far as we're concerned is the great selection of delicious gourmet pies (to take away) – choose from lamb and rosemary, game and blackberry or Cumberland sausage and tomato (and many others), and munch contentedly on a park bench beside the river.

**Délices de Bretagne** (☎ 712422; 6 Stephen's Brae; mains £5-7; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) This café brings a little taste of France to the Highlands, with its Art-Nouveau décor and a menu of tasty *galettes* (savoury pancakes), crepes, Breton cider and excellent coffee.

**Shapla Tandoori Restaurant** (☎ 241919; 2 Castle Rd; mains £9-11; ☹ noon-2.30pm & 6-11pm) Head upstairs and choose a table by the window, where you can enjoy a curry with a splendid view over the river. You can get a three-course lunch for £6 from noon to 2.30pm Monday to Saturday.

Other good places for breakfast, coffee or a snack include the **café in Leakey's** (☎ 239947; Greyfriars Hall, Church St; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), the **Castle Restaurant** (☎ 230925; 41-43 Castle St; ☹ 9am-8.30pm) and **Red Pepper** (☎ 237111; 74 Church St; ☹ 9am-5.30pm).

Self-caterers can stock up at **Tesco Metro** (King St; ☹ 7.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun).

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Kitchen** (☎ 259119; 15 Huntly St; mains £8-14; ☹ noon-10pm) Opened by the people who own the Mustard Seed, this spectacular new glass-fronted restaurant offers good-value, informal dining with a view over the river. The menu focuses on fresh local produce and covers a range of old favourites, from battered cod with chips and mushy peas, to homemade burgers, to pasta and pesto with char-grilled veggies. Two-course lunch for £7 (noon to 3pm), and two-course early evening dinner for £10 (5pm to 7pm).

**Café 1** (☎ 226200; 75 Castle St; mains £9-16; ☹ noon-2pm & 6-9.30pm Mon-Sat; ☹) Café 1 is a friendly and appealing little bistro with candle-lit tables amid elegant blonde-wood and wrought-iron décor. There is an international menu based on quality Scottish produce, from succulent Aberdeen Angus steaks to grilled sea bass with red pesto and crispy leeks. Express menu (all mains £6) noon to 2pm daily, and 5.30pm to 6.45pm Monday to Friday; children's menu available.

**Mustard Seed** (☎ 220220; 16 Fraser St; mains £12-14; ☹ noon-10pm) This bright and bustling bistro brings a dash of big-city style to Inverness. The menu changes weekly, but focuses on Scottish and French cuisine with a modern twist. Grab a table on the upstairs balcony if you can – it's the best outdoor lunch spot in Inverness, with a great view across the river. It's best to book on weekends and any day in July and August.

**Rocpool Rendezvous** (☎ 717274; 1 Ness Walk; mains £11-17; ☹ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) Lots of polished wood, navy-blue leather and stainless-steel trim lend a nautical air to this relaxing bistro, which offers a Mediterranean-influenced menu that makes the most of quality Scottish produce, especially seafood (there's a special seafood menu on Friday). The two-course lunch (noon to 2.30pm Monday to Saturday) is £10.

**our pick** **Contrast Brasserie** (☎ 227889; 22 Ness Bank; 3-course dinner £25; ☹ noon-2.30pm & 5-10pm) Book early for what we think is the best restaurant in Inverness – a dining room that drips designer style, smiling professional staff, a jug of water brought to your table without asking, and truly delicious food – a light, crisp samosa filled with meltingly tender, spiced, shredded

lamb with a curry dipping sauce, followed by pan-fried whitefish with buttery shredded savoy cabbage and chanterelles; 10 out of 10. And at £7 for a two-course lunch, the value is incredible.

**River House** (☎ 222033; 1 Greig St; main £15-19; ☎ noon-2pm & 5.30-9.30pm Tue-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) The River House is an elegant restaurant of the polished wood and crisp white linen variety, serving the best of British venison, beef, lamb, duck and seafood. A two-course lunch is £11.50.

## Drinking

**Phoenix** (☎ 233685; 108 Academy St) This is the best of the traditional pubs in the city centre, with a mahogany horseshoe bar, a comfortable, family-friendly lounge, and good food at both lunchtime and in the evening. Real ales on tap include the rich and fruity Orkney Dark Island.

**Castle Tavern** (☎ 718718; 1-2 View Pl) Recently taken over by the owners of the Clachnaharry Inn, who have installed a tasty selection of real ales, this pub has a wee suntrap of a terrace out the front, a great place for a pint on a summer afternoon.

**Bar Pivo** (☎ 713307; 38-40 Academy St) This Czech-themed pub – half of the industrial-chic bar area is made up to look like a Prague metro station – offers no fewer than three Czech beers on draught, plus another six in bottles, as well as Scottish-made Belhaven real ales. Gay friendly.

**Johnny Foxes** (☎ 236577; 26 Bank St) Stuck beneath the ugliest building on the riverfront, Johnny Foxes is a big and boisterous Irish bar, with a wide range of food served all day and live music nightly.

**our pick Clachnaharry Inn** (☎ 239806; 17-19 High St; Clachnaharry) Just over a mile northwest of the city centre, on the bank of the Caledonian Canal just off the A862, this is a delightful old coaching inn (with beer garden out back) serving an excellent range of real ales.

## Entertainment

**Eden Court Theatre** (☎ 234234; www.eden-court.co.uk; Bishop's Rd) Following major renovations and extensions, the Eden Court has reopened as the Highlands' main cultural venue, theatre, art-house cinema and conference venue. It stages a busy programme of drama, dance, comedy, music, film and children's events, and has a good bar and restaurant. Pick up a

programme from the foyer or check its website; there's a box office (open 11.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Saturday) in Debenham's department store in the Eastgate Shopping Centre.

**Scottish Showtime** (☎ 830930; www.nessie.org.uk; Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Church St; tickets £16; ☎ 8.30pm Mon-Thu) From June to early September the Inverness Suite at the Ramada Jarvis Hotel stages 'Scottish Showtime', an evening of traditional Scottish music, song and dance aimed squarely at the tourist market. Tickets available from the tourist office.

**Hootananny** (☎ 233651; www.hootananny.com; 67 Church St) Hootananny is the city's best live-music venue, with traditional folk and/or rock music sessions nightly, including big-name bands from all over Scotland (and, indeed, the world). The bar is well stocked with a range of beers from the local Black Isle Brewery.

**Vue Cinema** (☎ 08712-240240; Inverness Retail & Business Park, Eastfield Way) This is a seven-screen multiplex cinema way out on the eastern edge of the city, just south of the A96 to Nairn.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Inverness airport** (☎ 01667-464000; www.hial.co.uk) is at Dalcross, 10 miles east of the city on the A96 towards Aberdeen. There are scheduled flights to London, Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stornoway, Benbecula, Orkney, Shetland and several other British airports. For more information, see p452.

### BUS

**National Express** (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.national.express.com) operates a direct overnight bus from London to Inverness (£20, 13 hours, one daily), with more frequent services requiring a change at Glasgow.

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) has direct connections to Glasgow (£19, four hours, hourly), Edinburgh (£19, 3½ to 4½ hours, hourly), Fort William (£10, two hours, five daily), Ullapool (£9, 1½ hours, two daily except Sunday), Portree on the Isle of Skye (£17, 3½ hours, five daily) and Thurso (£15, 3½ hours, two daily).

If you book far enough in advance, **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com) offers fares from as little as £1.50 for buses from Inverness to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and £6 to London.

Buses to Aberdeen (¾ hours, hourly) are operated by Stagecoach Bluebird, while Rapsons/Highland Country buses serve Aviemore (1¼ hours, three daily Monday to Friday) via Grantown-on-Spey, and also run on the Inverness–Fort William route.

### TRAIN

There is one direct train daily from London to Inverness (£139, eight hours); others require a change at Edinburgh (nine hours, five daily). There are several direct trains a day from Glasgow (£37, 3½ hours), Edinburgh (£37, 3¼ hours) and Aberdeen (£23, 2¼ hours), and three daily Monday to Saturday (one or two on Sunday) to Thurso and Wick (£15, two hours).

The line from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh (£17, 2½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) provides one of Britain's great scenic train journeys.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Rapsons Jet** (☎ 710555; www.thejet.co.uk) buses run from the airport to Queensgate in the city centre (£2.90, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes). A taxi costs around £13. There are plans for a rail link to the airport, but at the time of writing there was no scheduled opening.

### BICYCLE

Bike-rental outlets include **Highland Bicycle Co** (☎ 234789; 16a Telford St; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), which charges £12 a day.

### BUS

City services and buses to places around Inverness, including Nairn, Forres, the Culloden battlefield, Beauly, Dingwall and Lairg, are operated by **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 710555; www.rapsons.com). An Inverness Roverbus ticket costs £9 and gives unlimited travel for a day on buses serving Culloden, Cawdor Castle, Fort George and Nairn.

### CAR

The tourist office has a handy Car Hire leaflet. The big boys charge from around £40 per day, or you could try **Sharp's Vehicle Rental** (☎ 236694; www.sharpsreliablewrecks.co.uk; Inverness train station) for cheaper rates starting at £23 per day.

### TAXI

Call **Highland Taxis** (☎ 222222).

## AROUND INVERNESS Culloden Battlefield

The Battle of Culloden in 1746, the last pitched battle ever fought on British soil, saw the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the end of the Jacobite dream when 1200 Highlanders were slaughtered by government forces in a 68-minute rout. The duke of Cumberland, son of the reigning king George II and leader of the Hanoverian army, earned the nickname 'Butcher' for his brutal treatment of the defeated Scottish forces. The battle sounded the death knell for the old clan system, and the horrors of the Clearances soon followed. The sombre moor where the conflict took place has scarcely changed in the ensuing 260 years.

Kilted guides offer one-hour guided tours of the battlefield; an impressive new **visitor centre** (NTS; ☎ 01463-790607; www.nts.org.uk/culloden; adult/child £8/6.50 ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) was under construction at the time of research, and should be open by the time you read this.

Culloden is 6 miles east of Inverness. See left for details of bus services.

## Fort George

The headland guarding the narrows in the Moray Firth opposite Fortrose is occupied by the magnificent and virtually unaltered 18th-century artillery fortification of **Fort George** (HS; ☎ 01667-462777; adult/child £6.50/3.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar). One of the finest examples of its kind in Europe, it was established in 1748 as a base for George II's army of occupation in the Highlands – by the time of its completion in 1769 it had cost the equivalent of around £1 billion in today's money. The mile-plus walk around the ramparts offers fine views out to sea and back to the Great Glen. Given its size, you'll need at least two hours to do the place justice. The fort is off the A96 about 11 miles northeast of Inverness.

## Nairn

☎ 01667 / pop 11,000

Nairn is a popular golfing and seaside resort with a good sandy beach. The town has a **tourist office** (☎ 452763; 62 King St; ☎ Apr-Oct), banks with ATMs and a post office.

The most interesting part of Nairn is the old fishing village of **Fishtown**, down by the harbour. **Nairn Museum** (☎ 456791; Viewfield House; adult/child £3/50p; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat; ☎), a few minutes' walk from the tourist office, has displays on the history of Fishtown,

as well as on local archaeology, geology and natural history.

You can spend many pleasant hours wandering along the **East Beach**, one of the finest in Scotland.

The big event in the town's calendar is the **Nairn Highland Games** ([www.nairnhighlandgames.co.uk](http://www.nairnhighlandgames.co.uk)), held in mid-August. Also in August is the week-long **Nairn International Jazz Festival** ([www.nairnjazz.com](http://www.nairnjazz.com)). Contact the tourist office for details of both events.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Glebe End B&B** (☎ 451659; [www.glebe-end.co.uk](http://www.glebe-end.co.uk); 1 Glebe Rd; r per person £25-35; (P)) It's people as much as place that make a good B&B, and the owners here are all you could wish for – helpful and welcoming. The house is lovely too, a spacious Victorian villa with home-from-home bedrooms and a sunny conservatory where breakfast is served.

**Sunny Brae Hotel** (☎ 452309; [www.sunnybraehotel.com](http://www.sunnybraehotel.com); Marine Rd; s £92, d £98-130; (P)) Beautifully decked out with fresh flowers and pot plants, the Sunny Brae enjoys an enviable location with great views across the Moray Firth. The hotel restaurant specialises in Scottish produce cooked with continental flair, with dishes such as smoked haddock gratin, and braised shank of local lamb with ratatouille and risotto.

**Boath House Hotel** (☎ 454896; [www.boath-house.com](http://www.boath-house.com); Auldearn; s/d from £180/220; (P)) This beautifully restored Regency mansion, set in private woodland gardens 2 miles east of Nairn on the A96, is one of Scotland's most luxurious country house hotels, and includes a spa offering a range of holistic treatments, and a fine dining restaurant.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run hourly (less frequently on Sunday) from Inverness to Aberdeen via Nairn. The town also lies on the Inverness to Aberdeen railway line; there are five to seven trains a day from Inverness (£4.30, 20 minutes).

#### Cawdor

The 14th-century home of the Thanes of Cawdor, **Cawdor Castle** (☎ 01667-404615; adult/child £7.30/4.50; ☎ 10am-5.30pm May-mid-Oct) is reputedly the castle of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and was the scene of Duncan's murder in the play – a bit of poetic licence from the bard, since the central tower dates from the 14th century (the wings were 17th-century additions) and

*Macbeth* died in 1057. The castle is 5 miles southwest of Nairn.

**Cawdor Tavern** (☎ 01667-404777; bar meals £6-10) in the nearby village is worth a visit, though it can be difficult deciding what to drink as it stocks over 100 varieties of whisky. There's also good pub food, with tempting daily specials.

#### Brodie Castle

Set in 70 hectares of parkland, **Brodie Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01309-641371; adult/child £8/5; ☎ 10.30am-5pm daily Apr, Jul & Aug, Sun-Thu only May, Jun, Sep & Oct) has several highlights, including a library with more than 6000 peeling, dusty volumes. There are wonderful clocks, a huge Victorian kitchen and a 17th-century dining room with wildly extravagant moulded plaster ceilings depicting mythological scenes. The Brodies have been living here since 1160, but the present structure dates mostly from 1567, with many additions over the years.

The castle is 8 miles east of Nairn. Stage-coach Bluebird bus 305 from Inverness to Aberdeen stops at Brodie (45 minutes, hourly).

#### WEST OF INVERNESS

##### Beaulieu

☎ 01463 / pop 1160

Mary, Queen of Scots is said to have given this village its name in 1564 when she exclaimed, in French: *'Quel beau lieu!'* (What a beautiful place!). Founded in 1230, the red-sandstone **Beaulieu Priory** is now an impressive ruin; a small information kiosk next door has information on the history of the priory.

The central **Priory Hotel** (☎ 782309; [www.priory-hotel.com](http://www.priory-hotel.com); The Square; s/d £48/90; (P)) has bright, modern rooms and serves good bar meals. Another good place for lunch is the restaurant in the **House of Beaulieu** (☎ 784702; Station Rd; mains £5-7) shopping and visitor centre.

Buses 18 and 19 from Inverness run to Beaulieu (hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday), and the town lies on the Inverness-Thurso railway line.

#### Strathglass & Glen Affric

☎ 01456

The broad valley of **Strathglass** extends about 18 miles inland from Beaulieu, followed by the A831 road to **Cannich**, the only village in the area, where there's a grocery store and a post office.

Several long and narrow valleys lead west from Strathglass into an almost roadless wilderness. **Glen Affric**, one of the most beautiful

glens in Scotland, extends deep into the hills beyond Cannich. The upper reaches of the glen, now designated as Glen Affric National Nature Reserve, is a scenic wonderland of shimmering lochs, rugged mountains and native Scots pine, home to pine marten, wildcat, otter, red squirrel and golden eagle.

About 4 miles southwest of Cannich is **Dog Falls**, a scenic spot where the River Affric squeezes through a narrow, rocky gorge. A waymarked walking trail leads there easily from Dog Falls car park.

From the parking area and picnic site at the eastern end of **Loch Affric** there are several short walks along the river and the loch shore. The circuit of Loch Affric (10 miles, allow five hours) follows good paths right around the loch and takes you deep into the heart of some very wild scenery. Contact Inverness tourist office for more information.

It's possible to walk all the way from Cannich to Glen Shiel on the west coast (35 miles) in two days, spending the night at the remote Glen Affric Youth Hostel (see below).

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Glen Affric Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ bookings 0870 155 3255, no phone at the hostel; Allt Beithe, Glen Affric; dm £13.50; ☎ Apr-Oct) This remote and rustic hostel is set amid magnificent scenery at the halfway point of the cross-country walk from Cannich to Glen Shiel, 8 miles from the nearest road. Facilities are basic and you'll need to take all supplies with you. Book in advance.

**Kerrow House** (☎ 415243; [www.kerrow-house.co.uk](http://www.kerrow-house.co.uk); Cannich; s £44-60, d £54-70; (P)) This wonderful Georgian hunting lodge has bags of old-fashioned character – it was once the home of Highland author Neil M Gunn, and has spacious grounds with 3.5 miles of private trout fishing. It's a mile south of Cannich on the minor road along the east side of the River Glass.

**Tomich Hotel** (☎ 415399; [www.tomichhotel.co.uk](http://www.tomichhotel.co.uk); Tomich; s/d from £68/105; (P) ☎) About 3 miles southwest of Cannich on the southern side of the river, this Victorian hunting lodge has a blazing log fire, a Victorian restaurant, eight comfortable en-suite rooms and – a bit of a surprise out here in the wilds – a small, heated indoor swimming pool.

Other recommendations:

**Cannich Caravan Park** (☎ 415364; [www.highlandcamping.co.uk](http://www.highlandcamping.co.uk); Cannich; tent sites per person £4.50, plus per car £1)

**Glen Affric Backpackers** (☎ 415263; Charrein Lodge, Cannich; dm £11)

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 17 runs from Inverness to Cannich (one hour, three to five a day Monday to Friday, plus two on Saturday during school holidays) via Drumnadrochit.

#### BLACK ISLE

The Black Isle – a peninsula rather than an island – is linked to Inverness by the Kessock Bridge.

Rapsons/Highland Country buses run from Inverness to Fortrose and Rosemarkie (30 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday); most continue to Cromarty (55 minutes).

#### Fortrose & Rosemarkie

At **Fortrose Cathedral** you'll find the vaulted crypt of a 13th-century chapter house and sacristy, and the ruinous 14th-century south aisle and chapel. **Chanonry Point**, 1.5 miles to the east, is a favourite dolphin-spotting vantage point – there are one-hour **dolphin-watching cruises** (adult/child £10/7) departing from the harbour at Avoch (pronounced auch), 3 miles southwest.

In Rosemarkie, the **Groam House Museum** (☎ 01381-620961; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Easter & May-Sep, 2-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) has a superb collection of Pictish stones engraved with designs similar to those on Celtic Irish stones.

From the northern end of Rosemarkie's High St, a short but pleasant signposted walk leads you through the gorges and waterfalls of the **Fairy Glen**.

Once you've worked up a thirst, retire to the bar at the **Anderson Hotel** (☎ 01381-620236; Union St, Fortrose) to sample its range of real ales (including Belgian beers and Somerset cider) and more than 200 single malt whiskies.

#### Cromarty

☎ 01381 / pop 720

The Cromarty Firth, north of the Black Isle, is often dotted with huge offshore oil rigs lying at anchor; some are mothballed, others waiting for maintenance work at the Nigg Bay shipyards before being towed out to the North Sea.

The pretty village of Cromarty at the north-eastern tip of the Black Isle has lots of 18th-century stone houses, two stores, a post office and a bank with ATM.

The 18th-century **Cromarty Courthouse** (☎ 01381-600418; Church St; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) details the town's history using contemporary references. Kids will love the talking mannequins.

Nearby the courthouse is **Hugh Miller's Cottage** (NTS; ☎ 01381-600245; Church St; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 12.30-4.30pm daily Apr-Sep & Sun-Wed Oct), the thatch-roofed birthplace of Hugh Miller (1802-56), a local stonemason and amateur

#### ART & INSPIRATION: INSIDER TIPS FROM HIGHLAND ARTISTS

Erlend and Pamela Tait are artists who live and work near Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire. They recently moved back to the Highlands after several years living in Edinburgh. You can see their work at [www.erlendtait.com](http://www.erlendtait.com) and [www.pamelatait.co.uk](http://www.pamelatait.co.uk).

#### Has moving back to the Highlands been good for you as artists?

**Pam:** Moving up here has definitely been great for me as it has made me feel far more focused on my work. I think having so much open space around has really given my head the freedom and clarity it needs to create. Since moving back here my work has developed dramatically, which I think has been mainly due to focus I have been able to give, but I know that the plants, small flowers and patterns in the land have all been heavily influencing my work.

**Erlend:** Moving back up north has been invaluable. In Edinburgh I felt caged in by the buildings and the size of the city. I was concentrating on music by night (gigging and recording) and doing church window restoration throughout the country as the day job. I wanted to draw and paint again and needed to return to the Highlands to do this. I'm also designing far more stained glass now as opposed to restoring it.

#### What aspects of Scotland inspire you as artists?

**Pam:** The open landscape. What I love most about living up here is we can go anywhere in the car, even on a boring trip into town to get shopping, and I will always get blown away by the scenery. That to me is an endless supply of inspiration.

**Erlend:** I'm inspired, of course, by the rural landscape of the Highlands. However, my main inspiration comes from the folklore and fairy tales of the Black Isle where I grew up, and of Orkney where my family originates. One aspect of my work deals with where the physical landscape meets with mythology.

#### You are exhibiting in various galleries around Scotland – are there other artists on show whose work you especially admire?

**Erlend:** Michael Forbes, Kate Carruthers, Kate Leney and Paul Kershaw, among many others. I'm also a member of a small group who have a website at [www.highlandartists.co.uk](http://www.highlandartists.co.uk).

**Pam:** There's also Alex Main, Gerald Laing, Fin MacRae and Alex Dunn.

#### Are there any 'hidden corners' in your region, somewhere off the tourist trail, that you would recommend visitors should go and see?

**Erlend:** The Fairy Glen in Rosemarkie (p325) – carvings, locations and lore. And the Clottie Well near Munloch is a magical place where you hang a piece of your clothing to cure an ailment or bring you good luck. Generally, the Black Isle, Orkney, and the area around Glen Affric are my favourite places in Scotland. Although Mull's good too, and Skye...

**Pam:** Dogs Falls over Glen Affric way (p324). It's a beautiful drive there, just stunning, and there's great walks to do there too, but when you see the falls you are just looking at time gone by, carved in the stone by the power of the water – it's amazing, makes you feel all funny...

I really like the shop called Over the Rainbow in Portree (p386). It has the most amazing selection of clothes, handbags, jewellery, postcards, cushions, socks and other stuff. That actually doesn't make it sound that amazing but it really is! And we both love the Anderson Hotel in Fortrose (p325) – it just has the most amazing selection of whiskies and beers and it's a lovely pub to be in. I know if we lived in Fortrose it wouldn't be long before we had great big red toffee noses!

geologist who later moved to Edinburgh and became a famous journalist and newspaper editor. The Georgian villa next door is home to a museum celebrating his life and achievements.

From Cromarty harbour, **Ecoventures** (☎ 01381-600323; [www.ecoventures.co.uk](http://www.ecoventures.co.uk)) runs 2½-hour boat trips (adult/child £20/15) into the Moray Firth to see bottlenose dolphins and other wildlife.

## LOCH NESS

Deep, dark and narrow, Loch Ness stretches for 23 miles between Inverness and Fort Augustus. Its bitterly cold waters have been extensively explored in search of Nessie, the elusive Loch Ness monster, but most visitors see her only in cardboard-cutout form at the monster exhibitions. The busy A82 road runs along the northwestern shore, while the more tranquil and picturesque B862 follows the southeastern shore. A complete circuit of the loch is about 70 miles – travel anticlockwise for the best views.

### Activities

The 73-mile **Great Glen Way** ([www.greatglenway.com](http://www.greatglenway.com)) long-distance footpath stretches from Inverness to Fort William, where walkers can connect with the West Highland Way (see boxed text, p280). It is described in detail in *The Great Glen Way*, a guide by Jacquetta Megarry and Sandra Bardwell.

The Great Glen Way footpath shares some sections with the 80-mile **Great Glen Mountain Bike Trail**, a waymarked mountain-bike route that follows canal towpaths and gravel tracks through forests, avoiding roads where possible.

The climb to the summit of **Meallfuarvonie** (699m), on the northwestern shore of Loch Ness, makes an excellent short hill walk: the views along the Great Glen from the top are superb. It's a 6-mile round trip, so allow about three hours. Start from the car park at the end of the minor road leading south from Drumnadrochit to Bunloit.

### Drumnadrochit

☎ 01456 / pop 800

Seized by monster madness, its gift shops bulging with Nessie cuddly toys, Drumnadrochit is a hotbed of beastie fever, with two monster exhibitions battling it out for the tourist dollar.

The **Loch Ness Exhibition Centre** (☎ 450573; [www.loch-ness-scotland.com](http://www.loch-ness-scotland.com); adult/child £5.95/4; 🕒 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, to 6pm Jun & Sep, to 5.30pm Oct, 9.30am-5pm Easter-May, 10am-3.30pm Nov-Easter; 🇬🇧) is the better of the two Nessie-themed attractions, with a scientific approach that allows you to weigh the evidence for yourself, and featuring original footage of monster sightings plus exhibits of equipment used in the various underwater monster hunts.

The more homely **Original Loch Ness Monster Centre** (☎ 450342; [www.lochness-centre.com](http://www.lochness-centre.com); adult/child £5/3.50; 🕒 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5.30pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) shows a superficial 30-minute Loch Ness video (with multilingual headsets), but its main function is to sell you tacky Loch Ness monster souvenirs.

One-hour monster-hunting cruises, complete with sonar and underwater cameras, aboard the **Nessie Hunter** (☎ 450395; [www.lochness-cruises.com](http://www.lochness-cruises.com)), operate from Drumnadrochit. Cruises depart hourly from 9am to 6pm daily from Easter to December, and cost £10/6 for an adult/child.

### Urquhart Castle

Commanding a brilliant location with outstanding views (on a clear day), **Urquhart Castle** (HS; ☎ 450551; adult/child £6.50/3.25; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; 🇬🇧) is a popular Nessie-watching hot spot. A controversial new visitor centre (most of which is beneath ground level) includes a video theatre (with a dramatic 'unveiling' of the castle at the end of the film), displays of medieval items discovered in the castle, a huge gift shop and a restaurant. The site is often very crowded in summer.

The castle was repeatedly sacked and rebuilt over the centuries, but was finally blown up in 1692 to prevent the Jacobites from using it. The five-storey tower house at the northern point is the most impressive remaining fragment and offers wonderful views across the water.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Loch Ness Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 450807; [www.loch-ness-backpackers.com](http://www.loch-ness-backpackers.com); Coiltie Farmhouse, East Lewiston; dm/d/£12.50/30/45) This snug, friendly hostel housed in a cottage and barn has six-bed dorms, one double and a large barbecue area. It's about 0.75 miles from Drumnadrochit, along the A82 towards Fort William; turn left where you see the sign for Loch Ness Inn, just before the bridge.

### STRANGE SPECTACLE ON LOCH NESS

Highland folklore is filled with tales of strange creatures living in lochs and rivers, notably the kelpie (water horse) that lures unwary travellers to their doom. The use of the term 'monster', however, is a relatively recent phenomenon whose origins lie in an article published in the *Inverness Courier* on 2 May 1933, entitled 'Strange Spectacle on Loch Ness'.

The article recounted the sighting of a disturbance in the loch by Mrs Aldie Mackay and her husband: 'There the creature disported itself, rolling and plunging for fully a minute, its body resembling that of a whale, and the water cascading and churning like a simmering cauldron.'

The story was taken up by the London press and sparked off a rash of sightings that year, including a notorious on-land encounter with London tourists Mr and Mrs Spicer on 22 July 1933, again reported in the *Inverness Courier*:

It was horrible, an abomination. About 50 yards ahead, we saw an undulating sort of neck, and quickly followed by a large, ponderous body. I estimated the length to be 25 to 30 feet, its colour was dark elephant grey. It crossed the road in a series of jerks, but because of the slope we could not see its limbs. Although I accelerated quickly towards it, it had disappeared into the loch by the time I reached the spot. There was no sign of it in the water. I am a temperate man, but I am willing to take any oath that we saw this Loch Ness beast. I am certain that this creature was of a prehistoric species.

The London newspapers couldn't resist. In December 1933 the *Daily Mail* sent Marmaduke Wetherall, a film director and big-game hunter, to Loch Ness to track down the beast. Within days he found 'reptilian' footprints in the shoreline mud (soon revealed to have been made with a stuffed hippopotamus foot, possibly an umbrella stand). Then in April 1934 came the famous 'long-necked monster' photograph taken by the seemingly reputable Harley St surgeon Colonel Kenneth Wilson. The press went mad and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 1994, however, Christian Spurling – Wetherall's stepson, by then 90 years old – revealed that the most famous photo of Nessie ever taken was in fact a hoax, perpetrated by his stepfather with Wilson's help. Today, of course, there are those who claim that Spurling's confession is itself a hoax. And, ironically, the researcher who exposed the surgeon's photo as a fake still believes wholeheartedly in the monster's existence.

Hoax or not, there's no denying that the bizarre mini-industry that has grown up around Loch Ness and its mysterious monster since that eventful summer 75 years ago is the strangest spectacle of all.

**Loch Ness Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1138; dm £12.50-13.25; ☎ Apr-Sep) This hostel is housed in a big lodge overlooking Loch Ness, and many dorms have loch views. It's located on the A82 road, 13 miles southwest of Drumnadrochit, and 4 miles northeast of Invermoriston. Buses from Inverness to Fort William stop nearby.

**Gillyflowers** (☎ 450641; gillyflowers@cali.co.uk; s/d from £40/50; ☎ Mar-Oct; ♿) This B&B is a renovated 18th-century farmhouse on the southern edge of Drumnadrochit village, with two comfortable en-suite rooms with tartan-canopied beds. Walkers and cyclists are welcome.

**Borlum Farm Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 450220; tent/campervan sites per person £5; ☎ Mar-Oct) This campsite's 800m southeast of Drumnadrochit.

Near Drumnadrochit's village green are the pleasant **Glen Café Bar** (☎ 450282; mains £7-9) and the **Fiddler's Coffee Shop & Restaurant** (☎ 450678; mains £11-17). The coffee shop does cappuccino and croissants, while the restaurant serves traditional Highland fare, such as venison casserole, and a wide range of bottled Scottish beers.

### Getting There & Away

Scottish Citylink and Highland Country buses from Inverness to Fort William run along the shores of Loch Ness (six to eight daily, five on Sunday); those headed for Skye turn off at Invermoriston. There are bus stops at Drumnadrochit (£6, 30 minutes), Urquhart Castle car park (£6, 35 minutes) and Loch Ness Youth Hostel (£8, 45 minutes).

### FORT AUGUSTUS

☎ 01320 / pop 510

Fort Augustus, at the junction of four old military roads, was originally a government garrison and the headquarters of General George Wade's road-building operations in the early 18th century. Today it's a neat and picturesque little place, often overrun by tourists in summer.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 366367; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Sun Easter-Oct) in the central car park, and an ATM and bureau de change (in the post office) beside the canal.

### Sights & Activities

At Fort Augustus, boats using the **Caledonian Canal** are raised and lowered 13m by a 'ladder' of five consecutive locks. It's fun to watch, and the neatly landscaped canal banks are a great place to soak up the sun or compare accents with fellow tourists. The **Caledonian Canal Heritage Centre** (☎ 366493; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct), beside the lowest lock, showcases the history of the canal.

The **Clansman Centre** (☎ 366444; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct) has an exhibition on 17th-century Highland life, with live demonstrations of how to put on a plaid (the forerunner of the kilt) and how the claymore (Highland sword) was made and used. There is also a workshop where you can purchase handcrafted reproduction swords, dirks and shields.

The **Royal Scot** (☎ 366277; www.cruiselochness.com; ☎ 10am-4pm Mar-Oct, 2pm Sat & Sun only Nov & Dec) offers one-hour cruises (adult/child £9/5.25) on Loch Ness accompanied by the latest hi-tech sonar equipment so you can keep an underwater eye open for Nessie.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Fort Augustus Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 366618; www.campinglochness.co.uk; tent/campervan sites per adult/child £5.50/2.75; ☎ Apr-Sep; ♿) This campsite is just south of the village on the western side of the road to Fort William, and has a playhouse, sandpit and tree swing for the kids.

**Morag's Lodge** (☎ 366289; www.moragslodge.com; Bunnoich Brae; dm/tw/f £16/42/51; ♿) This large and well-run hostel is based in a big Victorian house with great views of Fort Augustus' hilly surrounds, and has a convivial bar with open fire. It's hidden away in the trees up the steep side road just north of the tourist office car park.

**Lorien House** (☎ 366736; www.lorien-house.co.uk; Station Rd; d £55-60) Lorien is a cut above your usual B&B – the bathrooms come with bidets and the breakfasts with smoked salmon, and there's a library of walking, cycling and climbing guides in the lounge.

**Lovat Arms Hotel** (☎ 0845 450 1100; www.lovatarms-hotel.com; Main Rd; d £110-270; ♿) Recently given a stylish and luxurious makeover, the bedrooms in this grand old hotel are spacious and elegantly furnished, while the lounge is equipped with a log fire, comfy armchairs and grand piano. Kids are allowed in the bar-restaurant, and a children's high tea is served 5.30pm to 8.30pm.

**Lock Inn** (☎ 366302; bar meals £5-11; ☎ food served noon-8pm) A superb little pub right on the canal bank, the Lock Inn has a vast range of malt whiskies and a tempting menu of bar meals that includes Orkney salmon, Highland venison and daily seafood specials; the house speciality is beer-battered haddock and chips.

### Getting There & Away

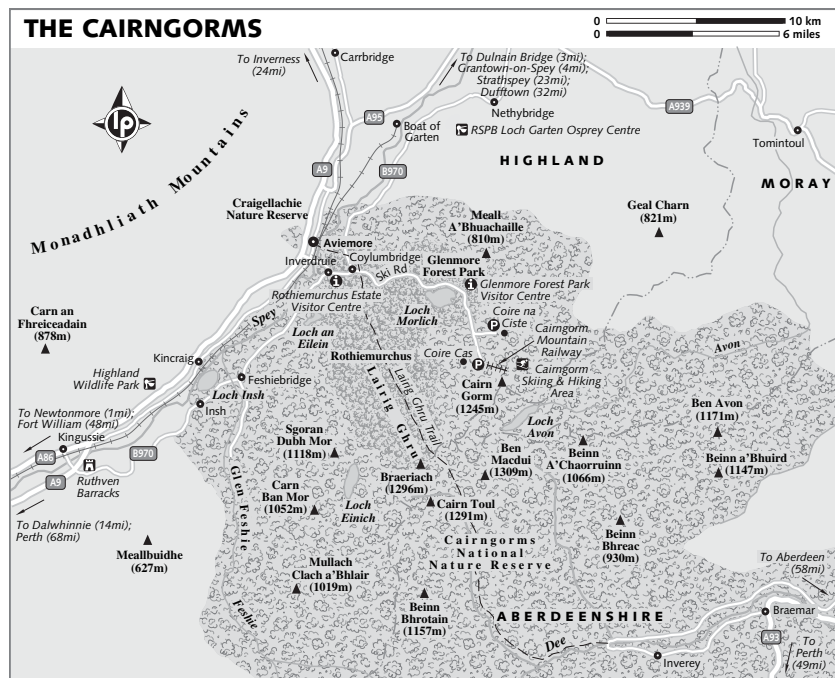
Scottish Citylink and Highland Country buses from Inverness to Fort William stop at Fort Augustus (£9, one hour, six to eight daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

## THE CAIRNGORMS

The **Cairngorms National Park** (www.cairngorms.co.uk) encompasses the highest landmass in Britain – a broad mountain plateau, riven only by the deep valleys of the Lairig Ghru and Loch Avon, with an average altitude of over 1000m and including five of the six highest summits in the UK. This wild mountain landscape of granite and heather has a sub-Arctic climate and supports rare alpine tundra vegetation and high-altitude bird species, such as snow bunting, ptarmigan and dotterel.

The harsh mountain environment gives way lower down to scenic glens softened by beautiful open forests of native Caledonian pine, home to rare animals and birds such as pine marten, wildcat, red squirrel, osprey, capercaillie and crossbill.

This is prime hill-walking territory, but even couch potatoes can enjoy a taste of the high life by taking the Cairngorm Mountain Railway (p334) up to the edge of the Cairngorm plateau.



## AVIEMORE

☎ 01479 / pop 2400

Aviemore is the gateway to the Cairngorms, the region's main centre for transport, accommodation, restaurants and shopping. It's not the prettiest town in Scotland by a long stretch – the main attractions are in the surrounding area – but when bad weather puts the hills off limits, Aviemore fills up with hikers, cyclists and climbers (plus skiers and snowboarders in winter) cruising the outdoor equipment shops or recounting their latest adventures in the cafés and bars. Add in tourists and locals and the eclectic mix makes for a lively little town.

## Orientation

Aviemore is on a loop off the A9 Perth–Inverness road; almost everything of note is to be found along the main drag, Grampian Rd. The train station and bus stop are towards the southern end.

The Cairngorm skiing area and mountain railway lie 9 miles east of Aviemore along the B970 (Ski Rd) and its continuation through Coylumbridge and Glenmore.

## Information

There are ATMs outside the Tesco supermarket, and currency exchange at the post office and the tourist office, all located on Grampian Rd.

**Old Bridge Inn** (☎ 811137; 23 Dalfaber Rd; per 30min £1; ☎ 11am–11pm Sun–Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) Internet access is available here.

**Tourist office** (☎ 810363; www.visitaviemore.com; The Mall, Grampian Rd; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Easter–Jun, Sep & Oct, limited hr Oct–Easter)

**Waterstone's** (☎ 810797; 87 Grampian Rd; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon & Wed–Sat, 9.30am–5.30pm Tue, 11am–5pm Sun) For books and maps.

## Sights

Aviemore's mainline train station is also home to the **Strathspey Steam Railway** (☎ 810725; www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk; Station Sq), which runs steam trains on a section of restored line between Aviemore and Broomhill, 10 miles to the northeast, via Boat of Garten. There are four or five trains daily from June to September, and a more limited service in April, May, October and December; a return ticket from

Aviemore to Broomhill is £9.50/4.75 per adult/child. An extension to Granttown-on-Spey is planned; in the meantime, you can continue from Broomhill to Granttown-on-Spey by bus.

The **Aviemore Highland Resort** (☎ 0845 223 6217; www.aviemorehighlandresort.com) to the west of Grampian Rd is a complex of hotels, chalets, restaurants, a swimming pool, gym, spa, computer games arcade and a huge, shiny shopping mall. The **swimming pool** (adult/child £6/3; ☎ 8am–8pm) and other leisure facilities are open to nonresidents.

## Activities

### WALKING

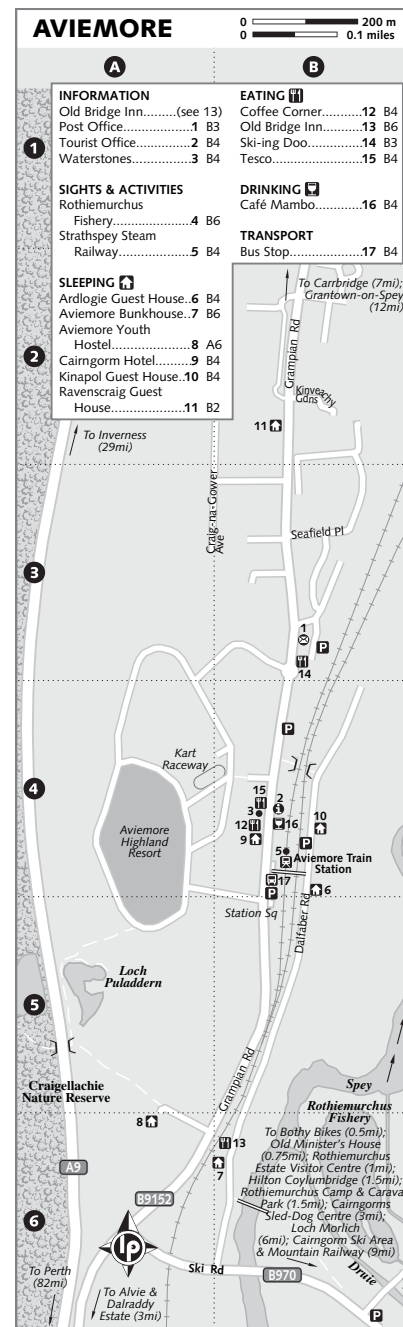
A trail leads west from Aviemore Youth Hostel and passes under the A9 into the **Craigellachie Nature Reserve**, a great place for short hikes across steep hill sides covered in natural birch forest. Look out for birds and other wildlife, including the peregrine falcons that nest on the crags from April to July. If you're very lucky, you may even spot a capercaillie.

The **Rothiemurchus Estate Visitor Centre** (☎ 812345; www.rothiemurchus.net; Inverdrue; admission free; ☎ 9am–5.30pm), a mile southeast of Aviemore along the B970, has a free *Visitor Guide & Footpath Map* detailing access to 50 miles of footpaths through the estate's beautiful Caledonian pine forests, including the wheelchair-accessible 4-mile trail around **Loch an Eilein**, with its ruined castle and peaceful pine woods. See also the boxed text Mountain Walks in the Cairngorms, p334.

## FISHING

**Rothiemurchus Fishery** (☎ 810703; Rothiemurchus Estate, Inverdrue) at the southern end of the village has a loch where you can cast for rainbow trout; buy permits (from £10 to £30 a day, plus £3.50 for tackle hire) at the Fish Farm Shop in Inverdrue. If you're a fly-fishing virgin, there's a beginner's package, including tackle hire, one hour's instruction and one hour's fishing, for £35. For experienced anglers, there's also salmon and sea trout fishing on the River Spey – a day permit costs around £20; numbers are limited, so it's best to book in advance.

You can also fish for brown trout and pike on **Loch Morlich** – permits are available from the warden's office at Glenmore Caravan & Camping Site (p334).





**SKIING**

Aspen or Val d'Isère it ain't, but with 19 runs and 23 miles of piste **Cairngorm Mountain** (☎ 861261; www.cairngormmountain.co.uk) is Scotland's biggest ski area. When the snow is at its best and the sun is shining you can close your eyes and imagine you're in the Alps; sadly, low cloud, high winds and horizontal sleet are more common. The season usually runs from December until the snow melts, which may be as late as the end of April, but snowfall here is unpredictable – in some years the slopes can be open in November, but closed for lack of snow in February.

A ski pass for one/two days is £28/54 for adults and £17/33 for those under 16. Ski or snowboard rental is around £19/13.50 per adult/child a day; there are lots of rental outlets at Coire Cas, Glenmore and Aviemore.

During the season the tourist office displays snow conditions and avalanche warnings. You can check the latest snow conditions on the **Ski Hotline** (☎ 0900 165 4655) and at <http://ski.visitscotland.com>, or tune into Cairngorm Radio Ski FM on 96.6MHz.

**OTHER ACTIVITIES**

If bad weather keeps you off the hills, there are other ways to get wet and dirty. Join a cross-country quad-bike trek at **Alvie & Dalraddy Estate** (☎ 810330; Dalraddy Holiday Park; per person £35), 3 miles south of Aviemore on the B9152 (call first), or if you prefer the smell of wet dog to the whiff of petrol, **Cairngorm Sled-Dog Centre** (☎ 07767 270526; www.sled-dogs.co.uk; Ski Rd) can take you on a two- to three-hour sled tour of local forest trails in the wake of a team of huskies (adult/child £50/35). The sleds have wheels, so snow's not necessary. There are also one-hour guided tours of the kennels (adult/child £8/4).

**Sleeping BUDGET**

**Rothiemurchus Camp & Caravan Park** (☎ 812800; info@rothie.net; Coylumbridge; tent/campervan sites per person £5.50) The nearest camping ground is this year-round park set among Scots pines at Coylumbridge, 1.5 miles along the B970.

**Aviemore Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1104; 25 Grampian Rd; dm £13-15; ♿ ♫) Offers upmarket hostelling in a spacious, well-equipped building, five minutes' walk from the village centre. There are four- and six-bed rooms, and the doors stay open until 2am.

**Aviemore Bunkhouse** (☎ 811181; www.aviemore-bunkhouse.com; Dalfaber Rd; dm/tw/f £14/34/48;

♿ ♫) This independent hostel, next door to the Old Bridge Inn, provides accommodation in bright, modern six- or eight-bed dorms, each with private bathroom, and one twin/family room. There's a drying room, secure bike storage and wheelchair-accessible dorms. From the train station, cross the pedestrian bridge over the tracks, turn right and walk south on Dalfaber Rd.

**Kinapol Guest House** (☎ 810513; www.kinapol.co.uk; Dalfaber Rd; s/d from £30/40; ♿) The Kinapol is a modern bungalow offering basic but comfortable B&B accommodation, across the tracks from the train station. All three rooms have shared bathrooms.

**MIDRANGE**

**Ravenscraig Guest House** (☎ 810278; www.aviemoreonline.com; Grampian Rd; r per person £30-38; ♿ ♫) Ravenscraig is a large, flower-bedecked Victorian villa with six spacious en-suite rooms, plus another six in a modern annexe at the back (one wheelchair accessible). It serves traditional and veggie breakfasts in an attractive conservatory dining room.

**Old Minister's House** (☎ 812181; www.theoldministershouse.co.uk; Rothiemurchus; r per person £35-42; ♿) This former manse dates from 1906 and has four rooms with a homely, country farmhouse feel. It's in a lovely setting amid Scots pines on the banks of the River Druie, just 0.75 miles southeast of Aviemore.

**Ardlogie Guest House** (☎ 810747; www.ardlogie.co.uk; Dalfaber Rd; s/d £35/60; ♿) Handy for the train station, the five-room Ardlogie has great views over the River Spey towards the Cairngorms, there's a boules pitch in the garden, and guests get free use of the local country club's pool, spa and sauna.

**Cairngorm Hotel** (☎ 810233; www.cairngorm.com; Grampian Rd; s/d £50/80; ♿ ♫) Better known as the Cairn, this long-established hotel is set in the fine old granite building with the pointy turret opposite the train station. It's a welcoming place with comfortable rooms and a determinedly Scottish atmosphere, all tartan carpets and stags' antlers. There's live music on weekends, so it can get a bit noisy – not for early-to-bedders.

**TOP END**

**Hilton Coylumbridge** (☎ 810661; www.coylumbridge.hilton.com; Coylumbridge; s/d from £85/110; ♿ ♫ ♿) This modern, low-rise Hilton, set amid the pine woods just outside Aviemore, is a won-

derfully child-friendly hotel, with bedrooms for up to two adults and two children, indoor and outdoor play areas, a crèche and a baby-sitting service.

**Eating & Drinking**

**Coffee Corner** (☎ 810564; 85 Grampian Rd; snacks £2-5; ☎ 9am-5pm) This cosy café is a good place to relax with newspapers and a steaming mug of coffee on a rainy day. It does good breakfasts, scones and ice-cream sundaes.

**Café Mambo** (☎ 811670; The Mall, Grampian Rd; mains £7-9; ☎ food served noon-8.30pm Mon-Thu, noon-7.30pm Fri & Sat, 12.30-8.30pm Sun) The Mambo is popular with snowboarders – a chill-out café in the afternoon, serving burgers, steaks and Tex-Mex grub, it turns into a clubbing and live-band venue in the evenings.

**Old Bridge Inn** (☎ 811137; 23 Dalfaber Rd; bar meals £9, mains £11-19; ☎ food served noon-2pm & 6-9pm, to 9.30pm Fri & Sat) The Old Bridge has a snug bar, complete with roaring log fire in winter, and a cheerful, chalet-style restaurant at the back serving quality Scottish cuisine.

**Ski-ing Doo** (☎ 810392; 9 Grampian Rd; mains £7-10, steaks £13-15; ☎ 1pm-late Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 5.30pm-late Sun; ♿) A long-standing Aviemore institution, the child-friendly Ski-ing Doo (it's a pun...oh, ask the waiter!) is a favourite with family skiers. An informal place offering a range of hearty, homemade burgers, chilli dishes and juicy steaks.

For campers and self-caterers there's a massive **Tesco** (Grampian Rd; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) supermarket in the middle of town. Head to **Rothiemurchus Larder** (☎ 810858; Rothiemurchus Estate Visitor Centre, Inverdrue), a mile along Ski Rd, for smoked trout, venison, pâté and other picnic delicacies.

**Getting There & Away BUS**

Buses stop on Grampian Rd; buy tickets at the tourist office. Scottish Citylink connects Aviemore with Inverness (£6.40, 45 minutes), Newtonmore (£6, 30 minutes), Pitlochry (£9, 1¼ hours), Perth (£13, two hours), Glasgow (£17, 3¼ hours) and Edinburgh (£17, 3¼ hours).

Buses 33 and 36 link Aviemore with Grantown-on-Spey (35 minutes, five daily weekdays, two Saturday) via Carrbridge (15 minutes), while bus 34 runs the Grantown-on-Spey–Aviemore–Cairngorm car park route (hourly, less frequent between Aviemore and Grantown-on-Spey on weekends).

**TRAIN**

There are direct train services to Glasgow/Edinburgh (£36, three hours, three daily) and Inverness (£9, 40 minutes, nine daily).

**Getting Around****BIKE**

Several places in Aviemore, Rothiemurchus Estate and Glenmore have mountain bikes for hire, including **Bothy Bikes** (☎ 810111; www.bothybikes.co.uk; Ski Rd), which charges £20 a day for a quality bike with front suspension and disc brakes.

**BUS**

Bus 34 links Aviemore to Cairngorm car park (hourly June to September and mid-December to April, three daily Monday to Friday May and October to mid-December) via Coylumbridge.

**AROUND AVIEMORE****Loch Morlich**

☎ 01479

Six miles east of Aviemore, Loch Morlich is surrounded by some 8 sq miles of pine and spruce forest that make up the Glenmore Forest Park. Its attractions include a sandy beach (at the east end) where you'll find the popular **Loch Morlich Watersports Centre** (☎ 861221; Glenmore; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct), which rents out Canadian canoes (£15.50 an hour), kayaks (£8), windsurfers (£15.50), sailing dinghies (£20) and rowing boats (£15).

The park's **visitor centre** (☎ 861220) has a small exhibition on the Caledonian forest and sells the *Glen More Forest Guide Map*, detailing local walks. The circuit of Loch Morlich (one hour) makes a pleasant outing; the trail is pram- and wheelchair-friendly.

The warden at the neighbouring **Cairngorm Reindeer Centre** (☎ 861228; Glenmore; adult/child £8/6) will take you on a tour to see and feed Britain's only herd of reindeer, who are very tame and will even eat out of your hand. Walks take place at 11am, plus another at 2.30pm from May to September, and 3.30pm Monday to Friday in July and August.

One of Britain's leading adventure sports training centres, **Glenmore Lodge** (☎ 861256; www.glenmorelodge.org.uk; Glenmore; r per person £22; ♿) offers courses in hill walking, rock climbing, ice climbing, canoeing, mountain biking and mountaineering. The centre's comfortable B&B accommodation is available to all, even

## MOUNTAIN WALKS IN THE CAIRNGORMS

The climb from the car park at the Coire Cas ski area to the summit of **Cairn Gorm** (1245m) takes about two hours (one way). From there, you can continue south across the high-level plateau to Ben Macdui (1309m), Britain's second-highest peak. This takes eight to 10 hours return from the car park and is a serious undertaking, for experienced and well-equipped walkers only.

The **Lairig Ghru trail**, which can take eight to 10 hours, is a demanding 24-mile walk from Aviemore through the Lairig Ghru pass (840m) to Braemar. An alternative to doing the full route is to make the six-hour return hike up to the summit of the pass and back to Aviemore. The path starts from Ski Rd, a mile east of Coylumbridge, and involves some very rough going.

Warning – the Cairngorm plateau is a sub-Arctic environment where navigation is difficult and weather conditions can be severe, even in midsummer. Hikers must have proper hill-walking equipment, and know how to use a map and compass. In winter it is a place for experienced mountaineers only.

if you're not taking a course, as is the indoor-climbing wall, gym and sauna.

**Cairngorm Lodge Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1137; Glenmore; dm £14; ☹ closed Nov–mid-Dec) is set in a former shooting lodge and enjoys a great location at the east end of Loch Morlich; pre-booking is essential.

**Glenmore Caravan & Camping Site** (☎ 861271; Glenmore; tents & campervans £8-17; ☹ closed Nov–mid-Dec) Campers can set up a base at this attractive loch-side site with pitches amid the Scots pines; rates include up to four people per tent/campervan.

## Cairngorm Mountain Railway

Aviemore's most popular attraction is the **Cairngorm Mountain Railway** (☎ 01479-861261; ☹ 10am-5pm May-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Dec-Apr), a funicular train that will whisk you to the edge of Cairngorm plateau (1085m) in just eight minutes (adult/child return £8.95/5.65). The bottom station is at the Coire Cas car park at the end of Ski Rd; at the top is an exhibition, a shop (of course) and a restaurant. Unfortunately, for environmental and safety reasons, you're not allowed out of the top station in summer, not even to walk down – you must return to the car park on the funicular. However, you can hike to the summit from the car park, and then go down on the railway. After 4.30pm the train only carries restaurant visitors.

The **Ptarmigan Restaurant** (☎ 01479-861336; 3-course dinner incl train fare £35; ☹ 6.30-10.30pm Fri & Sat Jul-Sep) in the top station is Britain's highest restaurant, and offers – weather permitting – a spectacular sunset dining experience. The menu combines traditional Scottish produce with contemporary style. Bookings essential.

## Kincaig & Glen Feshie

The **Highland Wildlife Park** (☎ 01540-651270; Kincaig; adult/child £10/7.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar, last entry 2hr before closing) near Kincaig, 6 miles southwest of Aviemore, features a drive-through safari park and animal enclosures that offer the chance to get close to rarely seen native wildlife, such as wildcat, capercaillie, pine marten, white-tailed sea eagle and red squirrel, as well as species that once roamed the Scottish hills but have long since disappeared, including wolf, lynx, wild boar, beaver and European bison. Visitors without cars get driven around by staff (at no extra cost).

At Kincaig the Spey widens into Loch Insh, home of the **Loch Insh Watersports Centre** (☎ 01540-651272; www.lochins.com; Kincaig), which offers canoeing, windsurfing, sailing, bike hire and fishing, as well as B&B accommodation from £24 per person. The food here is good, especially after 6.30pm when the loch-side café metamorphoses into a cosy restaurant.

Beautiful, tranquil **Glen Feshie** extends south from Kincaig, deep into the Cairngorms, with Scots pine woods in its upper reaches surrounded by big, heathery hills. The 4WD track to the head of the glen makes a great mountain-bike excursion (25 mile round trip).

**Glen Feshie Hostel** (☎ 01540-651323; glenfeshiehostel@totalise.co.uk; Glen Feshie; dm/tw £10/36), about 5 miles south of Kincaig, is a cosy, independent 14-bed hostel popular with hikers. Rates include bed linen and a steaming bowl of porridge to start the day.

## Carrbridge

☎ 01479 / pop 540

Carrbridge, 7 miles northeast of Aviemore, is a good alternative base for exploring the

region. It takes its name from the graceful old bridge (spotlit at night), built in 1717, over the thundering rapids of the Dulnain.

The **Landmark Forest Heritage Park** (☎ 841613; adult/child £9.75/7.60; ☹ 10am-7pm mid-Jul–Aug, to 6pm Apr–mid-Jul, to 5pm Sep-Mar; ☹), set in a forest of Scots pines, is a theme park with a difference; the theme is timber. The main attractions are the Ropeworx highwire adventure course, the Treetops Trail (a raised walkway through the forest canopy that allows you to view red squirrels, crossbills and crested tits), and the steam-powered sawmill.

**Carrbridge Bunkhouse Hostel** (☎ 841250; www.carrbridge-bunkhouse.co.uk; dm £8) is a cosy, wood-paneled forest cabin, complete with hot showers, drying room and sauna. It's just off the A938 at Bogroy, on the western edge of the village.

Highland Country bus 15 runs from Inverness to Carrbridge (45 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) and onwards to Granttown-on-Spey (20 minutes).

## Boat of Garten

☎ 01479 / pop 570

Boat of Garten is known as the Osprey Village because these rare and beautiful birds of prey nest nearby at the **RSPB Loch Garten Osprey Centre** (☎ 831694; Tulloch, Nethybridge; adult/child £3/50p; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Aug; ☹). The ospreys migrate here each spring from Africa and nest in a tall pine tree – you can watch from a hide as the birds feed their young. The centre is signposted about 2 miles east of the village.

**Fraoch Lodge** (☎ 831331; Deshar Rd; r per person £16-18; ☹) provides luxury hostel-style accommodation in a Victorian town house, in twin or family rooms. There's a lounge with an open fire and a self-catering kitchen; rates include a light breakfast.

The **Old Ferryman's House** (☎ 831370; s/d £26/52; ☹) is a charming cottage B&B on the riverbank on the far side of the bridge to the east of the village (follow the signs to Nethybridge), while the **Boat Hotel** (☎ 831258; www.boathotel.co.uk; s/d from £75/100; ☹) is a luxurious country hotel with a superb restaurant.

Boat of Garten is 6 miles northeast of Aviemore. The most interesting way to get here is on the Strathspey Steam Railway (p330).

## GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY

☎ 01479 / pop 2170

Grantown (pronounced granton) is an elegant Georgian town on the banks of the Spey, a

favoured haunt of anglers and the tweed cap and green wellies brigade. Thronged with tourists in summer, it reverts to a quiet backwater in winter. Most hotels can kit you out for a day of fly-fishing or put you in touch with someone who can. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 872773; 54 High St; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep), a bank, ATMs and a post office.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Brooklynn** (☎ 873113; www.woodier.com; Grant Rd; r per person £26-30; ☹) This beautiful Victorian villa features original stained glass and wood paneling, and seven spacious, luxurious rooms (all doubles have en suites). The food – dinner is available as well as breakfast – is superb, too.

**Culdearn House Hotel** (☎ 872106; www.culdearn.com; Woodlands Tce; r per person £55-75; ☹) Yet another plush Victorian villa (Grantown is full of them) with corniced ceilings, marble fireplaces and original wood panelling, this hotel has an excellent restaurant with a log fire and candle-lit tables. Note that children under 10 are not welcome.

**Coffee House & Ice Cream Parlour** (High St; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) A traditional family café that sells delicious homemade ice cream.

**Craggan Mill** (☎ 872288; Craggan Mill; mains £12-20; ☹ noon-2.30pm & dinner Wed-Mon) Housed in a restored 18th-century meal mill just south of town on the A95 towards Aviemore, the Craggan is strong on rustic atmosphere and friendly service. The menu doesn't disappoint either, with expertly prepared Scottish seafood, salmon, beef and venison, and desserts that include traditional clootie dumpling made to an old family recipe.

**Glass House** (☎ 872980; Grant Rd; mains £17-19; ☹ noon-1.45pm Wed-Sat, 7-9pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-2pm Sun) Set a block north of the main street, and looking more like a private home than a restaurant, this elegant but unpretentious place is famous for its fresh, seasonal menus that focus on local produce with dishes such as roast loin of pork with black pudding sauce, Scottish asparagus and wild mushrooms.

## Getting There & Away

For details of buses to Aviemore, see Getting There & Away in the Aviemore section. See also Getting Around on p317 for details of summer-only bus services from Granttown to Cullen, Elgin, Duftown, Tomintoul and Ballater.

## KINGUSSIE

☎ 01540 / pop 1410

The gracious old Spey-side town of Kingussie (pronounced kin-yewsie) sits at the foot of the great heather-clad humps known as the Monadhliath Mountains. The town is best known as the home of the excellent Highland Folk Museum.

### Sights

The open-air **Highland Folk Museum** (☎ 661307; www.highlandfolk.museum; Duke St; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Aug, to 4pm Mon-Fri Sep & Oct) comprises a collection of historical buildings and relics revealing many aspects of Highland culture and lifestyle. The museum is laid out like a village and has a traditional thatch-roofed Isle of Lewis *blackhouse* (low-walled stone cottage), a water mill and a 19th-century corrugated-iron shed for smoking salmon. Actors in period costume give demonstrations of traditional crafts. There's another section of the museum at nearby Newtonmore.

Perched dramatically on a river terrace and clearly visible from the main A9 road, the roofless **Ruthven Barracks** (admission free; ☹ 24hr) was one of four garrisons built by the British government after the first Jacobite rebellion of 1715 as part of a Hanoverian scheme to take control of the Highlands. Ironically, the barracks were last occupied by Jacobite troops awaiting the return of Bonnie Prince Charlie after the Battle of Culloden. Learning of his defeat and subsequent flight, they destroyed the barracks before taking to the glens. The ruins are spectacularly floodlit at night.

### Activities

The Monadhliath Mountains, northwest of Kingussie, attract fewer hikers than the nearby Cairngorms and make an ideal destination for walkers seeking peace and solitude. However, during the deer-stalking season (August to October), you'll need to check with the tourist office before setting out.

The recommended six-hour circular walk to the 878m summit of **Carn an Fhricheadain**, above Kingussie, begins north of the village. It continues to Pitman Lodge and along the Allt Mor river before climbing to the cairn on the summit. You can then follow the ridge east to the twin summits of Beinn Bhreac before returning to Kingussie via a more easterly track.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Lairds Bothy Hostel** (☎ 661334; www.thetipsylaird.co.uk; 68 High St; dm £10) Tucked behind the Topsy Laird pub in the main street, this good-value hostel has several comfortable three- and four-bed rooms, but suffers a bit with noise from the bar; ah well, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

**Homewood Lodge** (☎ 661507; www.homewood-lodge-kingussie.co.uk; Newtonmore Rd; r per person £25-30; ☐) This elegant Victorian lodge on the western outskirts of town offers double rooms with exquisite views of the Cairngorms – a nice way to wake up in the mornings!

**Hermitage** (☎ 662137; Spey St; r per person from £26; ☐) The five-bedroom Hermitage is a lovely old house with plenty of character, filled with Victorian period features. The lounge has a log fire, and there are good views of the Cairngorms from the garden.

**Osprey Hotel** (☎ 661510; www.ospreyhotel.co.uk; Ruthven Rd; r per person £30-35; ☐) Overlooking the town's flower-filled memorial gardens, this cosily old-fashioned Victorian town house has eight brightly refurbished rooms, and serves tasty home cooking at breakfast and dinner.

**Cross** (☎ 661166; www.thecross.co.uk; Tweed Mill Brae, Ardbroilach Rd; 3-course dinner £45; ☹ 7-9pm Tue-Sat, closed Jan; ☐) Housed in a converted water mill beside the Allt Mor burn, the Cross is one of the finest restaurants in the Highlands. The intimate, low-raftered dining room has an open fire and a patio overlooking the stream, and serves a daily-changing menu of fresh Scottish produce accompanied by a superb wine list. If you want to stay the night, there are eight stylish bedrooms to choose from. Double rooms cost between £130 and £190.

## Getting There & Away

There are Scottish Citylink buses from Kingussie to Perth (£11, 1¼ hours, five daily), Aviemore (£5, 25 minutes, five to seven daily) and Inverness (£9, one hour, six to eight Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

From the train station at the southern end of town there are trains to Edinburgh (£36, 2½ hours, seven a day Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Inverness (£9, one hour, eight a day Monday to Saturday, four Sunday).

## NEWTONMORE

☎ 01540 / pop 980

Three miles southwest of Kingussie lies the peaceful backwater of Newtonmore, home to the excellent **Highland Folk Museum** (☎ 661307;

adult/child £5/3; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm Apr-Aug, 11am-4.30pm Sep, 11am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct), a sister establishment to the museum of the same name in Kingussie. The Newtonmore site includes a reconstructed village with wattle and daub cottages, a school and a farm, and on-site demonstrations of woodcarving, spinning and peat-fire baking. You'll need two to three hours to make the most of a visit here.

Ten miles southwest of Newtonmore, on the A86 road towards Spean Bridge, is **Laggan Wolftrax** (☎ 01528-544786; www.basecampmtb.com; Strathmashie Forest, Laggan; admission free; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-9pm Thu, 9am-8pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun), a mountain-biking centre with purpose-built trails ranging from open-country riding to black-diamond downhill. Cycle hire is available on site, from £18 a day for an ordinary mountain bike to £35 for a full-suspension downhill rig.

## Sleeping

**Eagleview Guest House** (☎ 673675; www.eagleviewguesthouse.co.uk; Perth Rd; r per person £25-41; ☐) The family-friendly Eagleview is one of the nicest places to stay in the area, with beautifully decorated bedrooms, spacious bathrooms with power showers, and nice little touches like wall-mounted flat-screen TVs, cafetieres with real coffee on your hospital-ity tray and real milk rather than that yucky UHT stuff.

As a popular hill-walking base camp, Newtonmore is well endowed with budget accommodation, including the **Strathspey Mountain Hostel** (☎ 673694; www.newtonmore.com/strathspey; Main St; dm £12; ☐), a snug 19th-century cottage with two six-bunk dorms and two triple rooms.

## Getting There & Around

The Scottish Citylink buses that serve Kingussie (see p336) also stop at Newtonmore.

You can rent bikes (from £5 a day) from Strathspey Mountain Hostel.

## DALWHINNIE

The remote village of Dalwhinnie, bypassed by the main A9 road, straggles along its single street in glorious isolation amid wild and windswept scenery. From a distance you can spot the distinctive twin pagoda-shaped roofs of the malt kiln at **Dalwhinnie Distillery** (☎ 01540-672219; ☹ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 9.30am-4.30pm Sat Jun-Oct, plus 12.30-4.30pm Sun Jul & Aug), which offers guided tours for £5. It is the

highest in Scotland (326m above sea level) and one of the most remote.

Three or four trains a day on the Glasgow/Edinburgh to Inverness line stop at Dalwhinnie's tiny station, 600m from the distillery.

# WEST HIGHLANDS

This area extends from the bleak blanket-bog of the Moor of Rannoch to the west coast beyond Glen Coe and Fort William, and includes the southern reaches of the Great Glen. The scenery is grand throughout, with high and wild mountains dominating the glens. Great expanses of moor alternate with lochs and patches of commercial forest. Fort William, at the inner end of Loch Linnhe, is the only sizable town in the area.

## GLEN COE

Scotland's most famous glen is also one of the grandest and, in bad weather, the grimest. The approach to the glen from the east, watched over by the rocky pyramid of **Buachaille Etive Mor** – the Great Shepherd of Etive – leads over the Pass of Glencoe and into the narrow upper valley. The southern side is dominated by three massive, brooding spurs, known as the **Three Sisters**, while the northern side is enclosed by the continuous steep wall of the knife-edged Anonach Eagach ridge. The main road threads its lonely way through the middle of all this mountain grandeur, past deep gorges and crashing waterfalls, to the more pastoral lower reaches of the glen around Loch Achtriochtan and Glencoe village.

Glencoe was written into the history books in 1692 when the resident MacDonalds were murdered by Campbell soldiers in what became known as the Glencoe Massacre (see boxed text, p339).

## Activities

There are several short, pleasant walks around **Glencoe Lochan**, near the village. To get there, turn left off the minor road to the youth hostel, just beyond the bridge over the River Coe. There are three walks (40 minutes to an hour), all detailed on a signboard at the car park. The artificial lochan was created by Lord Strathcona in 1895 for his homesick Canadian wife Isabella and is surrounded by a North American-style forest.

A more strenuous hike, but well worth the effort on a fine day, is the climb to the **Loft Valley**, a magical mountain sanctuary still haunted by the ghosts of murdered MacDonalds (only 2.5 miles round trip, but allow three hours). A rough path from the car park at Allt na Reigh (on the A82, 6 miles east of Glencoe village) bears left down to a footbridge over the river, then climbs up the wooded valley between Beinn Fhada and Gearr Aonach (the first and second of the Three Sisters). The route leads steeply up through a maze of giant, jumbled, moss-coated boulders before emerging – quite unexpectedly – into a broad, open valley with an 800m-long meadow as flat as a football pitch. Back in the days of clan warfare, the valley – invisible from below – was used for hiding stolen cattle; its Gaelic name, Coire Gabhail, means ‘corrie of capture’.

The summits of Glen Coe’s mountains are for experienced mountaineers only. Details of hill-walking routes can be found in the Scottish Mountaineering Club’s guidebook *Central Highlands* by Peter Hodgkiss.

### East of the Glen

A few miles east of Glencoe proper, on the south side of the A82, is the car park and base station for the **Glencoe Mountain Resort** (☎ 01855-851226; www.glencoemountain.com), where commercial skiing in Scotland first began back in 1956. The Lodge Café-Bar has comfy sofas where you can soak up the view through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

The **chairlift** (adult/child £8/5; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Thu-Mon May-Sep) continues to operate in summer – there’s a grand view over the Moor of Rannoch from the top station – and provides access to a downhill mountain-biking track. In winter a lift pass costs £25 a day and equipment hire is £20 a day.

Two miles west of the ski centre, a minor road leads along peaceful and beautiful **Glen Etive**, which runs southwest for 12 miles to the head of Loch Etive. On a hot summer’s day the River Etive contains many tempting pools for swimming in, and there are lots of good picnic sites.

The remote **King’s House Hotel** (☎ 01855-851259; www.kingy.com; Glencoe; bar meals £6-10; 📍) claims to be one of Scotland’s oldest licensed inns, dating from the 17th century. It lies on the old military road from Stirling to Fort William (now followed by the West Highland Way; see boxed text, p280), and after the Battle of Cul-

oden it was used as a Hanoverian garrison – hence the name. The hotel serves good pub grub – it’s famous for its haggis, neeps and tatties (haggis, mashed turnip and mashed potato), and has long been a meeting place for climbers, skiers and hill walkers. The lounge has a picture window with a stupendous view of Buachaille Etive Mor, a great place to sit and admire the scenery with a glass of malt whisky. Single/double rooms are available for £28/60.

### Glencoe Village

☎ 01855 / pop 360

The little village of Glencoe stands on the south shore of Loch Leven at the western end of the glen, 16 miles south of Fort William. The small, thatched **Glencoe Folk Museum** (☎ 811664; Glencoe; adult/child £2/free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) houses a varied collection of military memorabilia, farm equipment, and tools of the woodworking, blacksmithing and slate-quarrying trades.

About 1.5 miles east of the village, towards the glen, is the **Glencoe Visitor Centre** (NTS; ☎ 811307; Inverigan; adult/child £5/4; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Mar; 📍). A modern facility with an ecotourism angle, the centre provides comprehensive information on the geological, environmental and cultural history of Glencoe via hitech interactive and audiovisual displays, and tells the story of the Glencoe Massacre (see boxed text, opposite) in all its gory detail.

At **Lochaber Watersports** (☎ 821391; www.lochaberwatersports.co.uk; West Laroch; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct) you can hire canoes (£10 an hour), rowing boats, sailing dinghies, mountain bikes (£15 a day) and even a 10m sailing yacht complete with skipper (£150 for three hours, up to five people).

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Invercoe Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 811210; www.invercoe.co.uk; Glencoe; tent sites per person £6, plus car £3, campervan £17) Our favourite official campsite in Glencoe, this place has great views of the surrounding mountains.

**Glencoe Independent Hostel** (☎ 811906; www.glencoehostel.co.uk; Glencoe; dm £9.50-12; 📍) This handily located hostel, just 10 minutes’ walk from the Clachaig Inn, is set in an old farmhouse with six- and eight-bed dorms, and a bunkhouse with another 16 bed spaces in communal, Alpine-style bunks. There’s also a cute little

### THE GLENCOE MASSACRE

Glen Coe – Gleann Comhann in Gaelic – is sometimes (wrongly) said to mean ‘the glen of weeping’, a romantic mistranslation that gained popularity in the wake of the brutal murders that took place here in 1692.

Following the Glorious Revolution of in 1688, in which the Catholic King James VII/II (VII of Scotland, II of England) was replaced on the British throne by the Protestant King William II/III, supporters of the exiled James – known as Jacobites, most of them Highlanders – rose up against William in a series of battles. In an attempt to quash Jacobite loyalties, King William offered the Highland clans an amnesty on condition that all clan chiefs take an oath of loyalty to him before 1 January 1692.

Maclain, the elderly chief of the MacDonalds of Glencoe, had long been a thorn in the side of the authorities. Not only was he late in setting out to fulfil the king’s demand, but he mistakenly went first to Fort William before travelling slowly through winter mud and rain to Inveraray, where he was three days late in taking the oath before the Sheriff of Argyll.

The secretary of state for Scotland, Sir John Dalrymple, decided to use the fact that Maclain had missed the deadline to punish the troublesome MacDonalds, and at the same time set an example to other Highland clans, some of whom had not bothered to take the oath.

A company of 120 soldiers, mainly from the Campbell territory of Argyll, were sent to the glen under cover of collecting taxes. It was a long-standing tradition for clans to provide hospitality to travellers and, since their commanding officer was related to Maclain by marriage, the troops were billeted in MacDonald homes.

After they’d been guests for 12 days, the government order came for the soldiers to ‘fall upon the rebels the MacDonalds of Glencoe and put all to the sword under 70. You are to have a special care that the Old Fox and his sons do upon no account escape’. The soldiers turned on their hosts at 5am on 13 February, killing Maclain and 37 other men, women and children. Some of the soldiers alerted the MacDonalds to their intended fate, allowing them to escape; many fled into the snow-covered hills, where another 40 people died of exposure.

The ruthless brutality of the incident caused a public uproar, and after an inquiry several years later Dalrymple lost his job. There’s a monument to Maclain in Glencoe village, and members of the MacDonald clan still gather here on 13 February each year to lay a wreath.

wooden cabin that sleeps up to three (£48 per night).

**Glencoe Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1122; Glencoe; dm £13.50-14.50; 📍 📍) The 62-bed Glencoe hostel is very popular with hikers, though the atmosphere is a little institutional. It’s a 1.5-mile walk from the village along the minor road on the northern side of the river.

**Crafts & Things** (☎ 811325; Glencoe; mains £3-5; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm; 📍) Just off the main road between Glencoe and Ballachulish, the coffee shop in this craft shop is a good spot for a lunch of homemade lentil soup with crusty rolls, ciabatta sandwiches, or just coffee and carrot cake. There are tables outdoors, and a box of toys to keep the little ones occupied.

**our pick Clachaig Inn** (☎ 811252; www.clachaig.com; Clachaig, Glencoe; bar meals £7-11; 📍) The Clachaig has long been a favourite haunt of hill walkers and climbers. As well as comfortable en-suite accommodation (single/double for £70/80),

there’s a smart, wood-panelled lounge bar, with lots of sofas and armchairs, mountaineering photos and climbing magazines to leaf through. Climbers usually head for the lively Boots Bar on the other side of the hotel – it has log fires, serves real ale and good pub grub, and has live Scottish, Irish and blues music every Wednesday and Saturday nights.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink buses run between Fort William and Glencoe (£5, 30 minutes, eight daily) and from Glencoe to Glasgow (£14, 2½ hours, eight daily).

### KINLOCHLEVEN

☎ 01855 / pop 900

Kinlochleven is hemmed in by high mountains at the head of the beautiful fjord-like Loch Leven, about 7 miles east of Glencoe village. The aluminium smelter that led to the

town's development in the early 20th century has now closed, and the opening of the Ballachulish Bridge in the 1970s allowed the main road to bypass the place completely. A ray of hope was provided by the opening of the West Highland Way, which now brings a steady stream of hikers through the village.

### Sights & Activities

The final section of the **West Highland Way** (see boxed text, p280) stretches for 14 miles from Kinlochleven to Fort William. The village is also the starting point for easier walks up the glen of the River Leven, through pleasant woods to the Grey Mare's Tail waterfall, and harder mountain hikes into the Mamores.

If you fancy trying your hand at ice-climbing, even in the middle of summer, head for the **Ice Factor** (☎ 831100; www.ice-factor.co.uk; Leven Rd; ☞ 9am-10pm Tue-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri-Mon), the world's biggest indoor ice-climbing wall; a 1½-hour beginner's course costs £55. There's also a rock-climbing wall, sauna and steam room, and a café and bar-bistro.

The **Aluminium Story Visitor Centre** (☎ 831663; Linnhe Rd; admission free; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Tue & Thu Oct-Mar) tells the interesting story of the British Aluminium Company smelter (which opened in 1908) and the Blackwater Reservoir hydroelectric scheme that powered it.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Blackwater Hostel** (☎ 831253; www.blackwaterhostel.co.uk; Lab Rd; dm/tw £13/29, tent sites per person £5) This 40-bed hostel has spotless, pine-panelled dorms with en-suite bathrooms and TV, and a level, well-sheltered camping ground.

**Lochleven Seafood Cafe** (☎ 821048; Loch Leven; mains £7-14; ☞ noon-9pm Wed-Sun) An outstanding and welcome addition to the region's restaurants, this place serves superb shellfish freshly plucked live from tanks – oysters on the half shell, razor clams, scallops, lobster and crab – plus a daily fish special, and a couple of non-seafood dishes. For warm summer days, there's an outdoor terrace with a view across the loch to the Pap of Glencoe, a distinctive conical-shaped mountain.

### Getting There & Away

Highland Country bus 44 runs from Fort William to Kinlochleven (50 minutes, eight to 10 a day Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) via Ballachulish and Glencoe village.

## FORT WILLIAM

☎ 01397 / pop 9910

Basking on the shores of Loch Linnhe amid magnificent mountain scenery, Fort William has one of the most enviable settings in the whole of Scotland. If it wasn't for the busy dual carriageway crammed between the town centre and the loch, and one of the highest rainfall records in the country, it would be almost idyllic. Even so, it's not a bad little town, and its easy access by rail and bus makes it a good place to base yourself for exploring the surrounding mountains and glens.

Magical Glen Nevis begins near the northern end of the town and wraps itself around the southern flanks of Ben Nevis (1344m) – Britain's highest mountain and a magnet for hikers and climbers. The glen is also popular with movie makers – parts of the films *Braveheart*, *Rob Roy* and *Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone* were filmed here.

### History

There is little left of the original fort from which the town derives its name – it was pulled down in the 19th century to make way for the railway. The first castle here was constructed by General Monk in 1654 and called Inverloch, but the meagre ruins by the loch are those of the fort built in the 1690s by General Mackay and named after King William II/III. In the 18th century it became part of a chain of garrisons (along with Fort Augustus and Fort George) that controlled the Great Glen in the wake of the Jacobite rebellions.

Originally a tiny fishing village called Gordonsburgh, the town took its present name with the opening of the railway in 1901, which, along with the building of the Caledonian Canal, helped it grow into a tourist centre. This has been consolidated in the last three decades by the huge increase in popularity of climbing, skiing, mountain biking and other outdoor sports.

### Orientation

The town straggles along the shore of Loch Linnhe for around 3 miles. The compact town centre is clustered around High St and Cameron Sq, 200m southwest of the train and bus stations, and is easy to get around on foot. Glen Nevis and Ben Nevis are 3 miles north of the town centre.

## Information

**Belford Hospital** (☎ 702481; Belford Rd) Opposite the train station.

**Lloyds TSB** (☎ 0845 303 0109; 6 Tweedale, High St; ☞ 9.30am-4pm Mon & Tue, 10am-4pm Wed, 9.30am-5.30pm Thu, 9.30am-5pm Fri) Twenty-four hour ATM.

**Nevisport** (☎ 704921; Airds Crossing, High St; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun) Outdoor equipment, guidebooks and maps. Internet access in downstairs bar (per 10 minutes £1).

**One World Internet Café** (☎ 07976 961695; 123 High St; per 15min £1; ☞ 9am-9pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar)

**Post office** (☎ 0845 722 3344; 5 High St)

**Royal Bank of Scotland** (☎ 705191; 6 High St; ☞ 9.15am-4.45pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-4.45pm Wed) Twenty-four hour ATM.

**Tourist office** (☎ 703781; www.visithighlands.com; Cameron Sq; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, limited hr Oct-Mar) Internet access (per 20 minutes £1).

### Sights

The small but fascinating **West Highland Museum** (☎ 702169; Cameron Sq; adult/child £3/50p; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, plus 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) is packed with all manner of Highland memorabilia. Look out for the secret portrait of Bonnie Prince Charlie – after the Jacobite rebellions all things Highland were banned, including pictures of the exiled leader, and this tiny painting looks like nothing more than a smear of paint until viewed in a cylindrical mirror, which reflects a credible likeness of the prince.

A tour of the **Ben Nevis Distillery** (☎ 702476; Lochy Bridge; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sat Easter-Sep & noon-4pm Sun Jul & Aug) makes for a warming rainy-day alternative to exploring the hills; the guided tour costs £4/2 per adult/child.

### Activities

From late May to early October, the **Jacobite Steam Train** (☎ 01463-239026; www.steamtrain.info) makes the scenic two-hour run from Fort William to Mallaig, departing from Fort William train station at 10.20am Monday to Friday (plus weekends in July and August), returning from Mallaig at 2.10pm (adult/child £28/16 day return). There's a brief stop at Glenfinnan station (p347), and you get 1½ hours in Mallaig (p348). Classed as one of the great railway journeys of the world, the route crosses the historic Glenfinnan Viaduct, made famous in

the *Harry Potter* films – the Jacobite's owners supplied the steam locomotive and rolling stock used in the film.

The **Lochaber Leisure Centre** (☎ 704359; Belford Rd; pool £2.30, wall £2.70; ☞ 7.15am-9pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-4pm Sat & Sun) has a swimming pool, indoor climbing wall, gym, sauna and other leisure facilities.

You can hike from the town centre to the summit of **Cow Hill** (287m) for a superb view of Ben Nevis, the Great Glen and Loch Linnhe. From the roundabout at the end of High St, head south along Lundavra Rd for 0.75 miles and turn left after Lochview Dr onto an unsurfaced road that leads to the TV mast at the top of the hill. Halfway to the summit another path descends on the far side of the hill into Glen Nevis, from where you can return to town along the road (6 miles total, allow 2½ hours).

For details of walking and cycling routes from Fort William to Inverness through the Great Glen, see p327.

### Tours

**Al's Tours** (☎ 700700; www.alstours.com) Taxi tours with driver-guide around Lochaber and Glencoe cost £80/195 for a half-/full day.

**Seal Island Cruises** (☎ 07766 138538) Operates 1½-hour (adult/child £10/8, three daily) and 3½-hour (adult/child £30/20, Friday only) wildlife cruises on Loch Linnhe departing from the Town Pier, visiting a seal colony and a salmon farm.

### Sleeping

It's best to book well ahead in summer, especially for hostels. See also the Glen Nevis Sleeping & Eating section (p344).

### BUDGET

**Calluna** (☎ 700451; www.fortwilliamholiday.co.uk; Heathercroft, Connachie Rd; dm/tw £12/28; ☐) Run by well-known mountain guide Alan Kimber and wife, Sue, the Calluna offers self-catering apartments geared to groups of hikers and climbers, but also takes individual travellers prepared to share; there's a fully equipped kitchen and an excellent drying room for your soggy hiking gear.

**Fort William Backpackers** (☎ 700711; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; Alma Rd; dm/tw £13.50/33; ☐) A 10-minute walk from the bus and train stations, this lively and welcoming hostel is set in a grand Victorian villa, perched on a hill side with great views over Loch Linnhe.

**Bank Street Lodge** (☎ 700070; www.bankstreetlodge.co.uk; Bank St; dm/tw £13/45) Part of a modern

hotel and restaurant complex, the Bank Street Lodge offers the most central budget beds in town, only 250m from the train station. It has kitchen facilities and a drying room.

**St Andrew's Guest House** (☎ 703038; www.standrewsguesthouse.co.uk; Fassifern Rd; r per person £20-25; (P)) Set in a lovely 19th-century building that was once a rectory and choir school, St Andrew's retains period features, such as carved masonry, wood panelling and stained-glass windows, and has six spacious bedrooms, some with stunning views – good value at the price.

#### MIDRANGE

**Glenloch Guest House** (☎ 702909; www.glenlochguesthouse.co.uk; Nevisbridge; r per person £35-38; (P)) Convenient for Glen Nevis, Ben Nevis and the

end of the West Highland Way, the Glenloch is a sprawling modern place, with 12 en-suite rooms set in a huge garden beside the River Nevis, a pleasant place to sit on summer evenings.

**Tornevis Guest House** (☎ 772868; www.tornevis.co.uk; Banavie; r per person £35-40; (M) Apr-Oct; (P)) This luxury B&B is set in a spacious modern house with a great location, enjoying an uninterrupted view of Ben Nevis. The friendly and knowledgeable owners have been in the business for many years, and can recommend local walks and attractions.

Other recommendations:

**No 6 Caberfeidh** (☎ 703756; www.6caberfeidh.com; 6 Caberfeidh, Fassifern Rd; r per person £20-30) Friendly B&B; vegetarian breakfast on request.

**Ashburn House** (☎ 706000; www.highland5star.co.uk; Achintore Rd; r per person £40-50; (P)) Grand Victorian villa; children under 12 not welcome.

#### TOP END

**Ourpick Grange** (☎ 705516; www.grangefortwilliam.com; Grange Rd; r per person from £52; (P)) An exceptional 19th-century villa set in its own landscaped grounds, the Grange is crammed with antiques and fitted with log fires, chaise longues and Victorian roll-top baths. The Turret Room, with its window seat in the turret overlooking Loch Linnhe, is our favourite.

**Lime Tree** (☎ 701806; www.limetreefortwilliam.co.uk; Achintore Rd; r per person £45-55; (P)) Much more interesting than your average guesthouse, this former Victorian manse overlooking Loch Linnhe is an 'art gallery with rooms', decorated throughout with the artist-owner's atmospheric Highland landscapes; there's also a dedicated gallery space with changing exhibitions. Recently extended and upgraded, it's now a bit overpriced perhaps, and – at the time of research at least – the restaurant can't be recommended, but the staff are helpful and enthusiastic and with a bit of feedback hopefully things will improve.

**Crolinnhe** (☎ 702709; www.crolinnhe.co.uk; Grange Rd; r per person £55-63; (P)) If you can't get into the Grange try the neighbouring Crolinnhe, another grand 19th-century villa, with loch-side location, beautiful gardens and sumptuous accommodation. A vegetarian breakfast is provided on request.

**Alexandra Hotel** (☎ 702241; www.strathmorehotels.com; The Parade; s/d from £59/99; (P)) A large, traditional, family-oriented hotel bang in the middle of town, the Victorian-era Alexandra has been refurbished with modern, business hotel-style rooms and is a comfortable and convenient choice, despite the tourist-oriented tartan-toned décor.

#### Eating

**Café 115** (☎ 702500; 115 High St; mains £5-10; (M) 9am-9.30pm; (♿)) This tidy little café covers all bases, from coffee and croissants at breakfast, to soup, sandwiches and nachos at lunchtime, to steak, seafood and vegetarian dishes at dinner. Babies and young children are made welcome.

**Grog & Gruel** (☎ 705078; 66 High St; mains £8-11; (M) bar meals noon-9pm, restaurant 5-9pm) The Grog & Gruel is a traditional-style, wood-panelled pub with an excellent range of cask ales from

regional Scottish and English microbreweries. Upstairs is a lively Tex-Mex restaurant, with a crowd-pleasing menu of tasty enchiladas, burritos, fajitas, burgers, steaks and pizza.

**Crannog Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 705589; Town Pier; mains £10-15; (M) noon-2.30pm & 6-9.30pm) The Crannog easily wins the prize for the best location in town – it's perched on the Town Pier, giving window-table diners an uninterrupted view down Loch Linnhe. Informal and unfussy, it specialises in fresh local seafood – there are three or four daily fish specials plus the main menu – though there are beef, poultry and vegetarian dishes too.

For takeaway grub, try the **Indian Garden** (☎ 705011; 88 High St; mains £7-12) for curries, or the **Highland Star** (☎ 703905; 155 High St; mains £5-9) for Chinese food.

Self-caterers can stock up at **Morrisons Supermarket** (An Aird; (M) 8.30am-8pm Mon-Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri, 8am-8pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun), next to the train station.

#### Drinking

**Fired Art Ceramicafé** (☎ 705005; 147 High St; (M) 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; (♿)) Enjoy what is probably the best coffee in town at this colourful café, or go for a hot chocolate, milk shake or smoothie; the kids can be kept busy painting their own coffee mugs in the pottery studio at the back.

**Ben Nevis Bar** (☎ 702295; 105 High St) The Ben Nevis, whose lounge bar enjoys a good view over the loch, exudes a relaxed, jovial atmosphere where climbers and tourists can work off leftover energy jiggling to live music (Thursday and Friday nights).

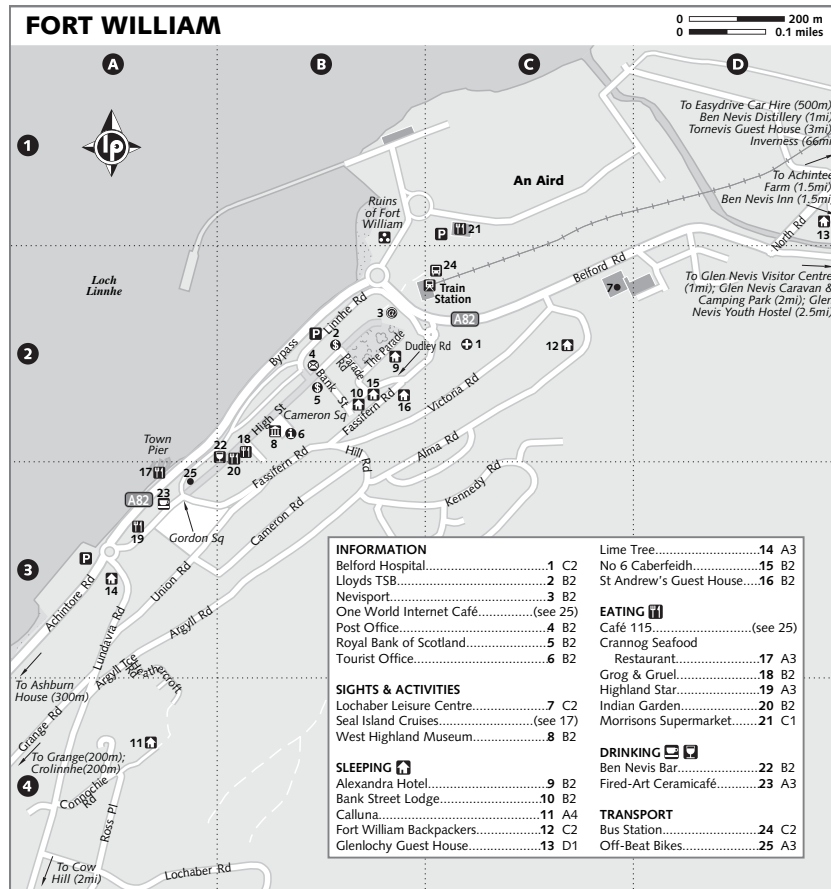
#### Getting There & Away

Fort William lies 146 miles from Edinburgh, 104 miles from Glasgow and 66 miles from Inverness.

#### BUS

Scottish Citylink buses link Fort William with Glasgow (£16, three hours, eight daily) and Edinburgh (£23, four hours, one daily direct, seven with a change at Glasgow) via Glencoe and Crianlarich, as well as Oban (£9.40, 1½ hours, four daily), Inverness (£10, two hours, five daily) and Portree on the Isle of Skye (£21, three hours, three daily).

Bus 500 runs to Mallaig (1½ hours, three daily weekdays, one on Saturday) via Glenfinnan (30 minutes) and Arisaig (one hour).



See also p301 for details of the minibus service between Oban, Fort William and Portree.

## CAR

The tourist office has a leaflet listing car-hire companies. **Easydrive Car Hire** (☎ 701616; www.easydrivescotland.co.uk; Unit 36a, Ben Nevis Industrial Estate, Ben Nevis Dr) has small cars from £32/175 a day/week, including tax and unlimited mileage, but not CDW.

## TRAIN

The spectacular West Highland line runs from Glasgow to Mallaig via Fort William. There are two or three trains daily from Glasgow to Fort William (£22, 3¼ hours), and four or five daily between Fort William and Mallaig (£9, 1½ hours). Travelling from Edinburgh (£36, five hours), you have to change at Glasgow's Queen St station.

There's no direct rail connection between Oban and Fort William – you have to change at Crianlarich, so it's faster to use the bus.

The overnight Caledonian Sleeper service connects Fort William and London Euston (£135 sharing a twin-berth cabin, 13 hours).

## Getting Around

The **Nevis'n'Coë Roverbus** (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) ticket (adult/child £6/4) gives unlimited travel for one day on bus services in the Fort William and Glencoe area (a three-day ticket costs £15/10).

There's a **taxi rank** (☎ 702545, 773030) on the corner of High St and The Parade.

**Off-Beat Bikes** (☎ 704008; 117 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) rents out mountain bikes for £15/10 for a day/half-day.

## AROUND FORT WILLIAM

### Glen Nevis

☎ 01397

You can walk the 3 miles from Fort William to scenic Glen Nevis in about an hour or so. The **Glen Nevis Visitor Centre** (☎ 705922; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct) is situated 1.5 miles up the glen, and provides information on walking as well as specific advice on climbing Ben Nevis.

From the car park at the far end of the road along Glen Nevis, there is an excellent 1.5-mile walk through the spectacular Nevis Gorge to **Steall Meadows**, a verdant valley dominated by a 100m-high bridal-veil waterfall. You can reach the foot of the falls by crossing the river on a wobbly, three-cable wire bridge –

one cable for your feet and one for each hand – a real test of balance!

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Glen Nevis Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 702191; www.glen-nevis.co.uk; tent £6.50, tent & car £10.50, campervan £11, plus per person £2.50; ☎ mid-Mar–Oct) This big, well-equipped site is a popular base camp for Ben Nevis and the surrounding mountains.

**Achintee Farm** (☎ 702240; www.achinteefarm.com; Achintee; dm £12.50-14, r per person £34) This attractive farmhouse offers excellent B&B accommodation and also has a small bunkhouse attached. It's just 100m from the Ben Nevis Inn, and ideally positioned for climbing Ben Nevis.

**our pick Ben Nevis Inn** (☎ 702240; www.ben-nevis-inn.co.uk; Achintee; dm £14; ☎ P) A good alternative to the youth hostel is this great barn of a pub (real ale and tasty bar meals available), with a comfy 24-bed hostel downstairs. It's at the Achintee start of the path up Ben Nevis, and only a mile from the end of the West Highland Way.

**Glen Nevis Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1120; Glen Nevis; dm £15.50; ☎ P) Large, impersonal and reminiscent of a school camp, this hostel is 3 miles from Fort William, beside one of the starting points for the tourist track up Ben Nevis.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

From late May to late September bus 42 runs from Fort William bus station up Glen Nevis to the youth hostel (10 minutes, every 80 minutes Monday to Saturday, four daily Sunday) and on to the Lower Falls 3 miles beyond the hostel (20 minutes).

## Nevis Range

The **Nevis Range ski area** (☎ 01397-705825; www.nevisrange.co.uk), 6 miles north of Fort William, spreads across the northern slopes of Aonach Mor (1221m). The gondola that gives access to the bottom of the ski area at 655m operates year-round from 10am to 5pm; a return trip costs £8.50/5 for an adult/child (15 minutes each way). At the top there's a restaurant and a couple of walking routes through nearby **Leannachan Forest**. During the ski season a one-day lift pass costs £24/14 per adult/child; a one-day package, including equipment hire, lift pass and four hours' instruction, costs £44.

A world championship **downhill mountain-bike trail** (☎ 11am-3pm mid-May–mid-Sep) – for experienced riders only – runs from the Snowgoose

restaurant to the base station; bikes are carried on a rack on the gondola cabin. A single trip with your own bike costs £10.25; including bike hire it's £25 to £50 depending on the bike. There are also 25 miles of waymarked mountain-bike trails in the nearby forest.

From late May to late September bus 42 runs from Fort William bus station to Nevis Range (15 minutes, every 80 minutes Monday to Saturday, four daily Sunday).

## Corpach to Loch Lochy

Corpach lies at the southern entrance to the Caledonian Canal, 3 miles north of Fort William; there's a classic picture-postcard view of Ben Nevis from the mouth of the canal. Nearby is the award-winning **Treasures of the Earth** (☎ 01397-772283; Corpach; adult/child £3.50/2; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Jul-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Dec & Feb-Jun) exhibition, a rainy-day diversion, with a great collection of gemstones, minerals, fossils and other geological curiosities.

A mile east of Corpach, at Banavie, is **Nep-tune's Staircase**, an impressive flight of eight

locks that allows boats to climb 20m to the main reach of the Caledonian Canal. The B8004 road runs along the west side of the canal to Gairloch at the south end of Loch Lochy, offering superb views of Ben Nevis; the canal towpath on the east side makes a great walk or bike ride (6.5 miles).

From Gairloch the B8005 continues along the west side of Loch Lochy to Achnacarry and the **Clan Cameron Museum** (☎ 01397-712480; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, 1.30-5pm Easter-Jun & Sep–mid-Oct), which records the history of the clan and its involvement with the Jacobite rebellions, including items of clothing that once belonged to Bonnie Prince Charlie.

From Achnacarry the Great Glen Way and Great Glen Mountain Bike Trail (p327) continue along the roadless western shore of Loch Lochy, and a dead-end minor road leads west along lovely **Loch Arkaig**.

There are a couple of backpacker hostels in Corpach: **Farr Cottage Lodge** (☎ 01397-772315; www.farrcottage.com; dm/tw £13/34; ☎ P) and **Blacksmiths Hostel** (☎ 01397-772467; www.highland-mountain-guides

## CLIMBING BEN NEVIS

As the highest peak in the British Isles, Ben Nevis (1344m) attracts many would-be ascensionists who would not normally think of climbing a Scottish mountain – a staggering (often literally) 100,000 people reach the summit each year.

Although anyone who is reasonably fit should have no problem climbing Ben Nevis on a fine summer's day, an ascent should not be undertaken lightly. Every year people have to be rescued from the mountain. You will need proper walking boots (the path is rough and stony, and there may be soft, wet snowfields on the summit), warm clothing, waterproofs, a map and compass, and plenty of food and water.

Here are a few facts to mull over before you go racing up the tourist track: the summit plateau is bounded by 700m-high cliffs and has a sub-Arctic climate; at the summit it can snow on any day of the year; the summit is wrapped in cloud nine days out of 10; in thick cloud, visibility at the summit can be 10m or less; and in such conditions the only safe way off the mountain requires careful use of a map and compass to avoid walking over those 700m cliffs.

The tourist track (the easiest route to the top) was originally called the Pony Track. It was built in the 19th century for the pack ponies that carried supplies to a meteorological observatory on the summit (now in ruins), which was manned continuously from 1883 to 1904.

There are three possible starting points for the tourist track ascent – Achintee Farm; the foot-bridge at Glen Nevis Youth Hostel; and, if you have a car, the car park at Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. The path climbs gradually to the shoulder at Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe (known as the Halfway Lochan), then zigzags steeply up beside the Red Burn to the summit plateau. The highest point is marked by a trig point on top of a huge cairn beside the ruins of the old observatory; the plateau is scattered with countless smaller cairns, stones arranged in the shape of people's names and, sadly, a fair bit of litter.

The total distance to the summit and back is 8 miles; allow at least four or five hours to reach the top, and another 2½ to three hours for the descent. Afterwards, as you celebrate in the pub with a pint, consider the fact that the record time for the annual Ben Nevis Hill Race is just under 1½ hours – up and down. Then have another pint.

.co.uk; dm £12.50; (P) – the latter is part of an outdoor activities centre and can organise courses in climbing, kayaking and other sports.

### Glen Spean & Glen Roy

Near Spean Bridge, at the junction of the B8004 and A82, 2.5 miles east of Gairloch stands the **Commando Memorial**, which commemorates the WWII special forces soldiers who trained in this area.

Four miles further east, at Roy Bridge, a minor road leads north up Glen Roy, which is noted for its intriguing, so-called **parallel roads**. These prominent horizontal terraces contouring around the hill side are actually ancient shorelines formed during the last ice age by the waters of an ice-dammed glacial lake. The best viewpoint is 3 miles up Glen Roy.

### ARDGOUR & ARDNAMURCHAN

The drive from Corran Ferry, 8 miles south of Fort William, to Ardnamurchan Point, the most westerly point on the British mainland, is one of the most beautiful in the western Highlands, especially in late spring and early summer when much of the narrow, twisting road is lined with the bright pink and purple blooms of rhododendrons. A car ferry (car £5.20, passenger free, 10 minutes, two an hour) crosses from the Fort William–Glencoe road to Ardgour at Corran Ferry.

The road clings to the northern shore of Loch Sunart, going through the pretty villages of **Strontian** – which gave its name to the element strontium, first discovered in ore from nearby lead mines in 1790 – and **Salen**.

The mostly single-track road from Salen to Ardnamurchan Point is only 25 miles long, but it'll take you 1½ hours each way. It's a dipping, twisting, low-speed roller coaster of a ride through sun-dappled native woodlands draped with lichen and fern. Just when you're getting used to the views of Morvern and Mull to the south, it makes a quick detour to the north for a panorama over the islands of Rum and Eigg.

### Sights

Midway between Salen and Kilchoan is the fascinating **Ardnamurchan Natural History Centre** (☎ 01972-500209; Glenmore; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, noon–5.30pm Sun Easter–Oct). Devised by local photographer Michael MacGregor, it tries to bring you face to face with the flora and fauna of the Ardnamurchan peninsula.

The Living Building exhibit is designed to attract local wildlife, with a mammal den that is occasionally occupied by hedgehogs or pine martens, an owl nest-box, a mouse nest and a pond. If the beasties are not in residence, you can watch recorded video footage of the animals. There's also live CCTV coverage of a golden eagle feeding site.

The scattered crofting village of **Kilchoan**, the only village of any size west of Salen, is best known for the scenic ruins of 13th-century **Mingary Castle**. The village has a **tourist office** (☎ 01972-510222; Pier Rd; ☎ Easter–Oct), a shop and a hotel.

The final 6 miles of road ends at the 36m-high, grey granite tower of **Ardnamurchan Lighthouse**, built in 1849 by the Stevensons to guard the westernmost point of the British mainland. The **Kingdom of Light Visitor Centre** (☎ 01972-510210; adult/child £3/1.70; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Oct), by Kilchoan, will tell you more than you'll ever need to know about lighthouses, with lots of hands-on stuff for kids; the guided tour (£6) includes a trip to the top of the lighthouse. But the main attraction here is the expansive view over the ocean – this is a superb sunset viewpoint, provided you don't mind driving back in the dark.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Salen Hotel** (☎ 01967-431661; www.salenhotel.co.uk; Salen; r per person from £30; (P)) A traditional Highland pub with views over Loch Sunart, the Salen Hotel has three rooms upstairs in the pub (with sea views) and another three rooms (each with en suite) in a modern chalet out the back. The cosy lounge has a roaring fire and comfy sofa, and the bar meals, including seafood, venison and other game dishes, are very good.

**Ardnamurchan Natural History Centre** (☎ 01972-500209; Glenmore; mains £4–8; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, noon–5.30pm Sun Easter–Oct) The café at this wildlife centre serves delicious lunches, ranging from fresh salads and sandwiches to daily specials such as prawns and crayfish tails.

**Inn at Ardgour** (☎ 01855-841225; www.ardgour.biz; Ardgour; mains £8–12; (P)) This pretty, whitewashed coaching inn, draped in colourful flower baskets, makes a great place for a lunch break or overnight stop. Single rooms cost between £45 and £65, doubles £60 to £100. The restaurant is set in the row of cottages once occupied by the Corran ferrymen, and serves traditional, homemade Scottish dishes.

You can camp at **Resipole Caravan Park** (☎ 01967-431235; www.resipole.co.uk; Resipole; tent sites £8, with car £13). Alternatively, the **Kilchoan House Hotel** (☎ 01972-510200; www.kilchoanhousehotel.co.uk; Kilchoan; s/d £38/65, tent sites per person £3; ☎ Mar–Oct; (P)) will let you pitch a tent in its garden; ask at the bar first.

### Getting There & Away

Bus 500 runs from Fort William to Lochailort and Acharacle, continuing to Salen and Kilchoan on request (3¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday). For details of ferries between Kilchoan and Tobermory, see p303.

### SALEN TO LOCHAILORT

The A861 road from Salen to Lochailort passes through the low, wooded hills of Moidart. A minor road (signposted Dorlin) leads west from the A861 at Shiel Bridge to a picnic area looking across to the picturesque roofless ruin of 13th-century **Castle Tioram**. The castle sits on a tiny island in Loch Moidart, connected to the mainland by a narrow strand that is submerged at high tide (the castle's name, pronounced *chee*-ram, means 'dry'). It was the ancient seat of the Clanranald Macdonalds, but the Clanranald chief ordered it to be burned (to prevent it falling into the hands of Hanoverian troops) when he set off to fight for the Jacobite side in the 1715 rebellion. At the time of research it was closed to the public while the owner and Historic Scotland wrangled over plans for its future.

As the A861 curls around the north shore of Loch Moidart you will see a line of five huge beech trees between the road and the shore. Known as the **Seven Men of Moidart** (two have been blown down by gales and replaced with saplings), they were planted in the late 18th century to commemorate the seven local men who accompanied Bonnie Prince Charlie from France and acted as his bodyguards at the start of the 1745 rebellion.

### ROAD TO THE ISLES

The 46-mile A830 from Fort William to Mallaig is traditionally known as the Road to the Isles, as it leads to the jumping-off point for ferries to the Small Isles and Skye. This is a region steeped in Jacobite history, having witnessed both the beginning and the end of Bonnie Prince Charlie's doomed attempt to regain the British throne.

The final section of this scenic route, between Arisaig and Mallaig, has recently been upgraded to a fast straight road. Unless you're in a hurry, opt for the old coastal road (signposted Alternative Coastal Route).

Between the A830 and the A87 far to the north lies Scotland's 'Empty Quarter', a rugged landscape of wild mountains and lonely sea lochs roughly 20 miles by 30 miles in size, mostly uninhabited and penetrated only by two minor roads (along Lochs Arkaig and Quoich). If you want to get away from it all, this is the place to go.

### Getting Around

The Fort William to Mallaig railway line has three or four trains a day, with stops at many points along the way, including Corpach, Glenfinnan, Lochailort, Arisaig and Morar.

**Cycles2U** (☎ 01687-450291, 07800 956913; cycles2u@btinternet.com) provides bicycle hire (adult/child £16/10 a day), and allows you to pick up and drop off the bikes at various points along the Fort William to Mallaig route.

### Glenfinnan

☎ 01397 / pop 100

Glenfinnan is hallowed ground for fans of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and its central shrine is the **Glenfinnan Monument**. This tall column, topped by a statue of a kilted Highlander, was erected in 1815 on the spot where the Young Pretender first raised his standard and rallied the clans on 19 August 1745, marking the start of the ill-fated campaign that would end in disaster 14 months later. The setting, at the north end of Loch Shiel, is hauntingly beautiful.

The nearby **Glenfinnan Visitor Centre** (☎ 722250; admission free; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am–5pm Easter–Jun, Sep & Oct; ☎) recounts the story of the '45, as the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 is known, when the prince's loyal clansmen marched and fought from Glenfinnan south to Derby, then back north to final defeat at Culloden.

A half-mile west of the visitor centre is **Glenfinnan Station Museum** (☎ 722295; adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 9am–5pm Jun–mid-Oct), a shrine of a different kind whose object of veneration is the great days of steam on the West Highland line. The famous 21-arch **Glenfinnan Viaduct**, just east of the station, was built in 1901, and featured in the movie *Harry Potter & the Chamber of Secrets*. A pleasant walk of around 0.75 miles leads to a viewpoint for the viaduct and the loch.



The **Glenfinnan Highland Games** (☎ 722324) are held on the Saturday nearest to 19 August.

Two converted railway carriages at Glenfinnan Station house the 10-berth **Sleeping Car Bunkhouse** (☎ 722295; dm £10) and the atmospheric **Dining Car** (☎ 722295; snacks £1-4; ☎ 9am-5pm Jun-mid-Oct), which serves scones with cream and jam and pots of tea, with superb views of the mountains above Loch Shiel.

**Prince's House Hotel** (☎ 722246; www.glenfinnan.co.uk; s £65, d £85-140; (P)) is a delightful old coaching inn from 1658; it's a good place to pamper yourself – ask for the spacious, tartan-clad Stuart Room if you want to stay in the oldest part of the hotel. Note that only dinner, bed and breakfast rates (£160 to £195 a double) are available on weekends from Easter to October. There's no documentary evidence that Bonnie Prince Charlie actually stayed here in 1745, but then again it was the only sizable house in Glenfinnan at that time, so...

## Arisaig & Morar

☎ 01687

The 5 miles of coast between Arisaig and Morar is a fretwork of rocky islets, inlets and gorgeous silver-sand beaches backed by dunes and machair, with stunning sunset views across the sea to the silhouetted peaks of Eigg and Rum. The **Silver Sands of Morar**, as they are known, draw crowds of bucket-and-spade holidaymakers in July and August, when the many camping grounds scattered along the coast are filled to overflowing.

Fans of the movie *Local Hero* still make pilgrimages to **Camusdarach Beach**, just south of Morar, which starred in the film as Ben's beach. To find it, look for the car park 800m north of Camusdarach camp site; from here, a wooden footbridge and a 400m walk through the dunes lead to the beach. (The village that featured in the film is on the other side of the country, at Pennan; see p259.)

**Loch nan Uamh** (pronounced loch nan oo-ah, meaning the loch of the caves) washes the southern shores of Arisaig; this was where Bonnie Prince Charlie first set foot on the Scottish mainland on 11 August 1745, on the shingle beach at the mouth of the Borrodale burn. Just 2 miles to the east of this bay, on a rocky point near a parking area, the **Prince's Cairn** marks the spot where he finally departed Scottish soil, never to return, on 19 September 1746.

## SLEEPING & EATING

There are at least a half-dozen camping grounds between Arisaig and Morar; all are open in summer only, and are often full in July and August, so book ahead. Some are listed on www.road-to-the-isles.org.uk.

**Camusdarach Campsite** (☎ 450221; www.camusdarach.com; South Morar; tent sites £9-14; ☎ Mar-Oct) A small and beautiful site with good facilities, only three minutes' walk from the *Local Hero* beach.

**Garramore House** (☎ 450268; South Morar; r per person £28-35; (S) (P)) Built as a hunting lodge in 1840, it served as a Special Operations Executive HQ during WWII. Today it's a wonderfully atmospheric, child- and pet-friendly guesthouse and restaurant (mains £9 to £12) set in lovely woodland gardens with great views to the Small Isles and Skye.

**Old Library Lodge & Restaurant** (☎ 450651; www.oldlibrary.co.uk; Arisaig; mains £10-15; ☎ food served noon-2.30pm & 6.30-9.30pm) The Old Library is a charming restaurant with rooms (£40 to £50 per person) set in converted 200-year-old stables overlooking the waterfront in Arisaig village. The lunch menu concentrates on soups and freshly made sandwiches, while dinner is a more sophisticated affair offering local seafood and lamb.

## Mallaig

☎ 01687 / pop 800

If you're travelling between Fort William and Skye, you may find yourself overnighting in the bustling fishing and ferry port of Mallaig. Indeed, it makes a good base for a series of day trips by ferry to the Small Isles and Knoydart. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 462170; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-3.45pm Sat, noon-3.30pm Sun), a post office, a bank with ATM and a **Co-op supermarket** (☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun).

The village's rainy-day attractions are limited to **Mallaig Heritage Centre** (☎ 462085; Station Rd; adult/child £1.80/free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun), which covers the archaeology and history of the region, including the heart-rending tale of the Highland Clearances in Knoydart.

The **MV Grimsay Isle** (☎ 07780 815158) provides entertaining, customised sea-fishing trips and seal-watching tours (book at the tourist office), while the **Brightwater** (☎ 07747 034767; www.seatour.co.uk) offers high-speed boat trips to Skye, the Small Isles and Mull.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Sheena's Backpacker's Lodge** (☎ 462764; www.mallaigbackpackers.co.uk; Harbour View; dm £13) Sheena's is a

friendly, 12-bed hostel in a lovely old house overlooking the harbour. On a sunny day the hostel's Tea Garden terrace café (mains £3 to £7), with its flowers, greenery and cosmopolitan backpacker staff, feels more like the Med than Mallaig, though at busy times service can be glacially slow. The speciality of the house is a pint-glass full of Mallaig prawns with dipping sauce.

**Springbank Guest House** (☎ 462459; www.springbank-mallaig.co.uk; East Bay; r per person £20; (P)) A little further around the bay than the Moorings, the Springbank is a traditional West Highland house with seven homely guest bedrooms, again with superb views across the harbour to the Cuillin of Skye.

**Moorings Guest House** (☎ 462225; mooringsguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk; East Bay; r per person £22-24; (S)) Just beyond the tourist office, this four-bedroom B&B has grand views over the harbour, not only from the upstairs bedrooms but also from the conservatory-style breakfast room, which doubles as a tearoom open to the public from Easter to September.

**ourpick Fish Market** (☎ 462299; Station Rd; mains £8-18; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm) There are at least half-a-dozen signs in Mallaig advertising 'seafood restaurant', but this bright, modern, bistro-style place next to the harbour is our favourite, serving simply prepared scallops with garlic and fennel, grilled langoustines with garlic butter, and fresh Mallaig haddock fried in breadcrumbs, as well as the tastiest *Cullen skink* (soup made with smoked haddock, potato, onion and milk) on the west coast. Upstairs is a tearoom (mains £4 to £5) that serves delicious hot roast-beef rolls with horseradish sauce, and scones with clotted cream and jam; it's open from 11am to 5pm.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 500 and Scottish Citylink coaches link Fort William to Mallaig (£5, 1¼ hours, one a day Monday to Friday) via Glenfinnan, Arisaig and Morar. See also Getting There & Away (p301) for details of the summer minibus service linking Portree, Mallaig, Fort William and Oban.

The beautiful West Highland railway links Mallaig to Fort William (£9, 1½ hours) and Glasgow (£25, 5¼ hours, four a day Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). In summer vintage steam trains (p341) operate between Fort William and Mallaig.

Ferries run from Mallaig to the Small Isles, the Isle of Skye and Knoydart; see the

transport information of these areas for more details.

## KNOYDART PENINSULA

☎ 01687 / pop 70

The Knoydart peninsula is the only sizable area in Britain that remains inaccessible to the motor car, cut off by miles of rough country and the embracing arms of Lochs Nevis and Hourn – Gaelic for the lochs of Heaven and Hell. No road penetrates this wilderness of rugged hills – **Inverie**, its sole village, can only be reached by ferry from Mallaig, or on foot from the remote road-end at Kinloch Hourn (a tough 16-mile hike).

The main reasons for visiting are to climb the remote 1020m peak of **Ladhar Bheinn** (pronounced *laar-ven*), which affords some of the west coast's finest views, or just to enjoy the feeling of being cut off from the rest of the world. There are no shops, no TV and no mobile phone reception (although there is internet access); electricity is provided by a private hydroelectric scheme – truly 'off the grid' living! For more information, see www.knoydart-foundation.com.

There are a couple of walkers' bunkhouses near Inverie, including the **Knoydart Foundation Bunkhouse** (☎ 462242; info@knoydart.org; Inverie; dm £14; (M)), 15 minutes' walk east of the ferry pier, and the atmospheric **Torrie Shieling** (☎ 462669; torrie@knoydart.org; Inverie; dm £15), a 20-minute walk to the west. You can camp for free on the Long Beach, a 10-minute walk east of the ferry, but there's no facilities.

The very basic **Barisdale Bothy** (☎ 01764-684946; www.barisdale.com; Barrisdale; dm £3, tent sites per person £1), 6 miles west of Kinloch Hourn on the footpath to Inverie, has sleeping platforms without mattresses – you'll need your own sleeping bag and foam mat.

The **Pier House** (☎ 462347; www.thepierhouseknoydart.co.uk; Inverie; r per person £35) is the first place you'll see when you walk off the ferry. A guesthouse and restaurant, it offers B&B in its four homely bedrooms, and is famous for its superb seafood, venison and vegetarian dishes.

The neighbouring **Old Forge** (☎ 462267; Inverie; mains £8-16; (S)) is listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as Britain's most remote pub. It's surprisingly sophisticated – as well as having real ale on tap, there's an Italian coffee machine for those wilderness lattes and cappuccinos, and the house special is a platter of

langoustines with aioli dipping sauce. In the evening you can sit by the fire, pint of beer in hand and join the impromptu *ceilidh* (an evening of traditional Scottish entertainment including music, song and dance) that seems to take place just about nightly.

### Getting There & Away

A passenger ferry operated by **Bruce Watt Cruises** (☎ 462320; www.knoydart-ferry.co.uk) links Mallaig to Inverie (£8/10 single/return, 45 minutes) twice daily Monday to Friday from mid-May to mid-September, and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only the rest of the year (no weekend ferries). Taking the morning boat gives you four hours ashore in Knoydart before the afternoon return trip.

## SMALL ISLES

The scattered jewels of the Small Isles – Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna – lie strewn across the silvery-blue cloth of the Cuillin Sound to the south of the Isle of Skye. Their distinctive outlines enliven the glorious views from the beaches of Arisaig and Morar.

Rum is the biggest and boldest of the four, a miniature Skye of pointed peaks and dramatic sunset silhouettes. Eigg is the most pastoral and populous, dominated by the miniature sugarloaf mountain of the Sgurr. Muck is a botanist's delight with its wildflowers and unusual alpine plants, and Canna is a craggy bird sanctuary made of magnetic rocks.

If your time is limited and you can only visit one island, choose Eigg; it has the most to offer on a day trip.

### Getting There & Away

The main ferry operator is **CalMac** (☎ 08705 650000; www.calmac.co.uk), which operates the passenger-only ferry from Mallaig to Eigg (£9.85 return, 1½ hours, five a week), Muck (£15.15 return, 1½ hours, four a week), Rum (£14.55 return, 1½ hours, five a week) and Canna (£18.30 return, two hours, four a week). You can also hop between the islands without returning to Mallaig, but the timetable is complicated and it requires a bit of planning – you would need at least five days to visit all four. A bicycle costs £2.20 extra on all routes.

From May to September **Arisaig Marine** (☎ 01687-450224; www.arisaig.co.uk) operates day

cruises from Arisaig harbour to Eigg (£16 return, one hour, six a week), Rum (£22 return, 2½ hours, two or three a week) and Muck (£17 return, two hours, three a week). The trips include whale watching, with up to an hour for close viewing. Sailing times allow four or five hours ashore on Eigg, two or three hours on Muck or Rum.

### ISLE OF RUM

☎ 01687 / pop 30

The Isle of Rum – the biggest and most spectacular of the Small Isles – was once known as the Forbidden Island. Cleared of its crofters in the early 19th century to make way for sheep, from 1888 to 1957 it was the private sporting estate of the Bulloughs, a nouveau riche Lancashire family who made their fortune in the textile industry. Curious outsiders who ventured too close to the island were liable to find themselves staring down the wrong end of a gamekeeper's shotgun.

The island was sold to the Nature Conservancy in 1957. Since then it has been a reserve noted for its deer, wild goats, ponies, golden and white-tailed sea eagles, and a 120,000-strong nesting colony of Manx shearwaters. Its dramatic, rocky mountains – known as the Rum Cuillin for their similarity to the peaks on neighbouring Skye – draw hill walkers and climbers.

**Kinloch**, where the ferry lands, is the island's only settlement; it has a small **grocery shop** (☎ 5-7.30pm), post office and public telephone. There's a **tearoom** (☎ 11am-4pm Apr-Sep) in the village hall. The hall itself is open at all times for people to shelter from the rain (or the midgets!). For more information see www.isleofrum.com.

### Sights & Activities

When George Bullough – a dashing, Harrow-educated cavalry officer – inherited Rum along with half his father's fortune in 1891, he became one of the wealthiest bachelors in Britain. Bullough blew half his inheritance on building his dream bachelor pad – the ostentatious **Kinloch Castle** (☎ 462037; adult/child £6/3; ☎ guided tours Mon-Sat, to coincide with ferry times). The bachelor shipped in pink sandstone from Dumfriesshire and 250,000 tonnes of Ayrshire topsoil for the gardens, and paid his workers a shilling extra a day to wear tweed kilts – just so they'd look more picturesque. Hummingbirds were kept in the greenhouses and alligators in

the garden, and guests were entertained with an orchestra, the Edwardian equivalent of a Bose hi-fi system. Since the Bulloughs left, the castle has survived as a perfect time capsule of upper-class Edwardian eccentricity. The guided tour should not be missed.

The only part of the island that still belongs to the Bullough family is the **Bullough Mausoleum** in Glen Harris, a miniature Greek temple that wouldn't look out of place on the Acropolis; Lady Bullough was laid to rest here alongside her husband and father-in-law in 1967, having died at the age of 98.

There's some great coastal and mountain walking on the island, including a couple of easy, waymarked **nature trails** in the woods around Kinloch. Glen Harris is a 10-mile round trip from Kinloch, on a rough 4WD track – allow four to five hours' walking. The climb to the island's highest point, **Askival** (812m), is a strenuous hike and involves a bit of rock scrambling (allow six hours for the round trip from Kinloch).

### Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation on Rum is strictly limited, and if you want to stay overnight on the island, you have to contact the **reserve office** (☎ 462026) in advance.

**Kinloch Campsite** (tent sites per person £3) Near the castle, this is the only place on the island where camping is allowed. The only facilities are toilets and a water supply, and there's not much in the way of level ground! Book in advance with the reserve office. Wild camping in the rest of the island is allowed, but check with the reserve office first for advice on avoiding nesting areas and other wildlife that might suffer from disturbance.

**Kinloch Castle Hostel** (☎ 462037; dm/d £14/55; ☎ Mar-Oct) The castle has 45 hostel beds and four double bedrooms in its rear wing. There's also a small restaurant offering a cooked breakfast (£7) and dinner (£13.50) to guests and nonguests alike.

### ISLE OF EIGG

☎ 01687 / pop 70

The Isle of Eigg made history in 1997 when it became the first Highland estate to be bought out by its inhabitants. The island is now owned and managed by the **Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust** (www.isleofeigg.org), a partnership among the islanders, Highland Council and the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

The ferry landing is at Galmisdale in the south. **An Laimhrig** (☎ 482432), the building above the pier, houses a post office, grocery store, craft shop and tearoom. You can hire bikes here, too.

### Activities

The island takes its name from the Old Norse *egg* (edge), a reference to the **Sgurr of Eigg** (393m), an impressive mini-mountain that towers over Galmisdale. Ringed by vertical cliffs on three sides, it's composed of pitch-stone lava with columnar jointing similar to that seen on the Isle of Staffa and at the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland.

The climb to the summit (4.5 miles round trip; allow three to four hours) begins on the stony road leading up from the pier, which continues uphill through the woods to a red-roofed cottage. Go through the gate to the right of the cottage and turn left; just 20m along the road a cairn on the right marks the start of a boggy footpath that leads over the eastern shoulder of the Sgurr, then traverses beneath the northern cliffs until it makes its way up onto the summit ridge.

On a fine day the views from the top are magnificent – Rum and Skye to the north, Muck and Coll to the south, Ardnamurchan Lighthouse to the southeast and Ben Nevis shouldering above the eastern horizon. Take binoculars – on a calm summer's day there's a good chance of seeing minke whales feeding down below in the Sound of Muck.

A shorter walk (2 miles; allow 1½ hours round trip, and bring a torch) leads west from the pier to the spooky and claustrophobic **Uamh Fraing** (Massacre Cave). Start as for the Sgurr of Eigg, but 800m from the pier turn left through a gate and into a field. Follow the 4WD track and fork left before a white cottage to pass below it. A footpath continues across the fields to reach a small gate in a fence; go through it and descend a ridge towards the shore.

The cave entrance is tucked inconspicuously down to the left of the ridge. The entrance is tiny – almost a hands-and-knees job – but the cave opens out inside and runs a long way back. Go right to the back, turn off your torch, and imagine the cave packed shoulder to shoulder with terrified men, women and children. Then imagine the panic as your enemies start piling firewood into the entrance. Almost the entire population of Eigg – around

400 people – sought refuge in this cave when the MacLeods of Skye raided the island in 1577. In an act of inhuman cruelty, the raiders lit a fire in the narrow entrance and everyone inside died of asphyxiation. There are more than a few ghosts floating around in here.

Other good walks are to the deserted crofts of **Gruin** on the southwest coast (5 miles, two hours round trip), and north to Laig Beach with its famous **singing sands** – the sand makes a squeaking noise when you walk on it (8 miles, three hours return). You can get more information on island walks from the craft shop in An Laimhrig.

### Sleeping & Eating

All accommodation should be booked in advance. For a full listing of self-catering accommodation, see [www.isleofeigg.org](http://www.isleofeigg.org).

**Glebe Barn** (☎ 482417; [www.glebebarn.co.uk](http://www.glebebarn.co.uk); Galmisdale; dm/tw £12/26) The Glebe has excellent bunkhouse accommodation – a smart, maple-floored lounge with central fireplace, modern kitchen, laundry, drying room, and bright, clean dorms and bedrooms.

**Sandavore Bothy** (☎ 482480; [suehollands@talk21.com](mailto:suehollands@talk21.com); Sandavore; per night/week £25/150) This tiny, one-room bothy, a 15-minute walk from the pier, has space for four people in one double bed and two bunk beds. It's a real Hebridean experience – accessible only on foot, no electricity (just gaslight and candles), cold running water only and outside toilet.

**An Laimhrig** (☎ 482416; [www.isleofeigg.org](http://www.isleofeigg.org); Galmisdale) There's a good café here. The neighbouring craft shop takes fees for camping near the head of the bay at Galmisdale (£3 a tent); you can use the showers and toilets at the pier.

You can also camp at **Sue Holland's Croft** (☎ 482480; [suehollands@talk21.com](mailto:suehollands@talk21.com); per tent £4) at Cleadale in the north of the island.

### ISLE OF MUCK

☎ 01687 / pop 30

The tiny island of Muck, measuring just 2 miles by 1 mile, has exceptionally fertile soil, and the island is carpeted with wildflowers in spring and early summer. It takes its name from the Gaelic *muc* (pig), and pigs are still raised here.

Ferries call at the southern settlement of **Port Mor**. There's a tearoom and craft shop above the pier, which also acts as an information centre. See also [www.isleofmuck.com](http://www.isleofmuck.com).

It's an easy 15-minute walk along the island's only road from the pier to the sandy

beach at **Gallanach** on the northern side of the island. A longer and rougher hike (1½ hours round trip) goes to the top of **Beinn Airein** (137m) for the best views. Puffins nest on the cliffs at the western end of Camas Mor, the bay to the south of the hill. On Wednesday in summer you can take a **guided tour** (£1) around the island by tractor and trailer; it departs at 1.30pm from Port Mor.

The cosy six-bed **Isle of Muck Bunkhouse** (☎ 462042; dm £11.50), with its oil-fired Rayburn stove, is just above the pier, as is the welcoming eight-room **Port Mor House Hotel** (☎ 462365; [hotel@isleofmuck.com](mailto:hotel@isleofmuck.com); r per person £43); rates include evening meals, which are also available to nonguests (£15, book in advance).

You can camp on the island for free – ask at the craft shop first.

### ISLE OF CANNA

☎ 01687 / pop 17

The roadless island of Canna is a moorland plateau of black basalt rock, just 5 miles long and 1.25 miles wide. **Compass Hill** (143m), at the northeastern corner, contains enough magnetite (an iron oxide mineral) to deflect the navigation compasses in passing yachts.

The ferry arrives at the hamlet of **A'Chill** at the eastern end of the island, where tourists have left extensive graffiti on the rock face south of the harbour. There's a tearoom and craft shop by the harbour, and a tiny post office in a hut.

You can walk to **An Coroghon**, just east of the ferry pier, a medieval stone tower perched atop a sea cliff, and continue to Compass Hill, or take a longer hike along the southern shore past a **Celtic cross** and the remains of the 7th-century **St Columba's Chapel**.

In 2006 the island was cleared of a plague of rats that had threatened its population of native wood mice and nesting seabirds (see boxed text *Invasion of the Killer Hedgehogs*, p401). In the same year the National Trust for Scotland (Canna's owner), worried about the viability of the island community, sent out an international appeal for new residents.

It received more than 400 applications for the two vacant properties available, both of which were filled by the end of 2007 – one of the new families moved into **Tighard** ([www.ntsholidays.com](http://www.ntsholidays.com)), which should be operating as a guesthouse by spring 2008.

Contact the **warden** (☎ 462466) for permission to camp, or check [www.ntsholidays.com](http://www.ntsholidays.com) for self-catering accommodation.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'