

# Southern Scotland



An enchanting region of Scotland that seems to slip off the radar for many international visitors, southern Scotland is often missed by the hordes scrambling to destinations further north. A shame – but also a wonderful part of its attraction. Crowd-free castles to ramble around, miles of open countryside and small traffic-free roads along which to explore it all – it takes no time to stumble across a pocket of country you'll have all to yourself.

Stretching from the Scottish Borders, with the fiery remnants of the great Border abbeys to the floating paradise of Arran, southern Scotland is one big trail of treasures and pleasures. Unlike its cousin, central Scotland, a bit further north, the attractions aren't quite so jam packed, there's room to breathe down here. But the stately mansions, picture-perfect countryside and smoking ruins that encapsulate centuries of conflict with England are worth the time and effort to discover.

Woodland areas such as the exhilarating and remote Galloway Forest are a relief from Britain's naked landscape and there are many ways to enjoy them, including mountain-bike trails that criss-cross the region. Important wildlife survives in these lush valleys and undulating hills, with the bellow of the red deer reverberating in remote forests. The stunning Isle of Arran is a jewel of the Hebridean isles with easy access, historical sights, an excellent walking and cycling route around its perimeter and gourmet produce infused into its delectable cuisine.

This is an area that ignites the imagination – Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, Scotland's two great literary sons, romanticised the region. After a short time here it's easy to see why.

## HIGHLIGHTS

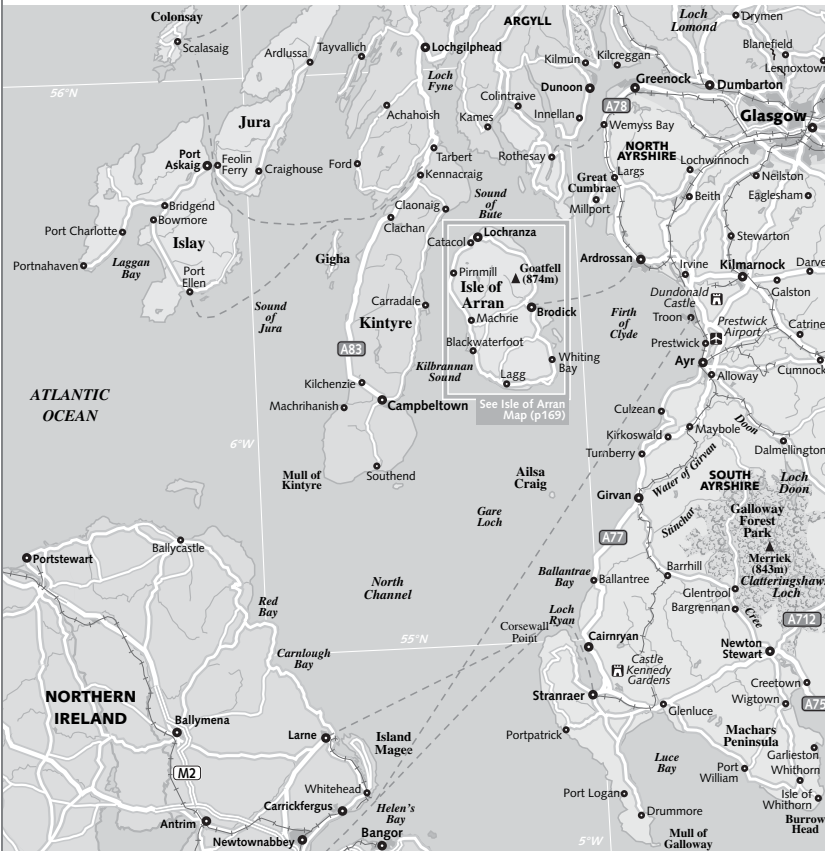
- Tumbling around lush Border country and roaming the hulking burnt-out shells of the **great Border abbeys** (p150)
- Getting snug by an open fire, local brew in hand, at one of the many fine pubs on **Isle of Arran** (p168), a walking and cycling paradise
- Admiring the architectural genius of the 18th century at **Culzean Castle** (p176), perched on wild sea cliffs
- Discovering some of Scotland's best wildlife at **Galloway Forest Park** (p184), a taste of the Highlands in the Lowlands
- Exploring the charming, dignified **Kirkcudbright** (p182), and the creative flair of its inhabitants



■ POPULATION: 1,246,000

■ AREA: 16,769 SQ KM

## SOUTHERN SCOTLAND



## Getting Around

Call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 22 33) for public-transport information. Bus transport is excellent around Ayrshire (p166), the Borders (opposite) and Lothians, and reasonable on the main north-south routes and the A75 to Stranraer, but limited elsewhere in Dumfries & Galloway. Various explorer tickets, which can be bought from bus drivers or at bus stations, are usually your best-value option.

Train services are limited. There are stations at Berwick-upon-Tweed (in Northumberland on the English side of the border, but the jumping-off point for the Tweed Valley) on the main east-coast line; at Dumfries on the main west-coast line; and at Stranraer and Ayr, which are linked to Glasgow. For time-

tables and fares, call the **National Rail Enquiry Service** (☎ 0845 748 4950; [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)).

## BORDERS REGION

Domestic tourists grease the wheel of the Borders' economy – they flock here from north and south of the border, eager to explore links to the country's medieval past. It's a distinctive region – centuries of war and plunder have left a battle-scarred landscape, encapsulated by the remnants of the great Border abbeys. They were an irresistible magnet during the Border wars, and were destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. The monasteries met their scorched end in the 16th century and were



never rebuilt. Today these massive stone shells are the region's finest attraction.

But there's also much more to this captivating area. Welcoming villages with ancient traditions pepper the countryside, one of the best cold-water diving sites in Europe is off the coast, and grandiose mansions all await exploration. It's fine walking and cycling country too, the gentle hills lush with an artist's palette of innumerable shades of green. And whatever you do, don't miss Hermitage Castle; nothing encapsulates the region's turbulent history like this spooky stronghold.

## Getting Around

There's a good network of local buses. **First** (☎ 0870 872 7271) operates between most of the

border towns and connects the larger towns with Edinburgh. Local bus companies serving border towns also include **Munro's of Jedburgh** (☎ 01835-862253) and **Buskers** (☎ 01896-758008). Tourist offices stock excellent public-transport booklets to local areas.

## COCKBURNSPATH

The 16th-century Mercat Cross in Cockburnspath village square, about a mile inland from the coast, is the official eastern-end start of the Southern Upland Way.

## COLDINGHAM BAY &amp; ST ABB'S HEAD

Coldingham and St Abbs are the two most popular places for tourists on this section of Scotland's east coast, a short distance north

**WALKING & CYCLING**

The region's most famous walk is the challenging 212-mile **Southern Upland Way**. If you want a sample, one of the best bits is the two-day section from St John's Town of Dalry to Beattock. Another long-distance walk is the 62-mile **St Cuthbert's Way**, inspired by the travels of St Cuthbert (a 7th-century saint who worked in Melrose Abbey), which crosses some superb scenery between Melrose and Lindsfarne (in England). In Galloway the **Pilgrims Way** follows a 25-mile trail from Glenluce Abbey to the Isle of Whithorn.

The **Borders Abbeys Way** links all the great Border abbeys in a 65-mile circuit. For shorter walks and especially circular loops in the hills, the towns of Melrose, Jedburgh and Kelso all make ideal bases.

With the exception of the main north-south A roads and the A75 to Stranraer, traffic is sparse, which, along with the beauty of the countryside, makes this ideal cycling country.

The **Tweed Cycle Way** is a waymarked route running 62 miles along the beautiful Tweed Valley following minor roads from Biggar to Peebles (13 miles), Melrose (16 miles), Coldstream (19 miles) and Berwick-upon-Tweed (14 miles). Jedburgh tourist office has details (see p160).

For an island tour, the **Isle of Arran** offers excellent cycling opportunities. The 50-mile coast-road circuit is stunning and is worth splitting into two or three days.

of the English border. This picturesque area is fantastic for those who love the great outdoors – there's loads to do, as evidenced by the anglers, scuba divers, bird-watchers and walkers who flock here.

From the village of Coldingham, with its twisting streets, take the B6438 downhill to the small fishing village of St Abbs, a gorgeous, peaceful little community with a picture-perfect harbour nestled below the cliffs. St Abbs is a great place for walking – head for the car park at the harbour and have a stroll over the rocky sea walls to get a feel of this fabulous location.

The clear, clean waters around St Abbs form part of **St Abbs & Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve** (☎ 018907-71443; www.marine-reserve.co.uk; Rangers Cottage, Northfield, St Abbs), one of the best cold-water diving sites in Europe. The reserve is home to a variety of marine life, including grey seals and porpoises. Visibility is about 7m to 8m but has been recorded at 24m.

Drop by the **St Abbs Dive Centre** (☎ 018907-71237; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon, 8am-4.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 8am-1pm Wed, 8.30am-3.30pm Sat, 8.30am-3pm Sun) at the post office; these folk provide plenty of advice on diving in the area. They also sell and repair (no charge) equipment, and nothing seems to be too much trouble. Knock on the door outside of hours if you've a problem with your diving equipment, and come here if you're having difficulty finding accommodation.

Divers can charter boats from **Paul Crowe** (☎ 018907-71945, 07710-961050) or **Billy Aitchison** (☎ 018907-71288).

Back in Coldingham you could try **Scoutscroft** (☎ 018907-71669; www.scoutscroft.co.uk; Scoutscroft Holiday Centre, St Abbs Rd, Coldingham) for pointers on the best places to dive in the area and what you'll likely see. You can also hire equipment here (£40) and organise a boat dive (£10: note that combined equipment hire and dive is cheaper). Bike (£12 for half day) and fishing-gear hire is also available.

In Coldingham, a signposted turn-off to the east leads 0.75 miles down to away-from-it-all Coldingham Bay, which has a sandy beach and a cliff-top walking trail to Eyemouth (3 miles). At St Vedas Hotel (opposite) is **St Vedas Surf Shop** where you can hire surfboards and snorkelling gear. Surfing lessons are also available.

North of St Abbs, the 78-hectare **St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve** (NTS; ☎ 018907-71443; Rangers Cottage, Northfield St, St Abbs) is an ornithologist's wonderland, with large colonies of guillemots, kittiwakes, herring gulls, fulmars, razorbills and some puffins. You get to the reserve by following the trail that begins beside the Northfield Farm car park (£2) and Smiddy café, on the road just west of St Abbs. The cliff-top walks here are spectacular, especially on sunny days.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Our pick** **Springbank Cottage** (☎ 018907-71477; www.springbankcottage.co.uk; The Harbour, St Abbs; s/d £30/56) Down at the harbour, you'd be hard pressed to find friendlier folk in Scotland than the crew here. Cottage-style, en-suite rooms are wee but have magic views over the harbour

and are super snug (especially when the rain is lashing outside). Watch out for the narrowest staircase in Britain and the low ceilings – especially in the twin room. There's homecooking in the onsite outdoor café and fresh crab is the speciality.

**Castle Rock Guest House** (☎ 018907-71715; www.castlerockbandb.co.uk; Murrayfield St, St Abbs; s/d £30/60) If you want to stay at the place with the best views and a prime cliff-top location close to the town centre – look no further. There are sea views from all rooms, which have en suite and satellite TV.

**St Vedas Hotel** (☎ 018907-71679; www.stvedas.co.uk; Coldingham Bay; s £35, d £70-80) Just opposite the path down to the beach, St Veda's is a cheery, British beach resort-style hotel. It has a touch of faded grandeur, and is very popular at weekends over summer. Rooms are plain but neat and tidy – No 1 is a good double with seaviews and en suite. Meals are available at the restaurant (mains £6 to £9).

Also recommended:

**Coldingham Sands Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1111; The Mount; dm adult/child £13/9.25; ☎ Apr-Sep) On the cliff above the southern side of the bay. A grand old property with a slightly school-holiday-camp feel.

**Old Smiddy** (☎ 018907-71707; St Abbs Rd; lunch £6; ☎ 11am-4pm daily, dinner Fri & Sat; ☎) Seafood dominates the menu (try the smoked-fish chowder or a St Abbs crab baguette).

**Getting There & Away**

Bus 253 between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed (six daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday) stops in Coldingham and St Abbs, as does bus 235, which runs at least hourly from Eyemouth.

**EYEMOUTH**

☎ 018907 / pop 3400

Eyemouth is a busy fishing port and popular domestic holiday destination. The harbour itself is very atmospheric – you may even spot seals frolicking in the water, and tourists frolicking around the boats, snapping pics of old fishing nets.

The community here suffered its greatest catastrophe in October 1881, when a storm destroyed the coastal fishing fleet, killing 189 fishermen, 129 of whom were locals.

**Information**

The Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland have ATMs.

**Laundrette** (Church St; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; Manse Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) Very helpful; it's in Eyemouth Museum near the harbour.

**Sights**

Captivating **Eyemouth Museum** (☎ 50678; Auld Kirk, Manse Rd; adult/child £2.50/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) has local-history displays, particularly relating to the town's fishing heritage. Its centrepiece is the tapestry commemorating the 1881 fishing disaster.

Situated right on Eyemouth's working fishing harbour, which lends it an air of authenticity, the **Eyemouth Maritime Centre** (☎ 751020; Harbour Rd; adults/kids £2.50/2; ☎ 10.30am-6pm) is shaped like an old 18th-century frigate. It feels like a vast hangar inside and there are lots of interesting model ships, a changing exhibition, and film and slide shows.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Bantry** (Mackays; ☎ 51900; joanne@mackaysofeyemouth.co.uk; 20 High St; s £28.50, d per person £28.50-35) Plonked on top of the restaurant of the same name on the main drag, this place has redecorated and refurbished rooms with muted tones and a luxurious, modern feel, positioned right on the waterfront. Try to get No 3, if you're after a double, as it's the only one with sea-facing views. Whip £5 off the price if you only require a continental breakfast.

**Churches** (☎ 50401; www.churcheshotel.co.uk; Albert Rd; s/d £80/105) This is a very stylish place set in an 18th-century building, with rooms exuding a cool demeanour and a classical look. Each room has a different theme but No 4 with four-poster bed and No 6 with huge windows overlooking the harbour are our favourites. The menu (mains £12 to £17) is blessed with the day's catch from the harbour – it's the best spot in town for fresh seafood.

**Obló** (☎ 52527; 20 Harbour St; mains £10-15; ☎ from 10am daily) For a meal pretty much anytime find your way upstairs to this modern bar-bistro with its comfy seating and modish interior. It's urban, it's trendy, it's just down from the tourist office. Try the Eyemouth langoustines on a bed of tarragon-flavoured carrots.

The pubs along the quay have suitably nautical names – the **Contented Sole** (☎ 50268; 3 Old Quay, Harbour Rd) and the **Ship Hotel** (☎ 50224;

Harbour Rd) – and serve freshly caught seafood for about £8 for a main dish.

### Getting There & Away

Eyemouth is 5 miles north of the Scotland-England border. Bus C4 runs to/from Kelso via Duns (1½ hours, once daily Monday to Friday); buses 235, 236 go south to Berwick-upon-Tweed (15 minutes, frequent), which has the nearest train station. Bus 253 from Berwick to Edinburgh (£4.50, 1¾ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday) also passes through Eyemouth.

### SOUTH OF EYMOUTH

Further south, beyond the village of Foulden and about 3 miles west of the A1 along the B6461, is **Paxton House** (☎ 01289-386291; adult/child £6/3; ☎ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, grounds 10am-sunset Apr-Oct; ♿). It's beside the River Tweed and surrounded by over 32 hectares of parkland and gardens. It was built in 1758 by Patrick Home for his intended wife, the daughter of Prussia's Frederick the Great. Unfortunately, she stood him up, but it was her loss; designed by the Adam family – brothers John, James and Robert – it's acknowledged as one of the finest 18th-century Palladian houses in Britain. It contains a large collection of Chippendale and Regency furniture, and its picture gallery houses paintings from the national galleries of Scotland. The nursery is a new feature designed to provide insight into a child's 18th-century life.

In the grounds are walking trails and a riverside museum on salmon fishing.

### DUNS & AROUND

☎ 01361 / pop 2300

Duns is a peaceful market town in the centre of Berwickshire, with some pleasant walks. You can get to **Duns Law** (218m) in Duns Castle Estate by following Castle St up from the square. The summit offers great views of the Merse and Lammermuir Hills. The Covenanters' Stone marks the spot where the Covenanting armies camped in 1639; a copy of the Covenant was later signed at Duns Castle.

On the northern side of the main square, **White Swan Hotel** (☎ 883338; 31-32 Market Sq; s £30-40, d £50-70) is a solid old place with decent-sized rooms – the refurbished ones have en suites.

Buses running between Galashiels and Berwick-upon-Tweed (six to nine daily) stop at Duns.

### LAMMERMUIR HILLS

North of Duns, the low-lying Lammermuir Hills, with their extensive grouse moors, rolling farmland and wooded valleys, run east-west along the border with East Lothian. The hills are popular with walkers and there are numerous trails, including a section of the **Southern Upland Way**.

To the west, the Way can be accessed at **Lauder**, where it passes through the grounds of **Thirlestane Castle** (☎ 01578-722430; castle & grounds adult/child £7/5, grounds only £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed, Thu & Sun mid-Apr-Jun & Sep, Sun-Thu Jul & Aug). The narcissism and folly of the aristocracy is evident here perhaps more than in most 'great homes'. Notice how many of the family portraits adorning the walls look similar? The extensive assemblage here is the result of the common practice of mass production used at the time. Many of the family have almost identical features, as the same bodies were used for their portraits with different clothes, faces and hands superimposed.

Thirlestane is also home to some of the finest plasterwork ceilings in Europe, and don't miss Henry the Ram (a snuff box) in the dining room – kitsch beyond kitsch.

Thirlestane is just outside town, off the A68, beside Leader Water. Munro's buses 29 and 30, running between Kelso and Edinburgh, pass by.

You're able to get onto the Southern Upland Way from the tiny village of **Abbey St Bathans** in the secluded, bucolic Whiteadder Valley, off the B6355. From here, the final 10-mile section of the trail heads northeast to Cockburnspath beside the coast.

### COLDSTREAM

☎ 01890 / pop 1800

On a sweeping bend of the River Tweed, which forms the border with England, Coldstream is small and relatively hidden from the well-trodden Borders tourist beat. It can be a handy base when nearby Kelso is overflowing with visitors and accommodation options are sparse.

The proud history of the Coldstream Guards is covered in the **Coldstream Museum** (☎ 882630; 12 Market Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct), including recent missions in the 1990s. The Coldstream Guards were formed in 1650 in Berwick-upon-Tweed for duty in Scotland as part of Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army.

The regiment took its present name from the town where it was stationed in 1659. It played a significant part in the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and saw service at Waterloo against Napoleon, at Sebastopol during the Crimean War, in the Boer War, at the Somme and Ypres in WWI, and at Dunkirk and Tobruk in WWII. It remains the oldest regiment in continuous existence in the British army and is the only one directly descended from the New Model Army.

### Sleeping

**Garth House B&B** (☎ 882477; 7 Market St; r per person £20-23) This old bastion is cheap and comfy with no frills attached. It's a basic, old-fashioned B&B – personable, good value and friendly – but nothing flash. If you want value for money – here it is.

**our pick** **Eastbraes B&B** (☎ 883949; www.eastbraes.co.uk; 100C High St; s/d £35/60) Eastbraes is full of personality and good vibes. A double and twin share a bathroom and there's one ensuite double, which is simply enormous, and comes with separate sitting area. This family-run place is in a gorgeous building with stupendous views and plenty of walking opportunities literally on the doorstep.

**Calico House** (☎ 885870; www.calicohouse.net; 44 High St; r 1/2 nights £60/50) Set behind a shop that churns out high-quality interior designs, this is a superb B&B with sumptuous rooms blessed with great views and attention to detail. Cleanliness is next to godliness could easily be the mantra. Privacy from your hosts and value for money are two very strong points in this excellent accommodation option.

### Getting There & Away

Coldstream is on the busy A697 road that links Newcastle upon Tyne in Northumberland, England, with Edinburgh. There are about six buses daily Monday to Saturday (three on Sunday) between Kelso (20 minutes) and Berwick-upon-Tweed (45 minutes) via Coldstream.

### KELSO

☎ 01573 / pop 5200

Kelso, a prosperous market town with a broad, cobbled square flanked by Georgian buildings, has a French feel to it and an historic appeal. During the day it's a busy little place, but after 8pm you'll have the streets to yourself. The town has a lovely site at the junction of the

Rivers Tweed and Teviot, and is one of the most enjoyable places in the Borders.

### Information

**Border Books** (☎ 225861; Horsemarket; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) Great range of books, especially out of date and antiquarian.

**Kelso Hospital** (☎ 223441; Inch Rd)

**Kelso Library** (☎ 223171; Bowmont St; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, plus 5.30-7pm Tue & Thu, 10am-1pm Wed, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) Free internet access.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; www.visitscottishborders.com; Town House, The Square; ☎ daily Apr-Nov, Mon-Sat Dec-Mar)

### Sights & Activities

#### KELSO ABBEY

Once one of the richest abbeys in southern Scotland, **Kelso Abbey** (HS; admission free; Bridge St; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun Apr-Dec) was built by the Tironensians, an order founded at Tiron in Picardy and brought to the Borders around 1113 by David I. English raids in the 16th century reduced it to ruins, though what remains today is some of the finest surviving Romanesque architecture in Scotland.

Nearby, the rare, octagonal **Kelso Old Parish Church** (The Butts; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri May-Sep), built in 1773, is intriguing.

#### FLOORS CASTLE

Grandiose **Floors Castle** (☎ 223333; adult/child £6.50/3.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Easter-Oct) is Scotland's largest inhabited mansion and overlooks the Tweed about a mile west of Kelso. Built by William Adam in the 1720s, the original Georgian simplicity was 'improved' in the 1840s with the addition of rather ridiculous battlements and turrets. Inside, view the vivid colours of the 17th-century Brussels tapestries in the drawing room and the intricate oak carvings in the ornate ballroom. Palatial windows reveal a ribbon of green countryside extending well beyond the estate. Unfortunately, there's also a rather questionable collection of stuffed birds, easily interpreted as bad taste. Floors is unashamedly in the tourism business – you walk past the restaurant to enter and past the gift shop to leave.

#### WALKING

The **Pennine Way**, which starts its long journey at Edale in the Peak district, ends at Kirk Yetholm Youth Hostel, about 7 miles south-east of Kelso on the B6352.

The **Borders Abbeys Way** links the great abbeys of Kelso, Jedburgh, Melrose and Dryburgh to create a 65-mile circuit. The Kelso–Jedburgh section (12 miles) is a fairly easy walk, largely following the River Teviot between the towns. The tourist office has a free leaflet with a map and description of the route.

Less-ambitious walkers should leave the Square by Roxburgh St and take the signposted alley to **Cobby Riverside Walk**, a pleasant ramble along the river to Floors Castle (although you have to rejoin Roxburgh St to gain admission to the castle).

## Sleeping

**Duncan House** (☎ 225682; Chalkheugh Tce; s/d £40/65) This elderly resident in the hospitality industry is a lovely Georgian house with views over the Rivers Tweed and Teviot. It has elegantly kitted-out rooms with Victorian furnishings, freestanding bathtubs and a whole lotta TLC.

**our pick** **The Old Priory** (☎ 223030; www.theoldpriorykelso.com; 33 Woodmarket St; s/d £45/70) The doubles in this atmospheric place are fantastic and the family room has to be seen to be believed;

rooms are both sumptuous and debonair with gorgeous dark polished wood pieces. The good news extends to the garden – perfect for a coffee in the morning, and there's off-street parking. The huge windows are another feature, flooding the rooms with natural light. Special diets are catered for.

**Ednam House Hotel** (☎ 224168; www.ednamhouse.com; Bridge St; s/d from £77/100; ♿) The genteel, Georgian Ednam House, touched with a quiet dignity, contains many of its original features and is the top place in town, with fine gardens overlooking the river and the excellent Ednam House Restaurant. It's very popular with fisher folk and during salmon season, from the end of August until November when a permit can cost £1000, the hotel is very busy.

Also recommended:

**Craignethan B&B** (☎ 224818; Jedburgh Rd; s/d £25/50) Welcoming, laid-back family home. Upstairs double has the best view – you can see over the whole town and Floors Castle. Old-fashioned hospitality.

**Inglestone House** (☎ 225800; www.inglestonehouse.co.uk; Abbey Row; s/d £40/60; ♿) Wedged between the Square and abbey; well-run guesthouse that's great for families or couples.

## Eating

**Cobbles Inn** (☎ 223548; 7 Bowmont St; mains £10-15; ♿ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) The new owners of this traditional pub, up an alley north of the main square, were finding their feet when we passed through. It was being refurbished and cask ales are a new feature. The sandwiches are ordinary but the game pie – a cauldron of game meats and mushrooms in red-wine sauce – looked delicious.

**our pick** **Oscar's Wine Bar Restaurant** (☎ 224008; 33 Horsemarket; starters £5, mains £10-16; ♿ dinner) If you enjoy a glass of wine with your dinner in a Mediterranean-theme setting, this is the place for you. Dishes on the extensive and varied menu are simple and well prepared. Try the roast monkfish with a fresh herb and almond crust or the crispy black pudding with a fresh mango salsa. Dessert portions are small.

For self-caterers there is a Somerfield supermarket located on the corner of the main square.

Also recommended:

**Central Baguette** (☎ 228853; 52 The Square; baguettes £1.50-2.50; ♿ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Baguette fillings feature everything from hot haggis to Cajun chicken.

**Ednam House Restaurant** (☎ 224168; Bridge St; 2-3-course dinner £19/25; ♿ lunch & dinner) Turns out delectable dinners and is the perfect place for a treat.

## Getting There & Away

See Coldstream transport information (p155) for details on the bus service to Berwick-upon-Tweed. Munro's bus 20 runs to/from Jedburgh (25 minutes, up to 11 daily Monday to Saturday, five Sunday) and Hawick (one hour, seven daily Monday to Saturday, four

Sunday). There are also frequent services to Galashiels (55 minutes), and from there to Edinburgh.

## AROUND KELSO Smailholm Tower

Perched on a rocky knoll above a small lake, the narrow, stone **Smailholm Tower** (HS; ☎ 01573-460365; Sandyknowe Farm, Smailholm; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ♿ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) provides one of the most evocative sights in the Borders and keeps the bloody uncertainties of its history alive. Although the displays inside are sparse, the panoramic view from the top is worth the climb.

The nearby farm, **Sandyknowe**, was owned by Sir Walter Scott's grandfather. As Scott himself recognised, his imagination was fired by the ballads and stories he heard as a child at Sandyknowe, and by the ruined tower a stone's throw away.

The tower is 6 miles west of Kelso, a mile south of Smailholm village on the B6397. You pass through the farmyard to get to the tower. Munro's bus 65 between Melrose and Kelso stops in Smailholm village.

## Mellerstain House

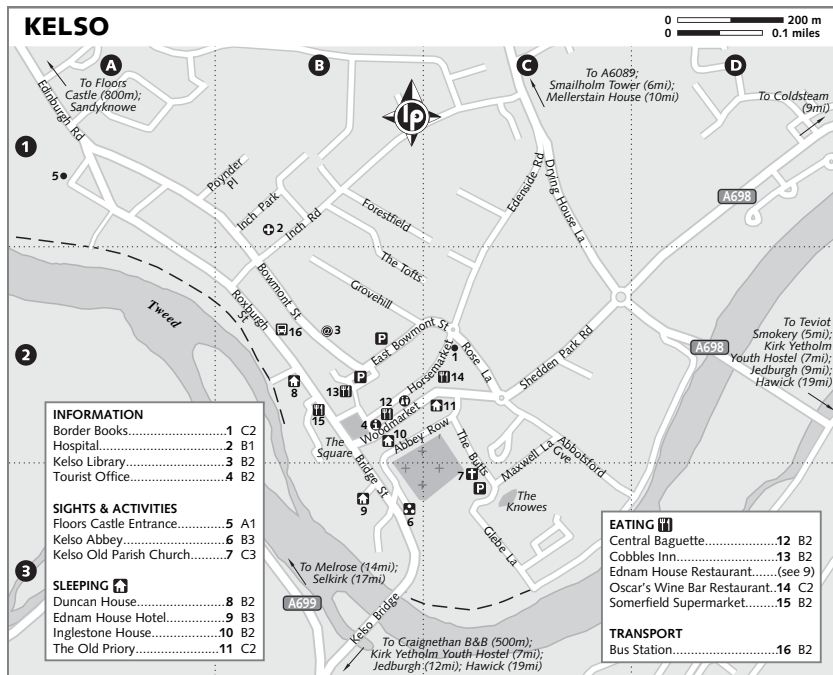
Finished in 1778, **Mellerstain House** (☎ 01573-410225; Gordon; adult/child £6/free; ♿ 12.30-5pm Sun, Wed & Bank Hol Mon May, Jun & Sep, 12.30-5pm Easter, 12.30-5pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Thu Jul & Aug, plus Sun Oct) is considered to be Scotland's finest Robert Adam–designed mansion. It is famous for its classic elegance, ornate interiors and plaster ceilings; the library in particular is outstanding. Give the garish upstairs bedrooms a miss, but have a peek at the bizarre puppet-and-doll collection in the gallery.

It's about 10 miles northwest of Kelso near Gordon. Munro's bus 65 between Melrose and Kelso passes about a mile from Mellerstain House.

## Town Yetholm & Kirk Yetholm

The twin villages of Town Yetholm and Kirk Yetholm, separated by Bowmont Water, are close to the English border, about 6 miles southeast of Kelso. Hill-walking centres, they lie at the northern end of the **Pennine Way** and on **St Cuthbert's Way** between Melrose and Lindisfarne (Holy Island) in Northumberland.

As the last stop on the Pennine Way, **Kirk Yetholm Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1132; Kirk



## SMOKEY DELIGHTS

If you're into smoked foods you will love **Teviot Smokery** (☎ 850253; Kirkbank House; light meals & mains £6-9; ♿ lunch). The restaurant at this shop/gardens churns out some delicious smoked numbers such as smoked salmon and asparagus tartlets. The adjoining shop also sells some excellent real ales and you can buy smoked salmon to take home if you haven't gorged on it enough for lunch. There are also satisfying riverside rambles to work off your meal. The smokery is located five miles southwest of Kelso on the A698.

Yetholm, Kelso; dm adult/child £12.50/9.50; ☎ Apr-Sep) is often busy – there's a twin room and two dorms (six and eight beds); book well in advance. Bus 81 from Kelso runs up to seven times a day Monday to Saturday (three times on Sunday).

## MELROSE

☎ 01896 / pop 1700

Tiny, charming Melrose is a polished village running on the well-greased wheels of tourism. This little enclave is a complete contrast with overbearing Galashiels, whose urban sprawl laps at its western edges. Sitting at the feet of the three heather-covered Eildon Hills, Melrose has a classic market square and its most famous resident is one of the great abbey ruins.

## Information

**Melrose Library** (☎ 823052; 18 Market Sq; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon & Wed, 2.30-5pm & 5.30-7pm Fri) Free internet access.

**Post office** (Buccleuch St)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; Abbey House, Abbey St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr & May, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jun & Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct, 10am-2pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Nov-Mar)

## Sights

Perhaps the most interesting of all the great Border abbeys, the red-sandstone **Melrose Abbey** (HS; ☎ 822562; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar) was repeatedly destroyed by the English in the 14th century. The remaining broken shell is pure Gothic and the ruins are famous for their decorative stonework – see if you can glimpse the pig gargoyle playing the bagpipes on the roof. You can climb to the top for tremendous views. The abbey was founded by David I in 1136 for Cistercian monks from Rievaulx in Yorkshire. It was rebuilt by Robert the Bruce, whose heart is buried here. The ruins date from the 14th and 15th centuries, and were repaired by Sir Walter Scott in the 19th century.

The adjoining **museum** (free for abbey ticket holders) has many fine examples of 12th- to 15th-century stonework and pottery found in the area. Note the impressive remains of the 'great drain' outside – a medieval sewerage system.

The **Melrose Rugby Heritage Centre** (☎ 822993; The Greenyards; admission free; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon, Wed & Fri) will appeal to rugby fans – it offers an insight into Rugby Sevens, which was founded here in the late 19th century.

## Activities

There are many attractive walks in the **Eildon Hills**, accessible via a footpath off Dingleton Rd (the B6359) south of the town, or via the trail along the River Tweed. Grab a copy of the *Walks Around Melrose* booklet (£1) for local guidance.

The **St Cuthbert's Way** long-distance path starts in Melrose, while the coast-to-coast **Southern Upland Way** passes through town. You can do a day's walk along St Cuthbert's Way as far as Harestanes (16 miles), on the A68 near Jedburgh, and return to Melrose on the hourly Jedburgh-Galashiels bus. The **Tweed Cycle Way** also passes through Melrose.

## Festivals & Events

In mid-April rugby followers fill the town to see the week-long **Melrose Rugby Sevens** competition. A popular event on the festivals calendar is the **Borders Book Festival** (www.bordersbookfestival.org), stretching over four days in late June.

## Sleeping

Melrose B&Bs and hotels aren't cheap by Scottish standards, but they are of a high standard; this would make a great place to treat yourself.

**Melrose Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1141; Priorwood; dm adult/child £14/11; ☎ late-Mar-Oct; ☑) Housed in a large Georgian mansion on the edge of town, these spick-and-span dorms are complemented by a big garden and barbecue area. Not a party house, this hostel is mainly used by walkers looking to turn in early. From Market Sq, follow the signposts to the A68.

**Braidwood** (☎ 822488; enquiries@braidwoodmelrose.co.uk; Buccleuch St; r per person £25-30) Mr and Mrs Dalgetty's popular town house near the abbey is an excellent place, with high-quality facilities and a warm welcome. The sparkling rooms are finely decorated and the twin has great views. Note, singles not available in summer.

**Burts Hotel** (☎ 822285; www.burtsotel.co.uk; Market Sq; s/d £60/112) Set in an early-18th-century house, and with an enviable reputation, Burts retains much of its period charm and has been run by the same couple for over 30 years. It

would suit older visitors or families. Room No 5 is the best.

**Townhouse** (☎ 822645; www.thetownhousemelrose.co.uk; Market Sq; s/d £70/100, superior r £120) The classy Townhouse, exuding warmth and professionalism, has some of the best rooms in town – tastefully furnished with attention to detail. There are two superior rooms that are enormous in size with lavish furnishings; the one on the ground floor in particular has an excellent en suite, which includes a Jacuzzi. It's well worth the price.

## Eating

**The Cellar** (☎ 823224; 17 Market Sq; mains £4-7; ☎ 10am-5pm) Drop into The Cellar for a caffeine hit. It's also good for a glass of wine on the town square, food platters and speciality cheeses.

**Russell's Restaurant** (☎ 822335; Market Sq; dishes £5-7; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Thu, 9.30am-5pm Fri & Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Russell's is a stylish little tearoom/restaurant with a large range of snacks and more substantial offerings, such as a ploughman's lunch.

**Marmion's Brasserie** (☎ 822245; 5 Buccleuch St; starters £6, mains £10-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This atmospheric, oak-panelled niche serves snacks all day, but the lunch and dinner menus include gastronomic delights, such as roast quail, braised lamb, or pan-seared cod with a king prawn red-curry sauce. For lunch the focaccias with creative fillings are a good choice.

**Townhouse** (☎ 822645; Market Sq; mains £12, 3-course dinner £24; ☎ lunch & dinner) The gourmet cuisine here is the best in town. Dishes are exquisitely prepared, and your stomach will thank you for weeks should you treat yourself to a three-course dinner. Desserts such as a peach-and-ginger tart served with sweet, pickled rhubarb are exquisite.

## SIR WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832)

Sir Walter Scott is one of Scotland's greatest literary figures. It was here, rambling around the Borders countryside as a child, that he developed a passion for historical ballads and Scottish heroes.

*The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) was an early critical success. Further works earning him an international reputation included *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), set around Loch Katrine and the Trossachs. He later turned his hand to novels and virtually invented the historical genre. *Waverley* (1814), which dealt with the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, set the classical pattern of the historical novel. Other works included *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *Rob Roy* (1817). In *Guy Mannering* he wrote about Border farmer Dandie Dinmont and his pack of dogs, which became so popular that they became known as Dandie Dinmont Terriers, the only breed of dog named after a literary character.

Later in life Scott wrote obsessively to stave off bankruptcy. His works virtually single-handedly revived interest in Scottish history and legend in the early 19th century. Tourist offices stock a *Sir Walter Scott Trail* booklet, guiding you to many places associated with his life in the Borders.

## Getting There & Away

There are First buses to/from Galashiels (20 minutes, frequent), Jedburgh (30 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday), Peebles (1¼ hours, at least hourly Monday to Saturday) and Edinburgh (£5.50, 2¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday).

## AROUND MELROSE Dryburgh Abbey

The most beautiful, complete Border abbey is **Dryburgh Abbey** (HS; ☎ 01835-822381; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mar), partly because the neighbouring town of Dryburgh no longer exists (another victim of the wars) and partly because it has a lovely site in a sheltered valley by the River Tweed, accompanied only by a symphony of birdsong. The abbey conjures up images of 12th-century monastic life more successfully than its counterparts in nearby towns. Dating from about 1150, it belonged to the Premonstratensians, a religious order founded in France. The pink-hued stone ruins were chosen as the burial place for Sir Walter Scott.

The abbey is 5 miles southeast of Melrose on the B6404, which passes famous **Scott's View** overlooking the valley. You can hike there along the southern bank of the River Tweed, or take a bus to the nearby village of Newtown St Boswells.

## Abbotsford

Fans of Sir Walter Scott should visit his former residence, **Abbotsford** (☎ 01896-752043; adult/child £6/3; ☎ 9.30am-5pm late-Mar-Oct, 2-5pm Sun Mar-May & Oct). Probably drawing inspiration from the surrounding 'wild' countryside, he created an extraordinary collection of works. These

are on display, as are many other personal possessions.

The mansion is about 2 miles west of Melrose between the River Tweed and the B6360. Frequent buses run between Galashiels and Melrose; alight at the Tweed bank roundabout and follow the signposts (it's a 15-minute walk). You can also walk from Melrose to Abbotsford in an hour along the southern bank of the Tweed.

## GALASHIELS

☎ 01896 / pop 14,500

Galashiels has little to recommend it – during the day it's uninviting and in the evening it carries an air of menace, but it's an important transport hub for the Scottish Borders. Fortunately, the charming town of Melrose is just 3 miles east.

The unmanned tourist office is in the **Lochcarron Cashmere & Wool Centre** (☎ 751100; Waverley Mill, Huddersfield St; ☞ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat year-round, plus noon–5pm Sun Jun–Sep), which also houses a museum on Galashiels history. Tours are available (adult/child £3.50/free).

There are frequent buses to/from Edinburgh (1¼hr, half hourly), Melrose (15 minutes, hourly), Hawick (40 minutes, half hourly), Kelso (one hour, hourly), and Peebles (45 minutes, half hourly).

## SELKIRK

☎ 01750 / pop 5800

Selkirk is a serene little town that climbs a steep ridge above the Ettrick Water, a tributary of the Tweed. Mills came to the area in the early 1800s, but today it's a quiet place with a couple of great attractions.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 20054; Halliwell's Close; ☞ Apr–Oct) is tucked away off Market Sq. Inside is **Halliwell's House Museum** (☎ 20096; Halliwell's Close; admission free; ☞ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, to noon Sun late–Mar–Sep, except 10am–1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Sat, to noon Sun Oct), the oldest building (1712) in Selkirk. The museum charts local history with an engrossing exhibition, and the Robson Gallery has changing exhibitions.

Drop into **Sir Walter Scott's Court Room** (☎ 20096; Market Sq; admission free; ☞ 10am–4pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat Apr–Sep, plus 10am–2pm Sun May–Aug, 1–4pm Mon–Sat Oct; ☎), where the great man served as Selkirk County's sheriff. There's an exhibition on his life and writings, plus a fascinating account of the courageous explorer Mungo Park (born near Selkirk) and his search for the River Niger.

You're better off staying overnight in Melrose or Jedburgh, or try the **County Hotel** (☎ 721233; www.countyhotelselkirk.co.uk; Market Sq; s/d £40/75), which has comfortable rooms with small couches and is popular with golfers. It also serves good bar meals (£8).

First bus 95 and express bus X95 run half-hourly or hourly between Hawick, Selkirk, Galashiels and Edinburgh. Selkirk to Edinburgh costs £5 (two hours).

## JEDBURGH

☎ 01835 / pop 4100

The most popular of the Border towns, attractive Jedburgh is a lush, compact oasis, where many old buildings and wynds (narrow alleys) have been intelligently restored, inviting exploration by foot. It's constantly busy with domestic tourists, but wander into some of the pretty side streets and you won't hear a pin drop.

### Information

**Library** (Castlegate; ☞ 10am–1pm & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 5.30–7pm Mon & Fri) Free internet access.

**Post office** (High St)

**Tourist office** (☎ 863170; Murray's Green; ☞ 9.15am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun Apr, May & Oct, 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun Jun–Jul & Sep, 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun Aug, 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar) Best tourist office in the Borders. Historic guided walks (£3) of Jedburgh leave from the tourist office at 6pm Monday and Friday, plus 2.30pm on Wednesday in summer.

### Sights

#### JEDBURGH ABBEY

Dominating the town skyline, **Jedburgh Abbey** (HS; ☎ 863925; Abbey Bridge End; adult/child £5/2.50; ☞ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Oct–Mar) was the first great Border abbey to be passed into state care, and it shows – audio and visual presentations telling the abbey's story are scattered throughout the carefully preserved ruins (good for the kids or if it's raining). The red-sandstone ruins are roofless but relatively intact, and the ingenuity of the master mason can be seen in some of the rich (if somewhat faded) stone carvings in the nave (be careful of the staircase in the nave – it's slippery when wet). The abbey was founded in 1138 by David I as a priory for Augustinian canons.

#### MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS HOUSE

Mary stayed at this beautiful 16th-century **tower house** (☎ 863331; Queen St; adult/child £3/free;

☞ 10am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4.30pm Sun Mar–Nov) in 1566 after her famous ride to visit the injured earl of Bothwell, her future husband, at Hermitage Castle (p162). The interesting displays evoke the sad saga of Mary's life.

### Activities

The tourist office sells some handy walking booklets, including *Walks around Jedburgh* (£1), which has 1.5-mile to 5.5-mile walks, good route descriptions and small maps. Those looking to really stretch the legs can take on small sections of the Southern Upland Way – grab a copy of *Short Walks* (£2.50). The *Borders Abbeys Way Circular Walking Route* is an excellent booklet (£2); simple maps included. For information about the **Borders Abbeys Way**, see p156.

### Festivals & Events

For two weeks in late June/early July the **Jethart Callant Festival** marks the perilous time when people rode out on horseback checking for English incursions (see the boxed text, right).

### Sleeping

**Jedburgh Camping & Caravanning Club Site** (☎ 863393; Elliot Park, A68; tent sites £9.30; ☞ late-Apr–Oct) About a mile north of the town centre, opposite Jedburgh Woollen Mill, this site is set on the banks of Jed Water and is quiet and convenient, particularly if you're interested in fishing.

**Maplebank** (☎ 862051; 3 Smiths Wynd; s/d £20/36) There are not many B&Bs left like this one. It's a very old-fashioned place (you really are staying in someone's home) and one word sums it up: clutter. It's slightly grotty as well, but the shared bathroom sparkles and the rooms are very comfy – large and definitely homely. The owner is just lovely and the breakfast (particularly if you like fruit, homemade yogurts and a selection of everything) is better than you'll get at a posh guesthouse. This is Scottish eccentricity at its best.

**Willow Court** (☎ 863702; www.willowcourtjedburgh.co.uk; The Friars; r per person £22) With superb views over Jedburgh from the conservatory, where you are served a three-meals-in-one breakfast, Willow Court is a traditional B&B with homespun décor, smiling hosts and a large garden. Ask about the self-catering cottage just out of town.

**Glenfriars Guest House** (☎ 862000; glenfriars@edenroad.demon.co.uk; The Friars; s/d £35/70) We really

### RIDING OF THE MARCHES

The Riding of the Marches, or Common Riding, takes place in early summer in the major Border towns. Like many Scottish festivals it has ancient traditions, dating back to the Middle Ages, when riders would be sent to the town boundary to check on the common lands. The colourful event normally involves extravagant convoys of horse riders following the town flag or standard as it's taken on a well-worn route. Festivities vary between towns but usually involve lots of singing, sport, pageants, concerts and a screaming good time! If you want to zero in on the oldest and largest of the Ridings, head to Selkirk for the Jethart Callant Festival.

like this place. Glenfriars is a classy Georgian affair being slowly, lovingly refurbished. All rooms have en suites and Nos 4 and 6 are excellent, especially the old drawing room (No 4), which has stupendous views. Four-poster beds, laid-back hosts and plenty of space make this stylish, ramshackle hotel a favourite.

Also recommended:

**Mrs Elliot** (Akaso Uram; ☎ 862482; 7 Queen St; s/d £20/36) Musty and fusty, sure, but one of the cheapest digs in town.

**Craigowen** (☎ 862604; duggleby21@hotmail.com; 30 High St; s/d £30/50) B&B with terrific, central location and huge rooms.

### Eating

**The Sunrise** (☎ 863503; 51 High St; mains £6–9; ☞ lunch & dinner) You'll pay slightly higher prices for the dishes at this curry house but it's well worth it. Featuring aromatic south Indian cooking, there's plenty on offer for vegetarians, including delicious homemade samosas stuffed with goodies, plus succulent, spicy tandoori chicken and generous side dishes.

**Carters Rest** (☎ 864745; Abbey Pl; mains £8–10; ☞ lunch & dinner) Upmarket pub dining that would suit families or older couples. The dinner menu is much better than lunch, featuring dishes such as grilled fillet of sea bass served over a smoked haddock mash and drizzled with fresh pesto. It also makes a good pit stop for a cold drink after an exploration of the abbey – it's practically on its doorstep.

**Nightjar** (☎ 862552; 1 Abbey Close; mains £12.50–14.50; ☞ dinner Tue–Sat) A highly commended restaurant

dishing out a mix of creative meals (try the salad of warm quail with chorizo and grapefruit), including seafood and Thai cuisine. The real highlight is if you're lucky enough to be here on the last Tuesday of the month when a special Thai menu is revealed; locals rave about this night.

### Getting There & Away

Jedburgh has good bus connections to Hawick (25 minutes, roughly hourly), Melrose (30 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday) and Kelso (25 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, four Sunday). Munro's runs from Edinburgh to Jedburgh (£5.60, two hours, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, five Sunday).

### HAWICK

☎ 01450 / pop 15,000

Straddling the River Teviot, Hawick is the largest town in the Borders and has long been a major production centre for knitwear. Most people come to Hawick to shop: it's a bargain-hunter's paradise with numerous factory outlets, including **Pringle** (☎ 377644; Commercial Rd); a full list is available from the **tourist office** (☎ 372547; 1 Tower Knowe; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct), at the western end of High St.

In the same building is **Drumlanrig's Tower Visitor Centre** (☎ 377615; 1 Tower Knowe; adult/child £2.50/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat late-Mar-Oct, noon-3pm Sun late-Mar-Sep), which tells the story of cross-border warfare from the 16th century.

Across the river, **Hawick Museum & Scott Art Gallery** (☎ 373457; Wilton Lodge Park; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) has an interesting collection of mostly 19th-century manufacturing and domestic memorabilia.

If you've ever had the urge to trace your Scottish heritage, or are a fanatical fan of Border sons such as Walter Scott, then the state-of-the-art **Heritage Hub** (☎ 433743; Towerdykeside; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 10am-7.45pm Tue & Thu) is for you. It's just behind the tourist office.

You'll be met with a cheery welcome at the amiable **Bridgehouse B&B** (☎ 370701; sergioshawick@aol.com; Sandbed; s/d £30/44). Functional rooms, in a former stables dating back to 1760, are brightly decorated and as neat as a pin, although en suites can be pokey. There's a café and a bar overlooking the river, but if you feel like something more substantial, pop

into **Sergio's** (☎ 370094; mains £8; ☎ lunch & dinner) next door for pizza and pasta dishes.

The half-hourly First buses 95 and X95 connect Hawick with Galashiels, Selkirk and Edinburgh (£5.50, two hours).

### HERMITAGE CASTLE

A massive collection of stone, with a heavy cumbist beauty, **Hermitage Castle** (HS; ☎ 01387-376222; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) sits isolated beside a rushing stream surrounded by bleak, empty moorland. Dating from the 13th century, but substantially rebuilt in the 15th, it embodies the brutal history of the Borders; the stones themselves almost speak of the past. Sir Walter Scott's favourite castle, it is probably best known as the home of the earl of Bothwell and the place to which Mary, Queen of Scots, rode in 1566 to see him after he had been wounded in a border raid.

It's also where, in 1338, Sir William Douglas imprisoned his enemy Sir Alexander Ramsay in a pit and deliberately starved him to death. Ramsay survived for 17 days by eating grain that trickled into his pit (which can still be seen) from the granary above. The castle is said to be haunted and it certainly has a slightly spooky feel, especially when dark clouds gather. If you have the place to yourself, a visit can be quite magical – it's one of the best castles to visit in southern Scotland.

The castle is about 12 miles south of Hawick on the B6357.

### PEEBLES

☎ 01721 / pop 8100

Prosperous Peebles sits smugly on the banks of the River Tweed, content in the knowledge that it has a prime Borders location, set among rolling, wooded hills. Its agreeable and picturesque ambience will happily entice you to linger for a couple of days. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 720138; High St; ☎ daily Apr-Dec, Mon-Sat Jan-Mar) will chase down accommodation for you.

### Sights & Activities

The small gallery at **Beltane Studios** (☎ 724888; www.beltanestudios.com; 2 Soonhope Farm Holdings) is quite superb with plenty of high-quality artwork: the highlight is also the speciality – bronze wax casting. There are huge windows looking into the workshop where you can see the masters at work. Beltane is outside of Peebles, on the road to Galashiels, just past the Hydro Hotel turn-off.

If it's sunny, the **riverside walk** along the River Tweed has plenty of grassed areas ideal for a picnic, and there's a children's playground (near the main road bridge). You could even walk to **Neidpath Castle** (☎ 702333; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Wed-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun May-Sep), a tower house perched on a bluff above the River Tweed. It's in a lovely spot, a mile west of the town centre, with good views from the parapets.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Rosetta Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 720770; www.rosettacaravanpark.com; Rosetta Rd; tent site & 2 people £15; ☎ Apr-Oct) This award-winning camping ground, about 800m north of the town centre, has an exquisite green setting. There are plenty of amusements for the kids, such as a bowling green and a games room.

**Cross Keys Hotel** (☎ 724222; www.crosskeyspeebles.co.uk; 24 Northgate; dm/s/d/f £22/35/60/75) The Cross Keys is a renovated 17th-century coaching inn, and the current owners have maintained the tradition of fine hospitality. Some rooms are very large, though all are neat and well presented. Kings Orchard Brasserie here knocks together good pub grub (mains £7 to £10), and there's a bar with real ales and live music at weekends.

**Rowanbrae** (☎ 721630; john@rowanbrae.freeserve.co.uk, 103 Northgate; s £30-35, d £50) This is a classy B&B in a quiet cul-de-sac, a short walk from the town centre. The personable owners have been doing B&B here for almost 30 years and it shows with little touches such as fresh flowers in the rooms. There are three upstairs bedrooms, two with en suite, and an excellent guest lounge for relaxation.

**Cringletie House Hotel & Restaurant** (☎ 725750; www.cringletie.com; s/d from £165/220; ♿) This elegant Baronial mansion, 2 miles north of Peebles on the A703, calls itself a house, but that's being coy – it's a mansion. A very luxurious, Baronial mansion, in fact, set in lush, wooded grounds with an excellent restaurant (three-course dinner £40). If you enjoy pampering, genteel elegance and linen so soft you could wrap a newborn in it, this is the place for you.

**Sunflower Restaurant** (☎ 724240; 4 Bridgegate; starters £6, mains £10-15; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) The Sunflower, with its warm yellow dining room, is in a quiet spot off the main drag. It serves good salads for lunch and has an admirable menu in the evenings, with dishes

such as wild-boar sausages or prawn, spring onion and lemongrass fishcakes with lemon and chive dip.

### Getting There & Away

The bus stop is beside the post office on Eastgate. First bus 62 runs half hourly to Edinburgh (£4, 1¼ hours), Galashiels (45 minutes) and Melrose (1¼ hours).

### AROUND PEEBLES

#### Traquair House

One of Scotland's great country houses, **Traquair House** (☎ 01896-830323; www.traquair.co.uk; Innerleithen; adult/child £6.30/3.40; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Jun-Aug, noon-5pm Apr-May & Sep, 11am-4pm Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov; ♿) has a powerful ethereal beauty, and an exploration here is like time travel. Odd, sloping floors and a musty odour bestow a genuine feel, and parts of the building are believed to have been constructed long before the first official record of its existence in 1107. The massive tower house was gradually expanded over the next 500 years but has remained virtually unchanged since 1642.

Since the 15th century the house has belonged to various branches of the Stuart family, and the family's unwavering Catholicism and loyalty to the Stuart cause are largely why development ceased when it did. The family's estate, wealth and influence were gradually whittled down after the Reformation, and there was neither the opportunity nor, one suspects, the will to make any changes.

One of its most interesting places is the concealed room where priests secretly lived and performed Mass – up until 1829 when the Catholic Emancipation Act was finally passed. Other beautiful, time-worn rooms hold fascinating relics, including the cradle used by Mary for her son, James VI of Scotland (who also became James I of England), and many letters written by the Stuart pretenders to their supporters.

In addition to the house, there's a **garden maze**, an **art gallery**, a small **brewery** producing the tasty Bear Ale, and an active craft community. The **Scottish Beer Festival** takes place here in late May and there's the **Traquair Fair** in early August.

Traquair is 1.5 miles south of Innerleithen, about 6 miles southeast of Peebles. Bus C1 departs from Peebles at 10.15am for Traquair daily and returns at 3.05pm.



## SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

South Lanarkshire is an area of contrasts. It combines a highly urbanised area south of Glasgow with scenically gorgeous country around the Falls of Clyde and the World Heritage-listed area of New Lanark, by far the biggest drawcard of the region. If you're roaring up to Scotland on the M74, there are some fine places to break your journey.

South and east of Glasgow are the large satellite towns of **East Kilbride**, **Hamilton**, **Motherwell** and **Coatbridge**. These are, for the most part, urban nightmares, and day trips only from Glasgow are recommended. Note also that you're far better off on public transport, given the plethora of roundabouts and one-way streets in these towns.

### BLANTYRE

☎ 01698

Blantyre's most famous son is David Livingstone, epitome of the Victorian missionary-explorer, who opened up central Africa to European religion. Visitors with an interest in Africa shouldn't miss the absorbing **David Livingstone Centre** (NTS; ☎ 823140; 165 Station Rd; adult/child £5/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Easter-Dec; 🇬🇧), which tells the story of his life. In 30 years it's estimated he travelled 29,000 miles, mostly on foot – the sheer tenacity of the man was incredible. The centre is just downhill from Blantyre train station.

It's a 30-minute walk along the river to **Bothwell Castle** (HS; ☎ 816894; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar), regarded as the finest 13th-century castle in Scotland. The stark, roofless, red-sandstone ruins are substantial and, largely due to their beautiful green setting, romantic. The castle is very popular with wedding parties.

Trains run from Glasgow Central station to Blantyre (£4.25/3.25 peak/off-peak return, 20 minutes, three hourly).

### LANARK & NEW LANARK

☎ 01555 / pop 8300

Below the market town of Lanark, in an attractive gorge by the River Clyde, is the World Heritage site of **New Lanark** – an intriguing collection of restored mill buildings and warehouses.

Once the largest cotton-spinning complex in Britain, it was better known for the pioneer-

ing social experiments of Robert Owen, who managed the mill from 1800. New Lanark is really a memorial to this enlightened capitalist. He provided his workers with housing, a cooperative store (the inspiration for the modern cooperative movement), the world's first nursery school for children, a school with adult-education classes, a sick-pay fund for workers and a social centre he called the New Institute for the Formation of Character. You'll need at least half a day to explore this site, as there's plenty to see.

### Information

There are two banks with ATMs on High St.

**Lanark Health Centre** (☎ 665522)

**Post office** (St Leonards St)

**Tourist office** (☎ 661661; Horsemarket, Ladyacre Rd, Lanark; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) Close to the bus and train stations.

### Sights & Activities

#### NEW LANARK

The best way to get the feel of New Lanark is to wander round the outside of this impressive place. What must once have been a thriving, noisy, grimy industrial village, pumping out enough cotton to wrap the planet, is now a peaceful oasis with only the swishing of trees and the rushing of the River Clyde to be heard.

At the **New Lanark Visitor Centre** (☎ 661345; www.newlanark.org; New Lanark Mills; adult/child/family £6/5/18; ☎ 11am-5pm Sep-May, 10.30am-5pm Jun-Aug) you need to buy a ticket to enter the main attractions. These include the **Historic Schoolhouse**, which contains an innovative, hi-tech journey to New Lanark's past via a 3-D hologram of the spirit of Annie McLeod, a 10-year-old mill girl who describes life here in 1820. The kids will love it as it's very realistic, although the 'do good for all mankind' theme is a little overbearing.

Also included in your admission is a **mill-worker's house**, Robert Owen's **home** and exhibitions on 'saving New Lanark'. There's also a 1920s-style **village store**.

#### FALLS OF CLYDE

After you have viewed New Lanark you can then walk up to the **Falls of Clyde** (one hour) through the beautiful nature reserve managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. But before you go, drop into the **Falls of Clyde Wildlife Centre** (☎ 665262; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 11am-5pm Mar-Dec, noon-

4pm Jan & Feb) by the river in New Lanark. This place has undergone major refurbishment that includes interactive displays focused on badgers, bats, peregrines and other prominent species. There's also a bee tree where you can see golden honeycomb being created before your eyes.

#### CRAIGNETHAN CASTLE

This **castle** (HS; ☎ 860364; Tillietudlem; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) has a very authentic feel – it hasn't been restored beyond recognition – and is in a stunning, tranquil spot, too. You'll feel miles from anywhere, so bring a picnic and make a day of it.

With a commanding position above the River Nethan, this extensive ruin includes a virtually intact tower house and a **caponier** (unique in the UK) – a small gun emplacement with holes in the wall so men with handguns could pick off attackers. The chilly chambers under the tower house are quite eerie.

Craignethan is 5 miles northwest of Lanark. If you don't have your own transport, take an hourly Lanark-Hamilton bus to Crossford, then follow the footpath along the northern bank of the River Nethan (20 minutes).

#### WALKING

You can organise bat walks (£5) or badger-watching (£7) at the Falls of Clyde Wildlife Centre (opposite). From the centre there's also a 2.5-mile walk along a riverside path to the beautiful **Cora Linn** (waterfalls that inspired both Turner and Wordsworth) and beyond them to **Bonnington Linn**, a smaller waterfall of about 12 metres along the same river.

#### Sleeping

**New Lanark Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1143; Wee Row, Rosedale St, New Lanark; dm adult/child £14.50/10.75, tw £30; ☎ Apr-Oct; 🇬🇧) This hostel has a great location in an old mill building by the River Clyde. There are mainly four-bed dorms with attached bathroom and one twin room. It makes a great base for exploring this fascinating World Heritage site.

**Mrs Berkley** (☎ 665487; mary@martinberkley.com; 159 Hyndford Rd; r per person £22-28) A green oasis next to the thumping A73, Mrs Berkley provides simple, traditional accommodation on a lovely property.

**Summerlea** (☎ 664889; 32 Hyndford Rd; s/d £25/50) Just up from the tourist office, this modern

guesthouse is one of the more central choices available. It has all the comforts of home and mainly twin rooms. The huge single is a great choice as long as you don't mind the colour lavender.

**New Lanark Mill Hotel** (☎ 667200; hotel@newlanark.org; Mill One, New Lanark; s/d from £70/110, cottages per week from £270; 🇬🇧) Cleverly converted from an 18th-century mill, this hotel is full of character and is a stone's throw from the major attractions. It has luxury rooms (£25 extra for a spacious suite and added decadence) or self-catering accommodation in cottages. The hotel also serves meals.

### Eating

**Prego** (☎ 666300; 3 High St; mains £8-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) This perpetually busy Italian restaurant manages to create a modern ambience in a traditional setting. It dishes up excellent pasta, pizza and fillet steak at very reasonable prices, and the service matches the cuisine.

**Crown Tavern** (☎ 664639; 17 Hope St; lunch £7, dinner mains £10-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) Off the main street, the Crown is a local favourite. It's a highly regarded place that does good bar meals and even better food (pasta, seafood and vegetarian dishes) in the evenings in its restaurant. Try the local trout or the Highlander chicken.

Also recommended:

**Cafe Espresso** (Bannatyne St; light meals under £5; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) Pull up a pew by the window and watch Lanark life tick by.

**New Lanark Mill Hotel** (☎ 667200; hotel@newlanark.org; Mill One, New Lanark; bar meals £9, 2-course dinner £19) Creative and tasty bar meals. Mediterranean-influenced restaurant with excellent wine list.

### Getting There & Around

Lanark is 25 miles southeast of Glasgow. Express buses from Glasgow, run by Irvine's Coaches, make the hourly run from Monday to Saturday (£4.75, one hour).

Trains also run daily between Glasgow Central station and Lanark (£5, 55 minutes, every 30 minutes).

There's a half-hourly bus service from the train station (daily) to/from New Lanark. If you need a taxi, call **Clydewide** (☎ 663221).

### BIGGAR

☎ 01899 / pop 2100

Biggar is a pleasant town in a rural setting dominated by Tinto Hill (712m). The town is well worth a visit – it probably has more

museums and attractions per inhabitant than anywhere else its size.

## Information

**Health Centre** (☎ 220383; South Croft Rd)

**Post office** (High St)

**Royal Bank ATM** (High St)

**Tourist office** (☎ 221066; 155 High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Easter-Sep)

## Sights

The Biggar Museums Trust looks after four major museums in the town.

**Moat Park Heritage Centre** (☎ 221050; Kirkstyle; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun May-Sep), in a renovated church, covers the history of the area with geological and archaeological displays.

**Greenhill Covenanter's House** (☎ 221050; Burnbrae; adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 2-5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep) is an intelligently reconstructed farmhouse, with 17th-century furnishings and artefacts relating to the fascinating story of the local Covenanters, who valiantly defied their king to protect their religious beliefs.

**Gladstone Court** (☎ 221050; North Back Rd; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun May-Sep) is an indoor street museum with historic nook-and-cranny shops that you can pop into to steal a glimpse of the past. Don't miss the old printing press and the Albion A2 Dogcart, one of the oldest British cars still around.

**Biggar Puppet Theatre** (☎ 220631; 8 Broughton Rd; all seats £6.50; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Tue-Sat; ♿) has miniature Victorian puppets and bizarre modern ones over 1m high that glow in the dark. There are several ultraviolet displays, but you shouldn't need your sunglasses. Different shows are suitable for varying age groups, so inquire before you take along the kids. Guided tours cost £2.50/2 per adult/child.

**Tinto Hill** dominates the town. The hill is a straightforward 4.5-mile ascent by its northern ridge from the car park just off the A73 by Thankerton Crossroads. Look out for the Stone Age fort on your way up.

## Sleeping & Eating

**School Green Cottage** (☎ 220388; isobel.burness@virgin.net; 1 Kirkstyle; r per person £25) There's a double and a twin available in this conveniently located cottage. The neat rooms are well kitted out with New Zealand oak furnishings. Expect homespun hospitality, but be warned – there's no puffin' on the premises.

**Cornhill House** (☎ 220001; www.cornhillhousehotel.com; Cornhill Rd, Coulter; s/d £60/80) This is a well-appointed place, complete with turrets, and is situated in a peaceful setting 2 miles south-west of Biggar. The rooms are good value, particularly those that have been refurbished, and a three-course breakfast is included. Its excellent restaurant (mains £17) serves local produce.

## Getting There & Away

Biggar is 33 miles southeast of Glasgow. McEwan's bus 100 runs to/from Edinburgh (£4, 1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, three Sunday). HAD Coaches bus 191 runs hourly to/from Lanark (30 minutes).

# AYRSHIRE

Ayrshire is synonymous with golf and with Robert Burns – and there's plenty on offer here to satisfy both of these pursuits. Troon has six golf courses for starters, and plenty of yachties, and there's enough Burns memorabilia in the region to satisfy his most fanatic admirers.

This region's main drawcard though is the irresistible Isle of Arran. With a gourmet culinary scene, atmospheric watering holes (and some of the best beer gardens in the country), and the most varied and scenic countryside of the southern Hebridean islands, this easily accessible island shouldn't be missed.

Back on the mainland, retro holiday towns by the seaside, such as Largs, give Ayrshire a unique flavour, while towns such as Irvine provide a link to the region's maritime heritage. There's also spectacular coastal scenery, best admired at Culzean Castle, one of the finest stately homes in the country.

## Getting There & Around

Call **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 22 33) for public-transport information. **Stagecoach Western** (☎ 01292-613500) is the main bus operator on the mainland. On Arran, **Western** (☎ 01770-302000) and **Royal Mail** (☎ 01463-256200) buses whiz you around the island, while **CalMac** (☎ 01770-302166) ferries will get you there from the mainland.

## NORTH AYRSHIRE

### Largs

☎ 01475 / pop 11,300

Largs has a kitsch, resort-style waterfront that is loads of fun. You need to approach

the amusements, old-fashioned eateries and bouncing castle with the right attitude – on a sunny day buy an ice cream and go for a stroll to check out this slice of retro Scotland.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 689962; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) at the train station. The **post office** (Aitken St) is just off Main St.

The main attraction in Largs is the award-winning **Vikingar!** (☎ 689777; Greenock Rd; adult/child £4.20/3.20; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-3.30pm Oct & Mar, 10.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Nov & Feb). This multimedia exhibition describes Viking influence in Scotland until its demise at the Battle of Largs in 1263. Tours with staff in Viking outfits run every half-hour. There's also a theatre, cinema, café, shop, swimming pool and leisure centre. To get here, follow the A78 coast road north from the tourist office. You can't miss it, as it's the only place with a longship outside.

Largs hosts a **Viking festival** during the first week in September. The festival celebrates the Battle of Largs and the end of Viking political domination in Scotland. In early June the **Largs Jazz Festival** (www.largsjazzfestival.org.uk) gets cranked up.

## SLEEPING

**Glendarroch** (☎ 676305; 24 Irvine Rd; r per person £23) This B&B typifies Scottish hospitality – the rooms are well kept and the owner is friendly without being intrusive. If it's full, staff will probably ring around to try and find you something else.

**Brisbane House Hotel** (☎ 687200; www.brisbanehousehotel.com; 14 Greenock Rd, Esplanade; s/d from £75/90) A genteel place standing proudly on the foreshore, the refined Brisbane House is set in lovely gardens and has luxury rooms, some with spas and sea views. Children under five stay for free and cots are available.

Two solid guesthouses in a street full of 'em are **Glenny Guest House** (☎ 674220; 3 Charles St; r per person £23), which doesn't bother locking the doors – always a good sign, and **Haven House** (☎ 676389; 18 Charles St; r per person £20), where you'll be greeted with a smile. They're typical of the friendliness of this town and are a short walk to the ferry. Rooms share a bathroom, but are comfortable, clean and a good size.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Largs is 32 miles west of Glasgow by road. Buses run to Greenock (45 minutes, frequent), and roughly one or two hourly to Ardros-

san (30 minutes), Irvine (55 minutes) and Ayr (1¼ hours). There are trains to Largs from Glasgow Central station (£6, one hour, hourly).

## Isle of Great Cumbrae

☎ 01475 / pop 1200

Walking or cycling is the best way to explore this accessible, hilly island (it's only 4 miles long), ideal for a day trip from Largs. **Millport** is the only town, strung out a long way around the bay overlooking neighbouring Little Cumbrae. With the frequent ferry service, the place buzzes with day-trippers and families (there's heaps of stuff for kids to do, such as crazy golf and a funfair). Walking around the bay admiring the views is one of the most pleasurable things to do in town, where you'll find a post office, supermarket, bank (with ATM) and your choice of chippies.

The town boasts Europe's smallest cathedral, the lovely **Cathedral of the Isles** (☎ 530353; Colledge St; admission free; ☎ daylight hours), which was completed in 1851. Inside it's quite ornate with a lattice woodwork ceiling and fragments of early Christian carved stones.

Just east of town is the interesting **Robertson Museum & Aquarium** (☎ 530581; adult/child £1.50/1; ☎ 8.45am-12.15pm & 1.45-4.15pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus Sat Jun-Sep). A short way along the coast from the aquarium is a remarkable rock feature, the **Lion**.

Rural parts of the island are pleasant for **cycling**; the narrow Inner Circle Rd is a particularly good cycle route. There are several bike-hire places in Millport, including **Mapes** (☎ 530444; 3-5 Guildford St; per 1/6 hr £2/4.50).

If you're staying overnight on the island, try the unusual **College of the Holy Spirit** (☎ 530353; tccumbrae@argyll.anglican.org; Colledge St; s £33-50, d £60-70), next to the cathedral; there's a refectory-style dining room and a library.

The **Dancing Midgie** (☎ 531278; 24 Glasgow St; snacks £2-5; ☎ 9am-4pm) is a cheerful café on the seafront providing some healthy, tasty alternatives to the chippies in town, as well as an ideal spot for a read of the newspaper. Food is freshly prepared (sandwiches, salads, soups) and the coffee freshly brewed.

A very frequent 15-minute CalMac ferry ride links Largs with Great Cumbrae (passenger/car £4.20/18.40) daily. Buses meet the ferries for the 3.5-mile journey to Millport (£2.30 return).

## Ardrossan

☎ 01294 / pop 11,000

The main reason – OK the *only* reason – for coming here is to catch a CalMac ferry to Arran. Trains leave Glasgow Central station (£5.45, one hour, half-hourly) to connect with ferries.

Although the port area is receiving a much needed facelift, Ardrossan is very run down, and if you're hungry you're better off saving your appetite for more palatable surrounds, which beckon just across the bay.

If you need a B&B, **Edenmore Guest House** (☎ 462306; fax 604016; 47 Parkhouse Rd; s/d £30/50) is the saving grace of this ramshackle town. It's very friendly, and offers small, spotless rooms and a hearty welcome – nothing seems too much trouble for the owner. Room No 4 is the best double. The guesthouse is just off the main A78 and offers evening meals (thank goodness!).

## ISLE OF ARRAN

☎ 01770 / pop 4800

Enchanting Arran is a jewel in Scotland's tourism crown. Strangely undiscovered by foreign tourists, the island is a visual feast, and boasts culinary delights, cosy pubs (including its own brewery) and stacks of accommodation. The variations in Scotland's dramatic landscape can all be experienced on this one small island, best explored by pulling on the hiking boots or jumping on a bicycle. Arran offers some challenging walks in the mountainous north, often compared to the Highlands, while the island's circular road is very popular with cyclists.

Arran's many watering holes are legendary, and over summer most have regular live-music sessions.

### WORTH THE TRIP

Boat lovers should check out the **Scottish Maritime Museum** (☎ 278283; Gottries Rd, Harbourside; family/adult/child £7/3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) in Irvine. In the massive Linthouse Engine Shop – an old hangar with a cast-iron framework – is an absorbing collection of boats and machinery. A ticket also gives admission to the boat shop, with its wonderful works of art and huge kids activity area. Free guided tours leave from the boat shop – guides will take you down to the pontoons where you can clamber over various ships and visitors can also see a shipyard worker's restored flat.

If you're feeling peckish, drop into the wonderful **Ship Inn** (☎ 279722; 120 Harbour St; mains £7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner). It's the oldest pub in Irvine (1597), serves tasty bar meals and has bucket loads of character.

Irvine is 26 miles from Glasgow. There are frequent buses from Ayr (30 minutes) and Largs (45 minutes). Trains run to/from Glasgow Central station (£5.35, 35 minutes, half-hourly); the other way they go to Ayr.

## Orientation & Information

The ferry from Ardrossan docks at Brodick, the island's main town. To the south, Lamlash is actually the capital and, like nearby Whiting Bay, a popular seaside resort. From the village of Lochranza in the north there's a ferry link to Claonaig on the Kintyre peninsula.

In Brodick there are banks with ATMs.

**Arran Library** (☎ 302835; Brodick Hall; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue, 10am-7.30pm Thu & Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Free internet access.

**Hospital** (☎ 600777; Lamlash)

**Internet resources** (www.ayrshire-arran.com, www.arrantourism.com)

**Kildonan Hotel** (☎ 820207; Kildonan) Internet access £1 per hour. Also has wireless internet.

**Tourist office** (☎ 303774/6; arran@visitscotland.com; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-May, also 10am-5pm Sun May only) Efficient; near Brodick pier.

## Sights

### BRODICK

Most visitors arrive in Brodick, the heartbeat of the island, and congregate along the coastal road to admire the town's long curving bay.

**Brodick Castle & Park** (NTS; ☎ 302202; adult/child castle & park £10/7, park only £5/4; ☎ castle 11am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, park 9.30am-sunset) is 2.5 miles north of Brodick. The first impression is that of an animal morgue as you enter via the hunting gallery, wallpapered with prized deer heads. On your way to the formal dining room (with its peculiar table furnishings), note the intricacy of the fireplace in the library. The castle has more of a lived-in feel than some NTS properties. Only a small portion is open to visitors. The extensive grounds, now a country



park with various trails among the rhododendrons, justify the steep entry fee.

As you follow the coast along Brodick Bay, look out for **seals**, often seen on the rocks around Merkland Point. Two types live in these waters, the Atlantic grey seal and the common seal. They're actually quite easy to tell apart – the common seal has a face like a dog; the Atlantic grey seal has a Roman nose.

### CLADACH

As well as a shop where you can purchase every imaginable thing related to beer (and many you can't), there's an excellent self-guided brewery tour at **Isle of Arran Brewery** (☎ 302353; www.arranbrewery.com; Cladach; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun) for £2, which includes tastings in the shop. Arran beers are pure quality. Warning: Arran Dark is highly addictive.

### CORRIE TO LOCHRANZA

The coast road continues north to the small, pretty village of Corrie, where there's a shop and hotel, and one of the tracks up **Goatfell** (the island's tallest peak) starts here. Corrie Village Shop sells wonderful sculptures by

local artist Marvin Elliot. After **Sannox**, with a sandy beach and great views of the mountains, the road cuts inland. Heading to the very north, on the island's main road, visitors weave through lush glens flanked by Arran's towering mountain splendour.

### LOCHRANZA

The village of Lochranza is in a stunning location in a small bay at the north of the island. On a promontory stand the ruins of the 13th-century **Lochranza Castle** (HS; admission free; ☎ always open), said to be the inspiration for the castle in *The Black Island*, Hergé's Tintin adventure. It's basically a draughty shell inside, with interpretive signs to help you decipher the layout.

Also in Lochranza is **Isle of Arran Distillers** (☎ 830264; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Oct), which has innovative tours (adult/child £4/free), including an obligatory dram.

### WEST COAST

On the western side of the island, reached by String Rd across the centre (or the coast road), is the **Machrie Moor Stone Circle**, upright sandstone slabs erected around 6000 years ago. It's an eerie place, and these are the most impressive of the six stone circles on the island. There's another group at nearby **Auchagallon**, surrounding a Bronze Age burial cairn.

**Blackwaterfoot** is the largest village on the west coast; it has a shop/post office and two hotels. You can walk to **King's Cave** from here, via Drumadoun Farm – Arran is one of several islands that lay claim to a cave where Robert the Bruce had his famous arachnid encounter (p30). This walk could be combined with a visit to the Machrie stones.

### SOUTH COAST

The landscape in the southern part of the island is much gentler; the road drops into little wooded valleys, and it's particularly lovely around **Lagg**. There's a 10-minute walk from Lagg post office to **Torrylinn Cairn**, a chambered tomb over 4000 years old where at least eight bodies were found. **Kildonan** has pleasant sandy beaches, a gorgeous water outlook, two hotels, a campground and an ivy-clad ruined castle.

In **Whiting Bay** you'll find small sandy beaches, a village shop, a post office and **Arran Art Gallery** (☎ 700250; www.arranartgallery.com; Shore Rd), which has exquisite landscape portraits of Arran.

## LAMLASH

Lamlash is an upmarket town (even the streets feel wider here) in a dazzling setting, strung along the beachfront. The bay was used as a safe anchorage by the navy during WWI and WWII.

Just off the coast is **Holy Island**, owned by the Samye Ling Tibetan Centre and used as a retreat, but day visits are allowed. The **ferry** (☎ 600998) makes eight trips a day (£10, 15 minutes) from Lamlash and runs between May and September. No dogs, alcohol or fires are allowed on the island. There's a good walk to the top of the hill (314m), taking two or three hours return. It is possible to stay on the island in accommodation belonging to the grandiose-named **Holy Island Centre for World Peace & Health** (☎ 601100; www.holyisland.org; dm/s/d £25/45/65). Although designed more for groups doing yoga and meditation courses at the centre, individuals are welcome. There's also a dining room and library for guests.

## Activities

Drop into the tourist office for plenty of walking and cycling suggestions around the island. The handy *Selection of Arran Walks* (£3) is a selection of leaflets covering Arran's best-known walks. There are also plenty of maps available.

The walk up and down **Goatfell** takes up to eight hours return, starting in Brodick and finishing in the grounds of Brodick Castle. If the weather's fine, there are superb views to Ben Lomond and the coast of Northern Ireland. It can, however, be very cold and windy up there; take the appropriate maps (available at the tourist office), waterproof gear and a compass.

More moderate walks here include the trail through **Glen Sannox**, which goes from the village of Sannox up the burn, a two-hour return trip. From Whiting Bay Youth Hostel there are easy one-hour walks through the forest to the **Giant's Graves** and **Glenashdale Falls**, and back – keep an eye out for golden eagles and other birds of prey.

The 50-mile circuit on the coastal road is popular with cyclists and has few serious hills – more in the south than the north.

The **Arran Adventure Company** (☎ 302244; www.arranadventure.com; Shore Rd, Brodick) has loads of activities on offer and runs a different one each day (such as gorge walking, kayaking, climbing, abseiling and mountain biking). All

activities run for about three hours and cost around £35/20 for adults/kids. Drop in to see what's available while you're around.

## Festivals & Events

The week-long **Arran Folk Festival** (☎ 302623; www.arranfolkfestival.org) takes place in early June. There are also local village festivals from June to September.

## Sleeping BUDGET

Camping isn't allowed without permission from the landowner, but there are several camping grounds (open April to October).

**Glen Rosa Farm** (☎ 302380; camp sites per person £3.50) In a lush glen by a river, 2 miles from Brodick, this large place has plenty of nooks and crannies to pitch a tent. It's remote camping with cold water and toilets only. To get there from Brodick head north, take String Rd, then turn right almost immediately on the road signed to Glen Rosa. After 400m, on the left is a white house where you book in; the campground is further down the road.

**Seal Shore Camping Site** (☎ 820320; mdeighton@sealshore.fsnet.co.uk; Kildonan; camp sites per person/tent £6/1) This campground is by the sea, and the breeze keeps the midges away. It has a manicured grassed area and is right next to the Kildonan Hotel.

**Lochranza Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1140; Lochranza; dm adult/child £13/10; ☒ May-Oct) In the north of the island, this hostel has clean, spacious dorms, helpful owners and buckets of information about Arran. Its worn furnishings are offset by the lovely views.

## MIDRANGE

### Brodick

**Ourpick Fellview** (☎ 302153; fellviewarran@yahoo.co.uk; 6 Strathwhillan Rd; r per person £25, bunkhouse per person £15) This lovely house is an excellent place to stay and rooms are imbued with personable touches. It's a bit pokey inside and there's not much parking, but the owner is warm, friendly and encapsulates Scottish hospitality. The snug bunkhouse out the back is wee with just two bunks and you need to use the bathroom inside the house. The owner doesn't charge a supplement for singles (because, in her words – 'it's not their fault'). To get here, head north out of Brodick and take the left-hand turn to Strathwhillan. Fellview is just up on the right.

**Belvedere Guest House** (☎ 302397; belvedere@vision-unlimited.co.uk; Alma Rd; s £25-30, d £60-80) Imperiously overlooking the town, bay and surrounding mountains, Belvedere has well-presented rooms and seems perpetually busy: book early.

**McLaren Hotel** (☎ 302226; mclaren@arran-hotels.co.uk; Shore Rd; r per person £35) The McLaren is a creaking, ageing servant of hospitality on the Brodick seafront. It's a bit grotty and rooms are dated, but it's quirky too. The modern décor helps to freshen the old furnishings in the rooms, which feature some unusual layouts. We like it. Besides, you won't have far to wander after an evening's boozing in the huge beer garden out the front.

**Rosaburn Lodge** (☎ /fax 302383; d £60; ☒) By the River Rosa, 800m from the centre of Brodick, this very friendly lodge gets heaps of natural light. The Rosa suite overlooks the river via its bay window and is closer to an apartment than a bedroom. Note that there are no singles.

## Corrie

**Corrie Hotel** (☎ 810273; corriehotel@btinternet.com; r per person £25, with en suite £30) The traditional stone Corrie Hotel offers quaint, slightly ramshackle, but comfy, loft-style rooms – No 6 is a good option for three people. Singles are very small and plain, although some have good views of the Holy Island. Its wonderful beer garden scrapes the water's edge.

## Lochranza

**Lochranza Hotel** (☎ /fax 830223; hotel@lochranza.co.uk; s/d £52/84) The Lochranza, a bastion of Arran hospitality, has some rooms with outrageous pink floral décor, but they're a good size, sort of homely, and the double and twin at the front (room Nos 1 and 10) have views you can't buy. Rooms are a bit expensive, but they get cheaper if you stay more than one night.

**Apple Lodge** (☎ /fax 830229; Lochranza; d £70-78; ☒) Lavish Apple Lodge, the finest place to stay in Lochranza, has beautifully, individually furnished rooms, one with a four-poster bed, and a guest lounge perfect for curling up with a good book. It makes all the difference when your hosts love their job.

## Whiting Bay

**Viewbank House** (☎ 700326; www.viewbank-arran.co.uk; s £25-28, d £56-70) Appropriately named, it does indeed have tremendous views from its

vantage point above Whiting Bay. Rooms are tastefully furnished and well kept. The real pull of this wonderful B&B, however, is its friendly hosts – expect a good dose of Arran hospitality. There's also a great lawn at the front to stretch out on during those shimmering sunny Arran days.

**Ourpick Royal Arran Hotel** (☎ 700286; www.royalarran.co.uk; s £42.50, d £42.50-47.50; ☒) This place has had a major refurbishment and the results are magnificent. It's a personalised, intimate hotel with just four rooms. The double upstairs is our idea of accommodation heaven – four-poster bed, big heavy linen, a huge room and gorgeous water views. Room No 1 downstairs is a great size and has a private patio. The hosts couldn't be more welcoming.

**Argentine House** (☎ 700662; www.argentinearran.co.uk; Shore Rd; s/d from £55/70; ☒) Swiss hospitality in very modish, minimalist rooms is what you can expect at this small hotel. Of the five stylish rooms, the 'Firth of Clyde' is by far the best with smashing views and heaps of space. The owners speak French, German, Italian and Spanish. If you don't enjoy your stay here you really *are* fussy. Note that prices increase for a sea-facing room but decrease with multiple-night stays.

**Eden Lodge Hotel** (☎ 700357; www.edenlodgehotel.co.uk; r without/with bathroom £60/80; ☒) This new kid on the block injects a bit of flair into the local accommodation scene. Rooms are very modern with a minimalist bent and a hint of TLC in the air. If you want to spoil yourself try the Jacuzzi room at £90. The dishes downstairs use lots of local Arran produce and there's a good range of salads.

## Lamlash

**Lilybank Guest House** (☎ 600230; www.lilybank-arran.co.uk; Shore Rd, Lamlash; r per person £25-30) Built in the 17th century, Lilybank retains its heritage but has been refurbished for 21st-century needs. Rooms are slightly frilly, but clean and comfortable. Breakfast includes oak-smoked kippers and Arran goodies. It's right next to the Glenisle Hotel.

## TOP END

**Lagg Inn** (☎ 870255; www.lagghotel.com; Lagg; s/d from £60/80) An 18th-century coach house, this inn has a beautiful location and is the perfect place for a romantic weekend. Grab a superior room with garden views. There's also a cracking beer garden and a fine restaurant.

**Kildonan Hotel** (☎ 820207; www.kildonahotel.com; Kildonan; standard/superior r £60/90; 🍷) The Kildonan offers stylish, upmarket B&B in light and airy rooms with a minimalist bent. The grassed area in the front of this classy hotel has been landscaped into a beautiful garden providing a fantastic seating area overlooking the water. Bar meals are available all day and the restaurant, in a lovely conservatory, specialises in fresh, local seafood – the menu changes daily depending on the catch.

**Kilmichael Country House Hotel** (☎ 302219; www.kilmichael.com; Glen Cloy; s/d from £100/150) The island's best hotel, the Kilmichael is also the oldest building – it has a glass window dating from 1650. The hotel is a luxurious, tastefully decorated hideaway, a mile outside Brodick, with eight rooms and an excellent restaurant.

## Eating & Drinking

**Island Cheese Co** (Home Farm, Duchess Ct) Anyone with a fetish for cheese should stop by this place, where you can stock up on the famed local cheeses and watch the masters at work. There are free samples.

**our pick** **Catacol Bay Hotel** (☎ 830231; Catacol; bar mains £6-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Two miles from Lochranza, this bar does great food. The Sunday buffet for £10 (over 60s – £7) is famous, and the cheery service makes you feel like a local. With its snug bar, sunny beer garden, frequent live music and great beers on tap, it's the best pub on the island.

**Drift Inn** (☎ 600656; Shore Rd, Lamhass; mains £5.50-12; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) There are few better places to be on the island on a sunny day than the beer garden at this child-friendly hotel, ploughing your way through an excellent bar meal while gazing over to the Holy Island. There are pub faves and genuine Angus beef burgers, with generous portions all round.

**Ormidale Hotel** (☎ 302293; Glen Cloy; mains £8-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This hotel has decent bar food. Vegetarians should try the mushroom and stilton lasagne, while carnivores can dig into braised steak and onions in Arran ale, or a cold Kintyre salmon salad. Arran beers are on tap.

**Breadalbane Hotel** (☎ 820284; Kildonan; mains £8-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Good home-cooked food is served here, and you can dine by the fire on blustery nights or on the decking overlooking the water if the sun is shining. If you want to drown out the sound of your chomping, give the jukebox a whirl.

**Brodick Bar & Brasserie** (☎ 302169; Alma Rd, Brodick; mains £8-15; 🍷 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily; 🍷) By the post office, this is a good choice for families (high chairs are available) and the older crowd, particularly if you like tucking into pizzas.

**our pick** **Creelers Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 302810; Duchess Ct; lunch £8, dinner mains £15-17; 🍷 closed Mon) This award-winning restaurant, 1.5 miles north of Brodick, offers formal but unpretentious dining and is religious about seafood, sourcing all of its delicacies from Arran and the Western Isles. Try the seafood salad with avocado and lime dressing. The Smokehouse next door sells seafood over the counter.

**Lighthouse Tearoom & Bunkhouse** (☎ 850240; Pinnmill; mains £9-13; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Calling itself a tearoom is being coy! The restaurant here has an extensive menu, great desserts and outdoor seating, all in a very, very blue lighthouse theme. It's getting quite a name for its excellent dishes (such as baked whole seabass stuffed with lime and coriander) using seasonal produce. Book in advance for dinner.

**Joshua's** (☎ 700308; Shore Rd, Whiting Bay; starters £4, mains £9-14; 🍷 10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) This funky place decked out in suave red tones and with a sun-drenched conservatory on the water's edge serves grills, seafood and salads in the evening, with lighter offerings during the day.

Other recommendations:

**Corrie Hotel** (☎ 810273; Corrie; mains £7-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Substantial bar meals; delicious Banoffee pie.

**Glenisle Hotel** (☎ 600559; Shore Rd, Lamhass; starters £4.50, mains £9-12; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Excellent pub food; serves Scottish faves such as *Cullen skink* (soup made with smoked haddock, potato, onion and milk). Good wine list.

## Getting There & Away

CalMac runs a car ferry between Ardrossan and Brodick (passenger/car return £8.75/53, 55 minutes, four to eight daily), and from April to late October runs services between Claonaig and Lochranza (passenger/car return £7.85/35.50, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily).

## Getting Around

### BICYCLE

Several places hire out bicycles in Brodick, including **Arran Adventure Company** (☎ 302244; Shore Rd; day/week £15/50) and the **Boathouse** (☎ 302868; Brodick Beach; day/week £12.50/45). Other bike-hire places around the island include **Blackwaterfoot Garage** (☎ 860277; Blackwaterfoot; day/week £8/20).

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

At the service station near the ferry pier, **Arran Transport** (☎ 302121; Brodick) hires cars from around £28 per day. Note that it also hires cars for part days at a pro-rata rate. Child seats are available.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

There are frequent bus services on the island. Five or six buses daily go from Brodick pier to Lochranza (45 minutes, Monday to Saturday), and three to 10 daily go from Brodick to Lamhass and Whiting Bay (30 minutes). Pick up a timetable from the tourist office. An Arran Rural Rover ticket costs £4.20 and permits travel anywhere on the island for a day (buy it from the driver). For a taxi, call ☎ 302274 in Brodick or ☎ 600903 in Lamhass.

## EAST AYRSHIRE

In **Kilmarnock**, where Johnnie Walker whisky has been blended since 1820, is **Dean Castle** (☎ 01563-522702; www.deancastle.com; Dean Rd; admission free; 🍷 11am-5pm Wed-Sun), a 15-minute walk from the bus and train stations. The castle, restored in the first half of the 20th century, has a virtually windowless keep (dating from 1350) and an adjacent palace (1468), with a superb collection of medieval arms, armour, tapestries and musical instruments. The grounds, an 81-hectare park, are a good place for a picnic, or you can eat at the visitor centre's tearoom, where snacks and light meals cost under £5. Free guided tours are available. From Ayr there are frequent buses throughout the day.

## SOUTH AYRSHIRE

### Ayr

☎ 01292 / pop 46,500

Ayr is a large, bustling town and a convenient base for a tour of Burns territory. The town's long sandy beach has made it a popular family seaside resort since Victorian times. There are many fine Georgian and Victorian buildings, although some areas of town show signs of neglect.

### INFORMATION

Banks with ATMs are on High St and Sandgate. The post office is also on Sandgate.

**Ayr Hospital** (☎ 610555) South of town, by the Dalmellington road.

**Carnegie Library** (☎ 286385; 12 Main St; 🍷 10am-7.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed & Sat) Offers fast, free internet access.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; 22 Sandgate; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Mar, 11am-4pm Sun Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug)

## SIGHTS

Most things to see in Ayr are Burns-related. The bard was baptised in the **Auld Kirk** (Old Church; ☎ 262938) off High St. The atmospheric cemetery here overlooks the river and is good for a stroll, offering an escape from the bustle of High St. Several of his poems are set here in Ayr; in *Twa Brigs*, Ayr's old and new bridges argue with one another. The **Auld Brig** (Old Bridge) was built in 1491 and spans the river just north of the church. In Burns' poem *Tam o'Shanter*, Tam spends a boozy evening in the **pub** that now bears his name, at 230 High St.

**St John's Tower** (☎ 286385; Eglinton Tce; admission free; 🍷 by arrangement) is the only remnant of a church where a parliament was held in 1315, the year after the celebrated victory at Bannockburn. John Knox's son-in-law was the minister here, and Mary, Queen of Scots, stayed overnight in 1563.

## ACTIVITIES

With only a few steep hills, the area is well suited to cyclists. From Ayr, you could cycle to Alloway and spend a couple of hours seeing the Burns sights before continuing to Culzean via Maybole. You could either camp here, after seeing Culzean Castle, or cycle back along the coast road to Ayr, a return trip of about 22 miles. **AMG Cycles** (☎ 287580; 55 Dalblair Rd; day/weekend/week £12.50/15/35) hires out bikes.

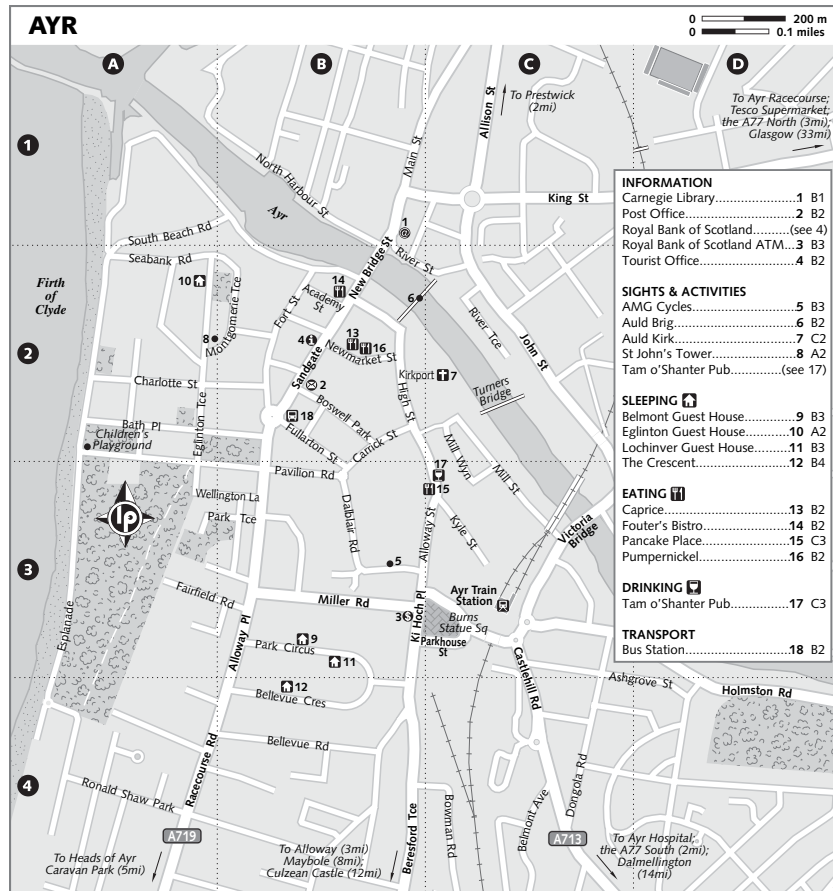
The beachfront is good for a walk in sunny weather, especially at low tide when a huge sandy beach is revealed. The silhouettes of Arrans peaks in the bay form an impressive backdrop.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Burns an' a' That** festival, held in Ayr in May, has been running for only a few years, but looks set to become a major event on Scotland's cultural calendar.

## SLEEPING

**Heads of Ayr Caravan Park** (☎ 442269; tent site & 2 people £16-18, chalets per week from £200; 🍷 Mar-Oct) This caravan park is in a lovely, quiet location close to the beach. From Ayr take the A719 south for about 5 miles.



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**Eglinton Guest House** (☎ /fax 264623; 23 Eglinton Tce; r per person £24) A short walk west of the bus station, this family-run Georgian property is in a quiet cul-de-sac and has a range of traditional, tidy rooms. The location is brilliant – between the beach and the town.

**Lochinver Guest House** (☎ /fax 265086; young Jochinver@talk21.com; 32 Park Circus; s/d £25/50) Though a little faded, Lochinver is a solid old guesthouse that is particularly good value for singles. Most rooms are well sized in this towering old Victorian terrace house and some have renovated bathrooms. It's a good place if you like your distance from the owners as it's not very personable.

**Belmont Guest House** (☎ 265588; www.belmontguesthouse.co.uk; 15 Park Circus; s/d £29/54) There's a

relaxing lounge and library for guests in this comfortable Victorian town house. It's a little deceptive inside, with the '70s décor punctuated by pictures of wildlife staring hungrily down at diners, but the rooms with Victorian furnishings are clean and mostly of a good size. Chocolates on your pillow give a romantic feel to the rooms. Note that over busy periods it doesn't accommodate singles.

**The Crescent** (☎ 287329; www.26crescent.freeserve.co.uk; 26 Bellevue Cres; s £45, d £60-70) If you want to move up a couple of rungs on the luxury and comfort scale, consider this outstanding small hotel. There are five opulent, individually furnished rooms, including a four-poster suite fit for royalty and a room with French doors opening onto the garden.

## EATING & DRINKING

**Pumpernickel** (☎ 263830; 32 Newmarket St; snacks £4-6; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Continental-style toasties and other delicious snacks are dished out at this deli-café. Dine indoors among the cheeses, meats and preserves or at outdoor tables on the pedestrianised street. It's a good spot for a glass of wine in the afternoon, too. If the weather's right, go for a gelato (£6).

**Caprice** (☎ 610916; 48 Newmarket St; mains £8-12; ☺ lunch & dinner daily, breakfast Mon-Fri) This French bistro-style bar-café provides dining among imported beers and well-to-do locals. Stained-glass windows, plenty of natural light, booth seating and a long bar gives Caprice a warm and intimate setting. There are great early meal deals too such as pizza, pasta or risotto for £5, from 5pm to 6.30pm Sunday to Thursday.

**Fouter's Bistro** (☎ 261391; 2a Academy St; 2-/3-course lunch £10/13, dinner starters £6, mains £14-17; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) The best place to eat in town, Fouter's is a class act set in a former bank vault opposite the town hall. It's an ideal place to splash out on a top-class dinner without breaking the budget. It specialises in Ayrshire produce (such as new season local lamb with pine nut, garlic and herb crust) and Mediterranean-style seafood.

If you are after a supermarket for self-catering, there's a huge **Tesco** (Whitlatts Rd) by Ayr Racecourse, and there's an **Asda** (Wallace St) near the river.

Also recommended:

**Pancake Place** (☎ 288666; 231 High St; mains £5-7; ☺ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Serves sweet and savoury pancakes (with fillings such as Mexican chilli or toffee apple) and all-day breakfasts.

**Tam o'Shanter** (☎ 611684; 230 High St; mains £7; ☺ lunch & dinner) Atmospheric old pub with traditional pub grub.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

Ayr is 33 miles from Glasgow and is Ayrshire's major transport hub. The main bus operator in the area is **Stagecoach Western** (☎ 613500) – its very frequent X77 service (Monday to Saturday) from Glasgow to Ayr costs £4.50 (one hour). It also runs buses from Ayr to Stranraer (£6.50, two hours, four to eight daily), Greenock (£6.40, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday, two Sunday), Largs (£4.80, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Dumfries (£5.30, 2¼ hours, five to seven daily).

The Ayr Dayrider (£3.40) allows one day's unlimited travel in and around Ayr, including Alloway, from 9am.

There are at least two trains an hour that run from Glasgow Central station to Ayr (£6.20, 50 minutes), and some trains continue south from Ayr to Stranraer (£11.70, 1½ hours).

For a taxi, call **Central Taxis** (☎ 267655).

## Alloway

☎ 01292

The pretty, lush town of Alloway (3 miles south of Ayr) should be on the itinerary of every Robert Burns fan – he was born here on 25 January 1759. Even if you haven't been seduced by Burns mania, it's still well worth a visit since the Burns-related exhibitions give a good impression of life in Ayrshire in the late 18th century. The sights are within easy walking distance of each other and come under the umbrella title **Burns National Heritage Park** (www.burnsheritagepark.com). Rumours of major renovations to these Burns attractions are flying around, so things may have changed (for the better) by the time you read this.

The **Burns Cottage & Museum** (☎ 441215; adult/child £4/2.50; ☺ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) is situated next to the main road from Ayr. A 10-minute video introduces you to Burns, his family and the cottage. Born in the little box bed in this cramped thatched dwelling, the poet spent the first seven years of his life here. A fascinating museum of Burnsiana next to the cottage exhibits some fabulous artwork, and many of his songs and letters.

The nearby **Tam o'Shanter Experience** (☎ 443700; Murdoch's Lane; adult/child £2/1.25; ☺ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) has a clever audiovisual display of the famous poem, although an understanding of Burns' 18th-century Lowland Scots dialect would greatly enhance appreciation.

From here, you can visit the ruins of **Alloway Auld Kirk**, the setting for part of *Tam o'Shanter*. Burns' father, William Burnes (his son dropped the 'e' from his name), is buried in the kirkyard.

The **Burns Monument & Gardens** (☺ 9am-5pm) are nearby. The monument was built in 1823 and affords a view of the 13th-century **Brig o'Doon** (see p176). There are also statues of Burns' drinking cronies in the gardens.

**ROBERT BURNS (1759–96)**

Best remembered for penning the words of *Auld Lang Syne*, Robert Burns is Scotland's most famous poet and a popular hero whose birthday (25 January) is celebrated as Burns Night by Scots around the world. The Scottish executive hopes to turn Burns Night into a national celebration to rival Ireland's St Patrick's Day.

Burns was born in 1759 in Alloway. At school he soon showed an aptitude for literature and a fondness for the folk song. He later began to write his own songs and satires. When the problems of his arduous farming life were compounded by the threat of prosecution from the father of Jean Armour, with whom he'd had an affair, he decided to emigrate to Jamaica. He gave up his share of the family farm and published his poems to raise money for the journey.

The poems were so well reviewed in Edinburgh that Burns decided to remain in Scotland and devote himself to writing. He went to Edinburgh in 1787 to publish a second edition, but the financial rewards were not enough to live on and he had to take a job as a customs officer in Dumfriesshire. He contributed many songs to collections published by Johnson and Thomson in Edinburgh, and a 3rd edition of his poems was published in 1793. To give an idea of the prodigious writings of the man, Robert Burns composed more than 28,000 lines of verse over 22 years. Burns died of rheumatic fever in Dumfries in 1796, aged 37.

Burns wrote in Lallans, the Scottish Lowland dialect of English that is not very accessible to the Sassenach (Englishman), or foreigner; perhaps this is part of his appeal. He was also very much a man of the people, satirising the upper classes and the church for their hypocrisy.

Many of the local landmarks mentioned in the verse-tale *Tam o'Shanter* can still be visited. Farmer Tam, riding home after a hard night's drinking in a pub in Ayr, sees witches dancing in Alloway churchyard. He calls out to the one pretty witch, but is pursued by them all and has to reach the other side of the River Doon to be safe. He just manages to cross the Brig o'Doon, but his mare loses her tail to the witches.

The Burns connection in southern Scotland is milked for all it's worth and tourist offices have a *Burns Heritage Trail* leaflet leading you to every place that can claim some link with the bard. Burns fans should have a look at [www.robertburns.org](http://www.robertburns.org).

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Stagecoach Western bus 57 operates hourly between Alloway and Ayr from 8.45am to 3.45pm Monday to Saturday (10 minutes). Otherwise, rent a bike and cycle here.

**Troon**

☎ 01292 / pop 14,800

Troon, a major sailing centre on the coast 7 miles north of Ayr, has excellent sandy beaches and six golf courses. The demanding championship course **Royal Troon** (☎ 311555; [www.royaltroon.co.uk](http://www.royaltroon.co.uk); Craigend Rd) offers two rounds of golf for £220, including lunch in the clubhouse (caddie hire is £35 extra).

**Dundonald Castle** (☎ 01563-851489; Dundonald; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) commands impressive views and has one of the finest barrel-vaulted ceilings in Scotland. The compulsory guided tour can be tiresome, but inside you can still see the original mason's signature on the stones. It was the first home of the Stuart kings, built by Robert II in 1371, and reckoned to be the third most important

castle in Scotland, after Edinburgh and Stirling. The visitor centre has a useful timeline of settlements here starting from 1500 BC. There are also models of the castle's development starting with a Dark Age fort from about 500AD.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Dundonald Castle is 4 miles northeast of Troon. Stagecoach Western runs hourly buses (Monday to Saturday) between Troon and Kilmarnock, via Dundonald village.

There are half-hourly trains to Ayr (£2.30, 11 minutes) and Glasgow (£5.60, 45 minutes).

**P&O** (☎ 0870 242 4777; [www.poirishsea.com](http://www.poirishsea.com)) sails twice daily to Larne in Northern Ireland (£20 for passengers, £50 to £60 for a car and driver, two hours).

**Culzean Castle & Country Park**

The Scottish National Trust's flagship property, magnificent **Culzean** (NTS; cull-ane; ☎ 01655-884400; [www.culzeanexperience.org](http://www.culzeanexperience.org); adult/child/family £12/8/30, park only adult/child £8/5; ☎ 10.30am-5pm

Apr-Oct, park 9.30am-sunset year round) is one of the most impressive of Scotland's great stately homes. The entrance to Culzean is a converted viaduct, and on approach the castle appears like a mirage, floating into view. Designed by Robert Adam, who was encouraged to exercise his romantic genius in its design, this 18th-century mansion is perched dramatically on the edge of the cliffs. Robert Adam was the most influential architect of his time, renowned for his meticulous attention to detail and the elegant classical embellishments with which he decorated his ceilings and fireplaces.

The beautiful oval staircase here is regarded as one of his finest achievements. On the 1st floor, the opulence of the circular saloon contrasts violently with the views of the wild sea below. Lord Cassillis' bedroom is said to be haunted by a lady in green, mourning for a lost baby. Even the bathrooms are palatial, the dressing room beside the state bedroom being equipped with a Victorian state-of-the-art shower.

There are also two ice houses, a swan pond, a pagoda, a re-creation of a Victorian vinery, an orangery, a deer park and an aviary. Wildlife in the area includes otters.

If you really want to experience the magic of this place, it's possible to stay in the **castle** ([culzean@nts.org.uk](mailto:culzean@nts.org.uk); s/d from £140/225, Eisenhower ste £250/375) from April to October. If you're not in that league there's a **Camping & Caravanning Club** (☎ 01655-760627; tent sites members/nonmembers £8/14) with good facilities in the park.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Culzean is 12 miles south of Ayr; Maybole is the nearest train station, but since it's 4 miles away it's best to come by bus from Ayr (30 minutes, 11 daily, Monday to Saturday). Buses pass the park gates, from where it's a 20-minute walk through the grounds to the castle.

**Turnberry**

☎ 01655 / pop 200

Visitors playing the world-famous golf course here usually stay at the luxurious **Westin Turnberry Resort** (☎ 331000; [www.turnberry.co.uk](http://www.turnberry.co.uk); r from £270), where they're able to land their private aircraft or helicopter. If you can afford the price of accommodation, a six-course dinner in the award-winning restaurant is a snip at £50.

**Kirkoswald**

☎ 01655 / pop 500

Just 2 miles east of Kirkoswald, by the A77, **Crossraguel Abbey** (HS; ☎ 883113; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) is a substantial ruin dating back to the 13th century that's good fun to explore. The recently renovated 16th-century gatehouse is the best part – you'll find decorative stonework and superb views from the top. Robert Adam was the most influential architect of his time, renowned for his meticulous attention to detail and the elegant classical embellishments with which he decorated his ceilings and fireplaces.

Stagecoach Western runs Ayr to Girvan buses via Crossraguel Abbey and Kirkoswald (35 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday).

**Ailsa Craig**

The curiously shaped island of Ailsa Craig can be seen from much of southern Ayrshire. While its unusual blue-tinted granite has been used by geologists to trace the movements of the great Ice Age ice sheet, bird-watchers know Ailsa Craig as the world's second-largest gannet colony – around 10,000 pairs breed annually on the island's sheer cliffs.

To see the island close up you can take a cruise from Girvan on the **MV Glorious** (☎ 01465-713219; bookings at 7 Harbour St). It's possible to land if the sea is reasonably calm; a four-hour trip costs £17/12 per adult/child (an extra £5 if you want to do a spot of fishing). A minimum of eight people and one week's notice are required.

Trains going to Girvan run approximately hourly (with only three trains Sunday) from Ayr (£4, 30 minutes).

**WORTH THE TRIP**

In mid-2007 a Palladian mansion, designed in the 1750s by the Adam brothers, was saved from being privately sold off. Prince Charles intervened in the break up and sale of **Dumfries House** and its contents by the Marquess of Bute. The house has been described as an architectural jewel and its preservation, dating to the 1750s, is said to be unique. It also contains an extraordinarily well-preserved collection of Thomas Chippendale furniture. Dumfries House should be open to the public in 2008 and is located 13 miles east of Ayr, near Cumnock. For information about its opening, contact the Ayr tourist office.

## DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Some of the region's finest attractions lie in the gentle hills and lush valleys of Dumfries & Galloway. Ideal for families, there's plenty on offer for the kids and, happily, restaurants, B&Bs and guesthouses that are very used to children. Galloway Forest is a highlight, with its sublime views, mountain-biking and walking trails, red deer, kites and other wildlife, as are the dream-like ruins of Caerlaverock Castle.

Adding to the appeal of this enticing region is a string of southern Scotland's most idyllic towns. Although they are devoid of the tourist crush, domestic day-trippers flood pretty Castle Douglas and other hotspots when the sun shines. And shine it does. Warmed by the Gulf Stream, this is the mildest region in Scotland, a phenomenon that has allowed the development of some famous gardens.

### Getting There & Around

Buses between London and Belfast, via Birmingham, Manchester, Carlisle, the towns along the A75 (including Dumfries and Newton Stewart) and Stranraer are available with **Eurolines/National Express** (☎ 0870 514 3219).

Local bus operators frequently change, although routes (and bus numbers) rarely alter. The main operators are **Stagecoach Western** (☎ 01776-704484) and **MacEwan's** (☎ 01387-256533). The Day Discoverer (adult/child £5/2) is a useful day ticket valid on most buses in the region and on Stagecoach Cumberland in Cumbria.

Two train lines from Carlisle to Glasgow cross the region, via Dumfries and Moffat respectively. The line from Glasgow to Stranraer runs via Ayr.

### DUMFRIES

☎ 01387 / pop 31,500

Despite having several important Burns-related museums, Dumfries has escaped mass tourism. Lovely, red-hued sandstone bridges connect the sprawling town, which is bisected by the wide River Nith, and there are pleasant grassed areas along the river bank.

Historically, Dumfries held a strategic position in the path of vengeful English armies. Consequently, although it has existed since

Roman times, the oldest standing building dates from the 17th century.

### Information

There is a Royal Bank of Scotland with ATMs near the tourist office.

**Ewart library cyber centre** (☎ 253820; Catherine St; ☎ 9.15am-7.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9.15am-5pm Thu & Sat) Free internet access at this library's excellent cyber centre.

**Laundrette** (☎ 252295; 26 Annan Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Wash and dry from £8.

**Tourist office** (☎ 253862; dumfriestour@visitscotland.com; 64 Whitesands; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun Nov, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Dec-Mar) A very good tourist office with plenty of information on the region. You can book Eurolines and Scottish Citylink buses here.

### Sights

The red-sandstone bridges arching over the River Nith are the most attractive features of the town, and Devorgilla Bridge (1431) is one of the oldest bridges in Scotland.

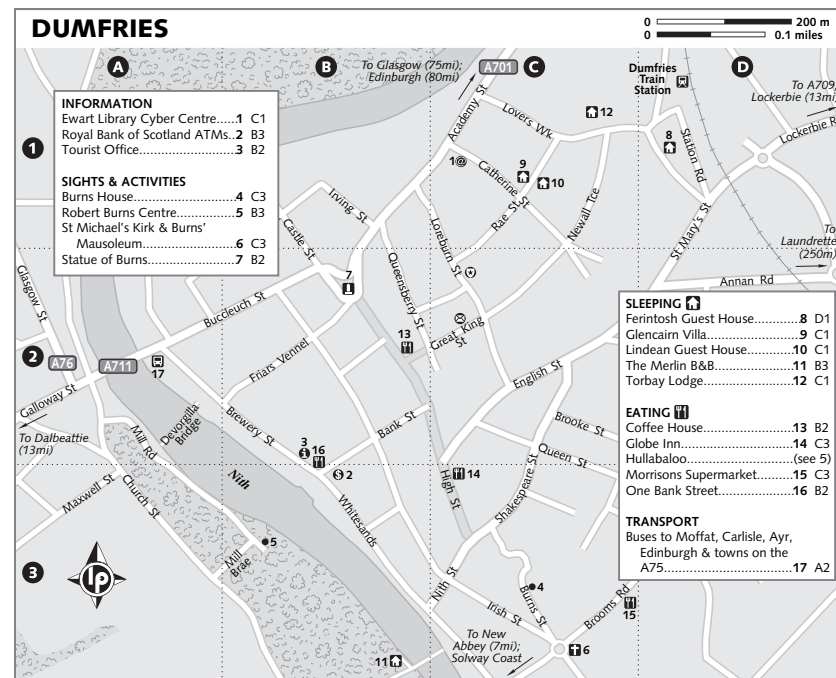
**Burns House** (☎ 255297; Burns St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) is a place of pilgrimage for Burns enthusiasts. It's here that the poet spent the last years of his life, and there are some interesting relics, original letters and manuscripts.

**Robert Burns Centre** (☎ 264808; Mill Rd; admission free, audiovisual presentation £1.60/80p; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) is an award-winning museum in an old mill on the banks of the River Nith. It tells the story of Burns and Dumfries in the 1790s. The audiovisual presentation explains the exhibition's contents, and there are original Burns manuscripts. Also check out the photographic exhibition, which includes local wildlife and some beautiful shots of the Solway coast.

Burns' **mausoleum** is in the graveyard at **St Michael's Kirk**. At the top of High St is a **statue** of the bard; take a close look at the sheepdog at his feet.

### Sleeping

**The Merlin B&B** (☎ 261002; 2 Kenmore Tce; r per person £25) The folks here have been doing B&B a long time and they know their stuff. The whole setup is impressive and effortless. There are three rooms – the best is No 2, which has



superb river and town vistas. Little touches like homemade choccies and fresh milk in the rooms sets this place apart. Right on the river bank and next to a pedestrian bridge, it has the best location in Dumfries.

**Torbay Lodge** (☎ 253922; www.torbaylodge.co.uk; 31 Lovers Walk; r per person £28) New owners have breathed a bit of life into rooms that were already of a high standard at this guesthouse. There are six beautifully presented bedrooms with generously sized en suites and the good vibe is topped off with an excellent breakfast.

**Ferintosh Guest House** (☎ 252262; www.ferintosh.net; 30 Lovers Walk; s £30-45, d £50-56) A Victorian villa, opposite the train station, Ferintosh has sumptuous rooms done in individual themes. The whisky room is our fave – no matter which you choose, there'll probably be a free dram awaiting you on arrival. These people have the right attitude towards hospitality. The owner's original artwork complements the décor and mountain bikers are welcomed with a shed out the back for bikes.

Two B&Bs, opposite each other, that excel in the B&B trade are **Glencairn Villa** (☎ /fax 262467; info@glencairnvilla.co.uk; 45 Rae St; s/d from £22/48) – room

No 3 is a great double – and efficiently run **Lindean Guest House** (☎ 251888; 80 Rae St; s/d £22/50).

### Eating

**Coffee House** (☎ 251771; 148 High St; snacks £2.50-3.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun; ☎) For a relaxing pit stop smack bang in the middle of High St, check out this cheeky little number bringing a bit of caffeine snobbery to Dumfries. Grab the paper, your favourite tea or coffee and watch the world tick by.

**One Bank St** (☎ 279754; 1 Bank St; lunch £3.50-5.50; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) This wee room upstairs around the corner from the tourist office (look for sign on the street) does gourmet rolls and baked potatoes, but gets even more adventurous with wraps like roast veg and humus or smoked chicken and raspberry. You can also scoff a bagel or ploughman's lunch. Roll fillings include brie and grape, or stilton and pear.

**our pick Globe Inn** (☎ 252335; 56 High St; bar mains £5.50-6.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) A traditional, rickety old nook-and-canny pub, said to be Burns' favourite watering hole, serving great home-cooked bar meals. The Globe is atmospheric, warm and welcoming.



**Hullabaloo** (☎ 259679; Mill Rd; lunch mains £4.50-8.50, dinner mains £10-14; 🍴 lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) At week-ends locals flock to this contemporary restaurant at the Robert Burns Centre. For lunch there's wraps, melts and ciabattas, but come dinner time it's inventive angles on traditional creations – try butterfly bream fillet stuffed with king prawns, courgette and garlic, or Moroccan vegetable tagine with spicy couscous.

For self-caterers looking for a supermarket, you can buy all you need at the huge **Morrisons** (Brooms Rd).

### Getting There & Away

Dumfries is 80 miles southwest of Edinburgh on the A76. Stranraer is 68 miles west on the A75, via Castle Douglas and Newton Stewart.

### BUS

Eurolines and National Express run buses 920 and 921 twice daily between London/Birmingham and Belfast, via Carlisle, Dumfries, towns along the A75 and Stranraer; London to Dumfries is £29.

Local buses run regularly to Kirkcudbright (one hour, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) and towns along the A75 to Stranraer (£6.50, 2¼ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

Bus 100/101 runs to/from Edinburgh (£6, 2¼ hours, six daily), via Moffat and Biggar.

### TRAIN

There are trains between Carlisle and Dumfries (£7.70, 35 minutes, every hour or two, Monday to Saturday), and direct trains between Dumfries and Glasgow (£11.60, 1¼ hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday); there's a reduced service on Sunday.

### Getting Around

Bikes are available for hire from **Grierson & Graham** (Shed; ☎ 270275; The Steading, Mabie Forest; per 24hr from £16; 🚲 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) near Dumfries and close to mountain-biking terrain, but don't forget to bring photo ID and cash for your deposit. For a taxi call **Dixon's Taxis** (☎ 720900).

### SOUTH OF DUMFRIES Caerlaverock

The ruins of **Caerlaverock Castle** (HS; ☎ 01387-770244; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar), by Glencaple on a beautiful stretch of the Solway coast, are among the loveliest in Britain. Surrounded by a moat,

lawns and stands of trees, the unusual pink-stoned triangular castle looks impregnable – in fact, it fell several times. The current castle dates from the late 13th century. Inside, there's an extraordinary Scottish Renaissance façade to apartments that were built in 1634. With nooks and crannies to explore, passageways and remnants of fireplaces, this castle is great for the whole family.

It's worth combining a visit to the castle with one to **Caerlaverock Wildlife & Wetlands Centre** (☎ 01387-770200; adult/child £5.50/2.75; 🕒 10am-5pm), a mile east. It protects 546 hectares of salt marsh and mud flats, the habitat for numerous birds, including barnacle geese. There's free, daily wildlife safaris with experienced rangers and a coffee shop that serves organic food.

### New Abbey

The small, picturesque village of New Abbey lies 7 miles south of Dumfries and contains the remains of the 13th-century Cistercian **Sweetheart Abbey** (HS; ☎ 01387-850397; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar). The shattered, red-sandstone remnants of the abbey are impressive and stand in stark contrast to the manicured lawns surrounding them. The abbey was founded by Devorgilla de Balliol in honour of her dead husband (with whom she had founded Balliol College, Oxford). On his death, she had his heart embalmed and carried it with her until she died 22 years later. She and the heart are buried in the presbytery – hence the name.

**Mabie Farm Park** (☎ 01387-259666; www.mabiefarm park.co.uk; family/adult/child £18/5/4.50; 🕒 10am-5pm daily Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Mar-Nov; 🍷) Kids complaining? Has your trip been all castles, historic sights, the odd pub and Robert Burns? Pack up the clan and get down to this park, 4 miles north of New Abbey off the A710. There's plenty of animals and activities for kids, including petting and feeding sessions, donkey rides, go-karting, hacking around in dirt buggies, slides, a soft play area, picnic areas...the list goes on – put a full day aside.

Staying in New Abbey is a good alternative to Dumfries and the **Abbey Arms** (☎ 01387-850489; www.abbeyarms.com; The Square; s/d £30/56) is a fine old inn with comfy rooms (nothing flash though and a bit leaky when it rains) and a good dose of homespun hospitality. The food is home-cooked (mains £8) and dishes include some Czech specials such as goulash. The Black Sheep bitter on tap is superb.

### Dalbeattie

Off the B794, 2 miles north of Dalbeattie, the **Motte of Urr** (admission free; 🕒 24hr) is one of Scotland's largest 12th-century Norman motte-and-bailey castles. About 4 miles south is the 15th-century **Orchardton Tower** (HS; Palnackie; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar), the only circular tower house in Scotland; the keyholder lives in the nearby cottage.

From Dalbeattie, you can either follow the scenic coast road to Kirkcudbright or head inland on the A745 to Castle Douglas.

### Getting There & Away

From Dumfries, Stagecoach Western bus 371 runs nine times a day Monday to Saturday (twice Sunday) to Caerlaverock Castle. By car take the B725 south.

Bus 372 from Dumfries stops in New Abbey, Kirkbean, Rockcliffe, Kippford and Dalbeattie; from there bus 505 continues to Kirkcudbright (but not on Sunday).

### CASTLE DOUGLAS & AROUND

☎ 01556 / pop 3671

Castle Douglas attracts a lot of day-trippers but hasn't been 'spruced up' for tourism. It's an open, attractive, well-cared-for town. There are some remarkably beautiful areas close to the centre, such as the small **Carlingwark Loch**. The town was laid out in the 18th century by Sir William Douglas, who had made a fortune in the Americas.

The **tourist office** (☎ 502611; Market Hill, King St; 🕒 daily Easter-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct) is in a small park on King St. The **library** (☎ 502643; Market Hill, King St; 🕒 10am-7.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-5pm Thu & Sat) has free internet access.

### Sights & Activities

#### SULWATH BREWERY

You can see traditional brewing processes at **Sulwath Brewery** (☎ 504525; 209 King St; adult/child £3.50/free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). Admission includes a half-pint of Galloway real ale (tea or coffee is also available). Recommended is the Criffel, an original pale ale, and Knockendoch, a dark brew with a delicious taste of roasted malt.

#### THREAVE CASTLE

Two miles further west, **Threave Castle** (HS; ☎ 07711-223101; adult/child incl ferry £4/2; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) is an impressive tower on a small island in the River Dee. Built in the late 14th century, it became a principal stronghold

### TOP FIVE DISTRACTIONS FOR KIDS IN DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

**Mabie Farm Park** (opposite)  
**Galloway Wildlife Conservation Park** (p182)  
**Cream o' Galloway** (p183)  
**Galloway Forest Park** (p184)  
**Caerlaverock Castle** (opposite)

of the Black Douglases. It's now basically a shell, having been badly damaged by the Covenanters in the 1640s, but it's a romantic ruin nonetheless.

It's a 10-minute walk from the car park to the ferry landing, where you ring a bell for the custodian to take you across to the island in a small boat.

### LOCH KEN

Stretching for 9 miles northwest of Castle Douglas beside the A713, Loch Ken is a popular outdoor recreational area. The range of water sports includes windsurfing, sailing, canoeing, power-boating and kayaking. Back on land, off-road buggies can also be hired. **Galloway Sailing Centre** (☎ 01644-420626; www.lochken.co.uk; 🕒 Apr-Oct), on the eastern bank north of Parton village, provides equipment, training and accommodation. Activities cost £21/42/54 for 1½, three or six hours. There are also walking trails and a rich variety of bird life. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has a **nature reserve** (☎ 01671-402861) on the western bank, north of Glenlochlar.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Lochside Caravan & Camping Site** (☎ /fax 502949; Lochside Park; tent sites £10.50-12.60; 🕒 Easter-Oct) This is an attractive spot beside Carlingwark Loch; there's plenty of grass and fine trees providing shade. With over 50 pitches available, booking isn't necessary.

The **Craig** (☎ 504840; www.thecraigcastledouglas.co.uk; 44 Abercromby Rd; s/d £25/50) This solid old property is a fine B&B with a conscientious owner, large rooms and fresh fruit served up for breakfast. It's old-fashioned hospitality – genuine and very comfortable. Would suit older visitors. It's out on the road to St John's Town of Dalry and New Galloway.

**Douglas House** (☎ 503262; www.douglas-house.com; 63 Queen St; s £30-35, d £75-80; 🍷 🚰 🚿) New owners are doing away with the frill and the

lace (thank god) at this well-regarded place. Instead, most rooms are sleek and contemporary with en suites that are something to behold. The two upstairs doubles are the best, although the downstairs double is huge and has a king-size bed – you could sleep four in it...if you're into that kinda thing. It's a luxury guesthouse well worth the extra coin.

**Douglas Arms Hotel** (☎ 502231; www.douglasarms.com; 206 King St; s/d/f £50/80/90) Smack bang in the middle of town, Douglas Arms was originally a coaching inn, but these days all the mod cons comfort the weary traveller. Rooms are slowly being upgraded and No 19 is a stunner – it has a four-poster bed and views over the main drag from a collage of windows. The lively bar serves scrummy food (bar meals £8 to £12), although the atmosphere is a bit staid. The steak-and-ale pie made with Galloway beef is recommended.

**Kings Arms Hotel** (☎ 502626; cnr Queen & St Andrew Sts; mains £6.50-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) This traditional pub sells very traditional pub meals – and it does them pretty well. It's recommended by locals, and there are plenty of them in here scoffing the tempting morsels.

Also recommended:

**Galloway Sailing Centre** (☎ /fax 01644-420626; Loch Ken; dm £13.50) Year-round backpacker accommodation 6 miles north of Castle Douglas.

**Deli 173** (☎ 504880; 173 King St; baguette or panini £2.50; ☺ lunch) For a truly awesome baguette drop into this fine-foods deli. We recommend 'the Godfather'.

**Simply Delicious** (☎ 503718; 134 King St; mains £2-5; ☺ breakfast, lunch Mon-Sat) Great café serving all-day brekky (£5), luxury melts and freshly ground coffee.

## Getting There & Away

McEwan's buses 501 and 502 pass through Castle Douglas roughly hourly en route to Dumfries (45 minutes) and Kirkcudbright (20 minutes). Buses 520 and S2 along the A713 connect Castle Douglas with New Galloway (30 minutes, six daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday) and Ayr (£6, 2¼ hours, two or three daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday).

## KIRKCUDBRIGHT

☎ 01557 / pop 3500

Kirkcudbright (kirk-coo-bree), with its dignified streets of 17th- and 18th-century merchants' houses and its appealing harbour, is the ideal base from which to explore the south coast. This delightful town has one of

the most beautifully restored high streets in Dumfries & Galloway. Look out for the nook-and-cranny wynds in the elbow of High St. With its architecture and setting, it's easy to see why Kirkcudbright has been an artists' colony since the late 19th century.

## Information

There's a handy **tourist office** (☎ 330494; kirkcudbrighttc@visitscotland.com; Harbour Sq; ☺ daily mid-Feb–Nov) with useful brochures detailing walks and road tours in the surrounding district. You'll find a bank with an ATM on St Mary St. Check out www.kirkcudbright.co.uk and www.kirkcudbrightartiststowntown.co.uk for heaps of information on the town.

## Sights & Activities

Kirkcudbright is a great town for a wander and it won't be long before you stumble across its charming sights.

**MacLellan's Castle** (HS; ☎ 331856; Castle St; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☺ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep), near the harbour, is a large, atmospheric ruin built in 1577 by Thomas MacLellan, then provost of Kirkcudbright, as his town residence. Inside look for the 'lairds' lug', a 16th-century hidey hole designed for the laird to eavesdrop on his guests.

**Tolbooth Arts Centre** (☎ 331556; High St; admission free; ☺ 11am–5pm Mon–Sat May, Jun & Sep, 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Jul–Aug, 11am–4pm Mon–Sat Oct–Apr, 2–5pm Sun May–Oct), as well as catering for today's local artists, has an exhibition on the history of the town's artistic development. The place is as interesting for the building itself as for the artistic works on display. It's one of the oldest and best-preserved tolbooths in Scotland and interpretive signboards reveal its past.

Nearby, the 18th-century **Broughton House** (NTS; ☎ 330437; 12 High St; adult/child £8/5; ☺ noon–5pm Jul & Aug, noon–5pm Thu–Mon Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct) displays paintings by EA Hornel (he lived and worked here), one of the Glasgow Boys group of painters (p131). Behind the house is a lovely Japanese-style garden. The library with its wood panelling and stone carvings is probably the most impressive room. You need to be very interested in this style of art to justify the hefty entry fee.

**Galloway Wildlife Conservation Park** (☎ 331645; Lochfergus Plantation; adult/child £5/3; ☺ 10am–dusk Feb–Nov; 🐾), a mile from Kirkcudbright on the B727, makes an easy walk from town, and you'll see red pandas, wolves, monkeys,

kangaroos, Scottish wildcats and many more creatures in a beautiful setting. An important role of the park is the conservation of rare and threatened species.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Silvercraigs Caravan & Camping Site** (☎ /fax 330123; Silvercraigs Rd; car & tent £10.50-13) There are brilliant views from this campground; you feel like you're sleeping on top of the town. Great stargazing on clear nights. The campground has good facilities, too, including a laundry.

**Parkview** (☎ 330056; kathmac@talk21.com; 22 Millburn St; s/d £25/46) A small, blue-painted, traditional guesthouse off St Cuthbert St, Parkview is a great choice. Rooms are tidy and well kept. Be careful if you scale the steep staircase under the influence.

**Toadhall** (☎ 330204; toadh16@aol.com; 16 Castle St; d £45) This is a wonderfully eccentric house with artefacts from the owners' travels and general bric-a-brac dripping from the walls. It's very friendly, and rooms are terrific value and an excellent size (the upstairs double has a four-poster bed). It's possibly the best option in town, considering its central location, welcoming hosts and stonking breakfasts.

**Gordon House Hotel** (☎ /fax 330670; www.gordon-house-hotel.co.uk; 116 High St; s/d £40/70) The small, laid-back hotel rooms are in good shape, but they vary a bit, so have a look at a few. No 2 is probably the best of the doubles. You can dine in the restaurant (mains £11 to £13), which serves posh nosh like pan-seared breast of guinea fowl with tarragon and grain mustard, or the lounge bar, and there's a beer garden for sunny afternoons.

**The Castle Restaurant** (☎ 330569; 5 Castle St; starters £5, mains £15; ☺ dinner; 🍷) The Castle Restaurant is the best place to eat in town and uses organic produce where possible. It covers a few bases with a chicken, beef and seafood dish on offer as well as tempting morsels for vegetarians. Try the prosciutto-wrapped monk fish with saffron-infused, roasted-red-pepper sauce. Families are welcome.

Also recommended:

**Anchorlee** (☎ 330197; www.anchorlee.co.uk; 95 St Mary St; r £57) Top-floor rooms are a bit frilly but very spacious and neat as a pin. All have en suites except for one.

**Selkirk Arms Hotel** (☎ 330402; www.selkirkarmshotel.co.uk; High St; s/d from £70/100; 🍷) Superior rooms are excellent – wood furnishings and views over the back garden give them a rustic appeal. Try No 20. Meals are also available (mains £9 to £14, 2-/3-course dinner £18/24).

## Getting There & Away

Kirkcudbright is 28 miles southwest of Dumfries. Buses 501 and 505 run hourly to Dumfries (one hour) via Castle Douglas and Dalbeattie respectively. To get to Stranraer (about £5.80), take bus 501 to Gatehouse of Fleet (two to five daily) and change to bus 500 or X75.

## GATEHOUSE OF FLEET

☎ 01557 / pop 900

Gatehouse of Fleet is an attractive little town stretched along a sloping main street, in the middle of which sits an unusual castellated clock tower. The town lies on the banks of the Water of Fleet, completely off the beaten track, and is surrounded by partly wooded hills. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 814212; High St; ☺ daily Jul–Sep, Mon–Sat Easter–Jun & Oct).

One mile southwest on the A75, the well-preserved **Cardoness Castle** (HS; ☎ 814427; adult/child £3.50/1.75; ☺ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, closed Thu & Fri Oct, to 4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar) was the home of the McCulloch clan. It's a classic 15th-century tower house with great views from the top. Back in town, **Mill on the Fleet Museum** (☎ 814099; High St; admission free; ☺ 10.30am–5pm Apr–Oct; 🍷), in a converted 18th-century cotton mill, traces the history of the local industry. The town was originally planned as workers' accommodation. Check out the magnificent *View over Gatehouse* painting, and the fantastic jumbled bookshop and small gallery in the loft.

**Bobbin Guest House** (☎ 814229; 36 High St; s/d/f £35/50/70), situated right in the middle of town, is a homely, child-friendly place with well-appointed rooms.

The friendly, family-run **Bank of Fleet Hotel** (☎ 814302; www.bankoffleet.co.uk; 47 High St; s/d from £28/60) has bright rooms with a blue décor that gives them a cool, contemporary feel. Live entertainment's on offer, plus good bar meals (mains £8 to £12) – try the grilled Galloway trout.

Buses X75 and 500 between Dumfries (one hour) and Stranraer (1¼ hours) stop here eight times daily (three on Sunday). Bus 501 from Dumfries (one hour, eight daily), via Castle Douglas, terminates in the village.

## AROUND GATEHOUSE

Ideal for families, **Cream o' Galloway** (☎ 814040; Rainton; adult/child for visitor centre £2/4; ☺ 10am–4pm Feb & Mar, 10am–6pm Easter–Aug, 10am–5pm Sep & Oct; 🍷 🍷) has taken off big time. It offers a plethora of

activities and events at the home of that delicious ice cream you'll see around the region. There are 4 miles of nature trails, an adventure playground for all ages, a 3-D maze, wildlife-watching, a farm to explore and plenty of ice cream to taste. Try the daily Ready, Steady, Freeze event (£5.50), when you get ingredients to create your own ice cream (the kids will love it!). It's about 4 miles from Gatehouse off the A75 – signposted all the way. You can also hire bikes from here.

## NEW GALLOWAY & AROUND

☎ 01644 / pop 290

New Galloway lies in the Glenkens district, north of Loch Ken. The unremarkable village is surrounded by some magnificent countryside in which you feel as if you're on a high plateau, surrounded by tumbling, short-pitched hills. This great swath of wooded landscape is unique in southern Scotland.

### Galloway Forest Park

South and northwest of town is the 300-sq-mile Galloway Forest Park, with numerous lochs and great whale-backed, heather- and pine-covered mountains. The highest point is **Merrick** (843m). The park is crisscrossed by some superb signposted walking trails, from gentle strolls to long-distance paths, including the **Southern Upland Way** (see boxed text, p152).

The 19-mile A712 (Queen's Way) between New Galloway and Newton Stewart slices through the southern section of the park.

On the shore of Clatteringshaws Loch, 6 miles west of New Galloway, is **Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre** (☎ for info 402420; admission free, car-park fee £1; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), with an exhibition on the area's flora and fauna. Pick up a copy of the *Galloway Kite Trail* leaflet here, which details a circular route through impressive scenery that offers a good chance to spot one of the majestic birds. From the visitor centre you can walk to a replica of a Romano-British homestead, and to Bruce's Stone, where Robert the Bruce is said to have rested after defeating the English at the Battle of Rapploch Moss (1307).

Near the loch there are ranger-guided walks of the **Galloway Red Deer Range** (☎ 07771-748400; adult/child £3.50/1.50). During rutting season in autumn it's a bit like watching a bullfight as snorting, charging stags compete for the harem. Walks take place at 11am and 2pm

### MOUNTAIN-BIKING HEAVEN

A brilliant way to experience southern Scotland's forests is by pedal power. The **7stanes** (stones) are seven mountain-biking centres around the region with trails through some of the finest forest scenery you'll find in the country. Glentroot is one of these centres and the Blue Route here is 5.6 miles in length and a lovely ride climbing up to Green Torr Ridge overlooking Loch Trool. If you've more serious intentions, the Big Country Route is 36 miles of challenging ascents and descents that afford magnificent views of the Galloway Forest. It takes a full day and is not for wimps. For more information on routes see [www.7stanes.gov.uk](http://www.7stanes.gov.uk) or [www.7stanes.com](http://www.7stanes.com).

Tuesday and Thursday, and at 2.30pm Sunday from mid-June to mid-September.

Walkers and cyclists head for **Glentroot** in the park's west, accessed by the forest road east from Bargrennan off the A714, north of Newton Stewart. Located just over a mile from Bargrennan is the **Glentroot Visitor Centre** (☎ 01671-840302; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm late-Mar-early May & Sep-Oct, 10.30am-5.30pm May-Aug), which stocks information on activities, including mountain biking, in the area. There is a coffee shop with snacks to replenish those weary legs. The road then winds and climbs up to Loch Trool, where there are magnificent views.

### St John's Town of Dalry

St John's Town of Dalry is a charming village, distinctly more pleasant than New Galloway, hugging the hill-side about 3 miles north on the A713. It's on the Water of Ken and gives access to the Southern Upland Way.

### Sleeping

**Kendoon Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1130; St John's Town of Dalry; dm adult/child £12.50/9.50; ☎ May-early Sep) This hostel, popular with walkers, is about 5 miles north of St John's on the B7000. Bus 520 stops about a mile away.

**Leamington House Hotel** (☎ 420327; [www.leamington-hotel.com](http://www.leamington-hotel.com); High St, New Galloway; s/d from £25/55; ♿) The Leamington has a range of rooms, with and without bathroom. The congenial owner prides herself on guest comfort and wouldn't let a fly in the bedrooms. The split-level family room would suit three people.

**The Lodgings** (☎ 430015; [www.thelodgings.co.uk](http://www.thelodgings.co.uk); St John's Town of Dalry; r per person £27.50) This classy little affair has just two very good rooms, one sleeping three and the other a family room sleeping five. Its advantage over other B&Bs in the town is privacy – the owners live off-site. Groups can book the whole place out. Very well located on Main St, just up from the Clachan Inn.

**Lochinvar Hotel** (☎ 430107; St John's Town of Dalry; s/d £40/60, with bathroom £45/70) The vine-engulfed Lochinvar, an old hunting lodge built in the 1750s with a stately interior, is a fine place to stay. It has a new set of owners and new renovation plans. Rooms vary a lot so ask to see a few. Front-facing rooms have the best views. Some of the old-fashioned en suites are 'a bit funky' but that is likely to change by the time you read this.

### Getting There & Away

Bus 521 runs once or twice daily (except Sunday) to Dumfries (55 minutes). Bus 520/S2 connects New Galloway with Castle Douglas (30 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday); one to three services continue north to Ayr (1¼ to 1¾ hours).

### NEWTON STEWART

☎ 01671 / pop 3600

On the banks of the sparkling River Cree, Newton Stewart is at the heart of some beautiful countryside, and is popular with hikers and anglers. On the eastern bank, across the bridge, is the older and smaller settlement of Minnigaff. It's worth dropping into the **tourist office** (☎ 402431; [newtonstewarttc@visitscotland.com](mailto:newtonstewarttc@visitscotland.com); Dashwood Sq; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep).

For advice on landing the big one, fishing gear and permits drop into **Galloway Angling Centre** (☎ 401333; 1 Queen St). Also see the very useful site at [www.fishgalloway.co.uk](http://www.fishgalloway.co.uk).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Minnigaff Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1142; Minnigaff; dm adult/child £12.50/9.50; ☎ Apr-Sep) This converted school is a well-equipped hostel with eight-bed dorms in a tranquil spot 800m north of the bridge on the eastern bank. Although it's popular with outdoor enthusiasts, you may just about have the place to yourself.

**Flowerbank Guest House** (☎ 402629; [www.flowerbankgh.com](http://www.flowerbankgh.com); Millcroft Rd, Minnigaff; s/d £27/58) This dignified 18th-century house is set in a magnificent

landscaped garden on the banks of the River Cree. The two elegantly furnished rooms at the front of the house are slightly more expensive, but are spacious and have lovely garden views. Two-course dinners are £11.

**Galloway Arms Hotel** (☎ 402653; 54 Victoria St; r per person £35) A traditional refurbished hotel offering excellent-value accommodation, with good-sized, well-furnished rooms and sparkling renovated en suites. Try No 11 if you're after a double. The restaurant churns out value fare specialising in local produce and burgers (try the pork and apple burger). The New Toll House bar is both a clever and quirky renovation.

**Creebridge House Hotel** (☎ 402121; [www.creebridge.co.uk](http://www.creebridge.co.uk); Minnigaff; s/d from £55/110) This is a magnificent refurbished 18th-century mansion built for the earl of Galloway. A maze inside, the tastefully decorated rooms have modern furnishings and loads of character. Try to get a room overlooking the garden (No 7 is a good one).

**Bruce Hotel** (☎ 402294; 88 Queen St; mains £8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Situated in the quieter part of town, the filling bar meals here include local seafood, venison, salmon and lamb. It's a good place to try Galloway beef (steaks £18).

### Getting There & Away

Buses stop in Newton Stewart (Dashwood Sq) on their way to Stranraer (45 minutes) and Dumfries (1½ hours), including buses 920 and 921 (Eurolines/National Express) and buses X75 and 500 (various operators, three to eight daily). Frequent buses also run south to the Isle of Whithorn.

### THE MACHARS

South of Newton Stewart, the Galloway Hills give way to the softly rolling pastures of the triangular peninsula known as the Machars. The south has many early Christian sites and the loping 25-mile **Pilgrims Way**.

Bus 415 runs every hour or two between Newton Stewart and the Isle of Whithorn (one hour) via Wigtown (15 minutes).

### Wigtown

☎ 01988 / pop 1000

Wigtown is a huge success story. Economically run down for many years, the town's revival began in 1998 when it became Scotland's National Book Town. Today 24 bookshops offer the widest selection of books in Scotland and give book enthusiasts the opportunity

to get lost here for days (check out [www.wigtown-booktown.co.uk](http://www.wigtown-booktown.co.uk)).

The **Book Shop** (☎ 402499; 17 North Main St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) claims to be Scotland's largest second-hand bookshop, and has a great collection of Scottish and regional titles. **Readinglasses Bookshop Café** (☎ 403266; 17 South Main St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) sells caffeine to prolong your reading time. It specialises in books on the social sciences and women's studies.

Folk in this town love their resident ospreys. It's a good conversation starter and if you'd like to learn a bit more about the majestic birds and see a live CCTV link to a nearby nest, drop by the **Wigtown County Buildings** (Market Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon, Thu & Sat, 10am-7.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 2-5pm Sun) for its osprey exhibition.

Four miles west of Wigtown, off the B733, the well-preserved recumbent **Torhouse Stone Circle** dates from the 2nd millennium BC.

Wow! That's what we said when we saw the rooms in **Hillcrest House** (☎ 402018; [www.hillcrest-wigtown.co.uk](http://www.hillcrest-wigtown.co.uk); Maidland Pl, Station Rd; s £30, d £50-66). Spend the extra and get a superior room, which have stupendous views. The colour schemes are...well, questionable, but who cares when you stay in huge, airy rooms overlooking rolling green hills and the sea beyond. This is all complemented by a ripper breakfast involving fresh local produce. Dinner also available.

Pop into the bright dining room at **Café Rendezvous** (☎ 402074; 2 Agnew Cres; dishes £3-6; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) for fresh, home-cooked paninis and filled crepes. There's also decent coffee, gooey treats and outdoor seating.

## Garlieston

You can't get more off the beaten track than Garlieston, which has a neat little harbour with a ring of 18th-century cottages behind a bowling green. A coastal path leads south to the ruins of **Cruggleton Castle**.

Drop into the **Harbour Inn** (☎ 01988-600685; 18 South Cres; mains £5-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) for great views and tasty pub grub.

## Whithorn

☎ 01988 / pop 900

Whithorn has a broad, attractive High St virtually closed at both ends – designed to enclose a medieval market. There are few facilities in town, but it's worth visiting because of its fascinating history.

In 397, while the Romans were still in Britain, St Ninian established the first Christian

mission beyond Hadrian's Wall in Whithorn (predating St Columba on Iona by 166 years). After his death, Whithorn Priory, the earliest recorded church in Scotland, was built to house his remains, and Whithorn became the focus of an important medieval pilgrimage.

Today the priory's substantial ruins are the centre point of the **Whithorn Trust Discovery Centre** (☎ 500508; 45 George St; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct), with absorbing exhibitions and an audiovisual display. The considerable remains of the old monastic settlement are being excavated and you'll see some important finds. There's also a museum with some fascinating early Christian stone sculptures, including the Latinus Stone (c 450), reputedly Scotland's oldest Christian artefact. Learn about the influences their carvers drew from around the British Isles and beyond.

## Isle of Whithorn

☎ 01988 / pop 400

The Isle of Whithorn, once an island but now linked to the mainland by a causeway, is a curious place with an attractive natural harbour and colourful houses. The roofless 13th-century **St Ninian's Chapel**, probably built for pilgrims who landed nearby, is on the windswept, evocative rocky headland. Around Burrow Head, to the southwest but accessed from a path off the A747 before you enter the Isle of Whithorn, is **St Ninian's Cave**, where the saint went to pray.

The 300-year-old **Dunbar House** (☎ 500336; pompeylewis@aol.com; Tonderghie Rd; s/d £22/36) overlooking the harbour has large, bright rooms. You can admire the view while tucking into your breakfast in the dining room.

The quayside **Steam Packet Inn** (☎ 500334; [www.steampacketinn.com](http://www.steampacketinn.com); Harbour Row; r per person £30-40) is a popular pub with real ales, scrumptious bar meals (mains £5 to £10), a snug bar and comfy lodgings. Try to get a room to the front of the building as they have lovely views over the little harbour (No 2 is a good one).

## STRANRAER

☎ 01776 / pop 11,000

Though a little ramshackle, Stranraer is more pleasant than the average ferry port and perhaps about to get better. There is a major waterfront development set to take place. Stena Line is moving its Northern Ireland-bound ferry service from Stranraer harbour to Cairnryan down the road. The Stranraer waterfront

in turn is undergoing a huge development to turn it into a marina. Folk in Stranraer are worried their buzzing little settlement will turn into a ghost town once Stena Line moves to Cairnryan, but as there's not much in the way of accommodation in Cairnryan, that's unlikely.

## Orientation & Information

The bus stops, train station, accommodation and tourist office are close to the new marina.

**Clydesdale Bank** (Bridge St) Has ATM.

**Stranraer library** (☎ 707400; North Strand St; ☎ 9.15am-7.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9.15am-5pm Thu & Sat) Free internet access.

**Tourist office** (☎ 888143; [stranraertic@visitscotland.com](mailto:stranraertic@visitscotland.com); 28 Harbour St; ☎ Mon-Sat Sep-mid-Jun, daily mid-Jun-Aug) Efficient and friendly.

## Sights

Worth a quick visit, **St John's Castle** (☎ 705544; George St; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-mid-Sep) was built in 1510 by the Adairs of Kihilt, a powerful local family. The old stone cells carry a distinctly musty smell. There are displays and a couple of videos that trace its history and, from the top of the castle, superb views of Loch Ryan and the ferries chugging out to Ireland.

**Stranraer Museum** (☎ 705088; 55 George St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) houses exhibits on local history and you can learn about Stranraer's polar explorers. The highlight is the carved stone pipe from Madagascar.

## Sleeping

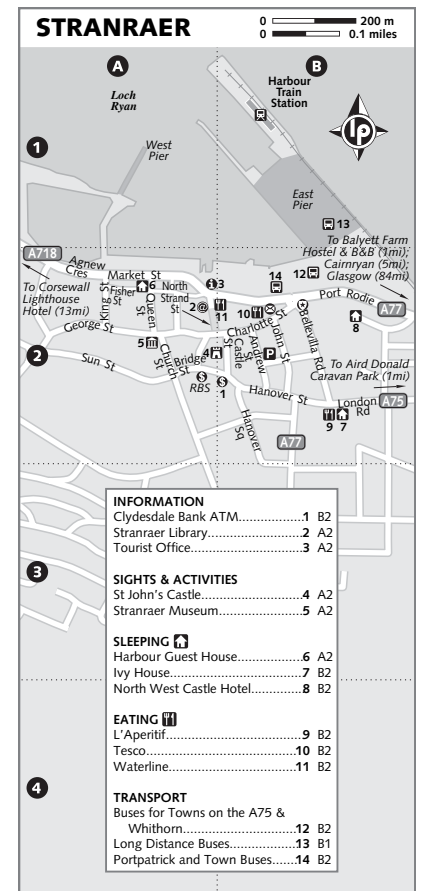
**Aird Donald Caravan Park** (☎ 702025; [www.aird-donald.co.uk](http://www.aird-donald.co.uk); London Rd; tent sites for 2 £11.50) The nearest tent-friendly campground is 1 mile east of the town centre. It has manicured lawns, plenty of trees and countless bunnies.

**our pick** **Balyett Farm Hostel & B&B** (☎ /fax 703395; [www.balyettbb.co.uk](http://www.balyettbb.co.uk); Cairnryan Rd; dm/s/d £15/35/50) A mile north of town on the A77, Balyett provides tranquil accommodation in its tidy hostel section, which accommodates six people and has a kitchen/living area. The relaxed B&B at the nearby ivy-covered farmhouse could be the best deal in town. The rooms are light, bright and clean as a whistle. Room No 2 is our fave but all are beautifully furnished and come with lovely aspects over the surrounding country. The real bargain are the two caravans out the front (£15 per person). They sleep up to six, and the bedrooms are very pokey, but

the living areas are excellent. It's very private, and there's a million-dollar view over the bay. The owner will let out the caravans to couples, so book ahead.

**Ivy House** (☎ 704176; [www.ivyplace.worldonline.co.uk](http://www.ivyplace.worldonline.co.uk); 3 Ivy Pl; r per person £22-28) This is a great guesthouse and does Scottish hospitality proud, with excellent facilities, personable hosts, tidy rooms and a smashing breakfast. Nothing is too much trouble for the hosts, who always have a smile for their guests.

**North West Castle Hotel** (☎ 704413; [www.northwestcastle.co.uk](http://www.northwestcastle.co.uk); Port Rodie; s/d from £75/110; ☎) Elegant and old fashioned, this is the most luxurious hotel in Stranraer and was formerly the home of Arctic explorer Sir John Ross. It's a little fussy and, although an interior designer



would tut tut over the busy designs and clash of colours, the rooms are sumptuous indeed. Try to get a front-facing room for seaviews. But here's the real puller: it was the first hotel in the world to have an indoor curling rink.

Also recommended:

**Harbour Guest House** (☎ 704626; www.harbourguesthousestranraer.co.uk; 11 Market St; B&B per person £25-30) On the harbour front, near the town centre.

**Corsewall Lighthouse Hotel** (☎ 853220; www.lighthousehotel.co.uk; Kirkcolm; r per person £80-135; ♿) Thirteen miles northwest of Stranraer at Corsewall Point. Single occupancy is the same rate minus £20.

## Eating

**Waterline** (☎ 889727; North Strand St; mains £5.50-8; ♿ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This chain pub across from the tourist office is soulless, but it's family friendly, close to the ferry and, for Stranraer, is a decent option for a meal or quiet drink. Good-value burgers, baguettes, pasta dishes, curries and pub faves are dished out all day.

**L'Aperitif** (☎ 702991; London Rd; mains £11.50-13.50; ♿ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) With its extensive menu, fine wines and delectable food, this is the best restaurant in town by a long shot. It's famous for its pasta, with dishes from £7.50. The service is also excellent. If you're feeling hungry, a set three-course dinner (£14.50) is available from 5.30pm to 7pm.

If you're after a supermarket for self-catering, there's a **Tesco** (Charlotte St) in town.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

See the Transport chapter (p452) for full details on services to Northern Ireland. From Stranraer there are two alternatives: **P&O** (☎ 0870 242 4777; www.poirishsea.com) ferries from Cairnryan to Larne, and **Stena Line** (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.co.uk) HSS and Superferries from Cairnryan to Belfast.

Cairnryan is 5 miles north of Stranraer on the eastern side of Loch Ryan. Bus 358 runs frequently to Cairnryan (terminating at the post office). For a taxi to Cairnryan (around £7), contact **McLean's Taxis** (☎ 703343; 21 North Strand St; ♿ 24hr), just up from the tourist office. Stena Line ferries for Belfast connect with rail and bus services. The train station is on the ferry pier in Stranraer.

### BUS

Eurolines and National Express buses 920 and 921 run twice daily between London

and Belfast, via the towns along the A75 and Stranraer.

Scottish Citylink buses run to Glasgow (£14, 2½ hours, twice daily) and Edinburgh (£16, 3¼ hours, twice daily).

There are also several daily local buses to Kirkcudbright and the towns along the A75, such as Newton Stewart (45 minutes, at least hourly) and Dumfries (£5.80, 2¼ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

### TRAIN

First Scotrail runs to/from Glasgow (£17.50, 2½ hours, two to seven trains daily); it may be necessary to change at Ayr.

## AROUND STRANRAER

Magnificent **Castle Kennedy Gardens** (☎ 01776-702024; www.castlekennedygardens.co.uk; Rephad; adult/child £4/1; ♿ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, Sat & Sun Feb-Mar), 3 miles east of Stranraer, are among the most famous in Scotland. They cover 30 hectares and are set on an isthmus between two lochs and two castles (Castle Kennedy, burnt in 1716, and Lochinch Castle, built in 1864). The landscaping was undertaken in 1730 by the earl of Stair, who used unoccupied soldiers to do the work. Buses 430 (hourly) and 500 from Stranraer stop here.

## PORTPATRICK

☎ 01776 / pop 600

Portpatrick is a charming port on the rugged west coast of the Rhinns (or Rhins) of the Galloway peninsula. Until the mid-19th century it was the main port for Northern Ireland, so it's quite substantial. It's now a coastguard station and a quiet holiday resort.

It is also a good base from which to explore the south of the peninsula, and it's the starting point for the **Southern Upland Way**. You can follow part of the Way to Stranraer (9 miles). It's a cliff-top walk, followed by sections of farmland and heather moor. Start at the Way's information shelter at the northern end of the harbour. The walk is waymarked until 800m south of Stranraer, where you get the first good views of the village.

**Harbour House Hotel** (☎ 810456; www.theharbourhousehotel.co.uk; 53 Main St; s/d from £37.50/75) was formerly the customs house but is now a popular, solid old pub. Some of the tastefully furnished rooms have brilliant views over the harbour. The tariff is an extra £5 if you bring your pooch. The hotel is also a warm nook for a traditional

bar meal (£7 to £10). You may have trouble dragging yourself outside again, given the delicious real ales on tap, including Kilkellan.

For total luxury, check out the **Portpatrick Hotel** (☎ 810333; www.shearingsholidays.com; Heugh Rd; r from £60) perched high above town and gazing imperiously over the harbour and out to sea. It's part of a chain, but the location is unrivalled.

Buses 358 and 367 run to Stranraer (20 minutes, eight Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

## SOUTH OF PORTPATRICK

From Portpatrick, the road south to the Mull of Galloway passes coastal scenery that includes rugged cliffs, tiny harbours and sandy beaches. The warm waters of the Gulf Stream give the peninsula the mildest climate in Scotland.

This mildness is demonstrated at **Logan Botanic Garden** (☎ 01776-860231; www.rbge.org.uk; adult/child £3.50/1; ♿ 10am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-6pm Apr-Sep), a mile north of Port Logan, where an array of subtropical flora includes tree ferns and cabbage palms. The garden is an outpost of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

Further south, **Drummore** is a fishing village on the east coast. From here it's another 5 miles to the **Mull of Galloway**, Scotland's most southerly point. It's a rocky, bleak and windy headland. The 26m-high **lighthouse** (adults/child £2/1; ♿ tours every 30 min, 10am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) here was built by Robert Stevenson in 1826. The Mull of Galloway RSPB nature reserve, home to thousands of sea birds, has a **visitor centre** (☎ 01776-830682; admission free; ♿ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) with plenty of information on local species, including where to see them.

## ANNANDALE & ESKDALE

These valleys, in Dumfries & Galloway's east, form part of two major routes that cut across

Scotland's south. Away from the highways, the roads are quiet and there are some interesting places to visit, especially if you're looking to break a road trip.

## Gretna & Gretna Green

☎ 01461 / pop 2700

This is one eccentric place, and it's worth dropping by just to experience the tourist hordes. Many people are drawn to Gretna and Gretna Green by its romantic associations (see the boxed text, below). Today's Gretna Green, on the northwestern edge of Gretna, is very touristy and very tacky – but the place has a real buzz. Such is the power of the name that about 5000 weddings are performed here annually.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 337834; gretnagreen@dgtb.visitscotland.com; Gretna Gateway village, Gretna; ♿ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is able to assist with most inquiries.

The commercialised **Old Blacksmith's Shop** (☎ 338441; Gretna Green; adult/child £3/2; ♿ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct & Nov, 9am-5pm Dec-May) has an exhibition on Gretna Green's history, a sculpture park and a coach museum (there's even an anvil marriage room!).

**Hazeldene Hotel** (☎ 338292; www.hotels-gretnagreen.co.uk; Gretna Green; s/d from £40/60, honeymoon ste £120), a small hotel near the Old Blacksmith's Shop, has eight modern, comfortable rooms. The honeymoon suite has a four-poster bed, a sauna and a complimentary bottle of champagne.

Bus 79 runs between Gretna and Dumfries (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday). Trains run from Gretna Green to Dumfries (£6.20, 25 minutes, every hour or two, five Sunday) and Carlisle (£3.50, 11 minutes).

### TYING THE KNOT IN GRETNA GREEN

From the mid-18th century, eloping couples south of the border realised that under Scottish law people could (and still can) tie the knot at the age of 16 without parental consent (in England and Wales the legal age was 21). Gretna Green's location close to the border made it the most popular venue.

At one time anyone could perform a legal marriage ceremony, but in Gretna Green it was usually the local blacksmith, who became known as the 'Anvil Priest'. In 1940 the 'anvil weddings' were outlawed, but eloping couples still got married in the church or registry office.

Today many people make or reaffirm their marriage vows in the village. If you want to get married over the famous anvil in the Old Blacksmith's Shop at Gretna Green, check out **Gretna Green Weddings** (www.gretnaweddings.com).

## Lockerbie

☎ 01576 / pop 4000

Red-sandstone buildings line the main street of this small country town. Its peace was shattered in 1988 when pieces from a Pan-Am passenger jet fell on the town after a bomb blew up the aircraft; 207 people were killed, including 11 townsfolk. In 2001 a Libyan intelligence agent was convicted of the bombing and sentenced to life imprisonment. A second Libyan was acquitted. However, in 2007 the jailed Libyan agent was granted a right of appeal. The Scottish criminal cases review commission found six instances where a miscarriage of justice may have occurred in the original case. In 2003 Libya agreed to set up a US\$2.7 billion fund for the families of people killed in the bombing, admitting 'civil responsibility' for the tragedy. Little evidence of the event remains, but the townspeople have created a small garden of remembrance in **Dryfesdale Cemetery**, about a mile west on the Dumfries road.

For traditional accommodation, grab a room in the **Kings Arms Hotel** (☎ 202410; www.kingsarmshotel.co.uk; High St; s/d £45/75) overlooking High St and follow in the footsteps of luminaries such as Bonnie Prince Charlie and Sir Walter Scott. If you're after pampering, go for the Special Occasion package for £120, which includes breakfast in bed.

Bus 382 runs to/from Moffat (30 minutes, hourly).

## Moffat

☎ 01683 / pop 2200

Moffat lies in wild, hilly country near the upper reaches of Annandale. It's really enjoyed by the older brigade and is a popular tourist-coach spot. The former spa town is a centre for the local wool industry, symbolised by the bronze ram statue on High St. The **tourist office** (☎ 220620; Churchgate; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Oct) is well organised.

At **Moffat Woollen Mill** (☎ 220134; Ladyknowe; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), near the tourist office, you can see a working weaving exhibition. This place is a retail bonanza – if that's your thing, you're going to love it here.

The flower-decked **Buchan Guest House** (☎ 220378; www.buchanguesthouse.co.uk; Beechgrove; s/d £30/56) is in a quiet street just a short walk north of the town centre. Room No 5 is a good choice, as it has a lovely outlook over nearby fields.

**our pick** **Groom's Cottage** (☎ 220049; The Lodge, Beattock Rd; cottage per person £30) is a beautifully presented, cosy wee nook with everything you could want for a comfortable stay. There are self-catering facilities (but breakfast is included). It has good privacy from the owner's residence, views over green fields and even an orthopaedic bed. It's a stylish job and very reasonably priced – weekly deals are available too. Look for 'The Lodge' sign coming in from the M74 – it's on your left before you hit the town centre. This option is ideally suited to couples.

There are several daily buses to Edinburgh (buses 100 and X100), Glasgow (Scottish Citylink bus 974) and Dumfries (buses 100 and 114). Bus 382 runs hourly to Gretna Green (1¼ hours) and Carlisle (two hours), via Lockerbie (half an hour).

## Langholm

☎ 013873 / pop 2300

The waters of three rivers – the Esk, Ewes and Wauchope – meet at Langholm, a gracious old town at the centre of Scotland's tweed industry. Most people come for **fishing** and **walking** in the surrounding moors and woodlands; check out the **Langholm Walks website** (www.langholmwalks.co.uk) for details.

**Border House** (☎ 80376; High St; r per person £30) is an excellent central accommodation option with large rooms (the downstairs double in particular), a lovely hostess and big sink-in-and-smile beds.

Bus 124/112 has up to five daily connections with Eskdalemuir (no Sunday service).

## Eskdalemuir

Surrounded by wooded hills, Eskdalemuir is a remote settlement 13 miles northwest of Langholm. About 1.5 miles further north is the **Samye Ling Tibetan Centre** (☎ 013873-73232), the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery built in the West (1968). The colourful prayer flags and the red and gold of the temple itself are a striking contrast to the stark grey and green landscape. The centre offers meditation courses, including weekend workshops (£62) for which basic food and board is available (dorm beds £23, single £35, twin £56, breakfast £2.50 and lunch £5).

Those staying here are asked to give two hours a day to help in the kitchen, garden and farm. The temple opens to casual visitors (9am to 5pm), for whom there's also a small café.

Buses A1 and 112 from Langholm/Lockerbie stop at the centre.

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