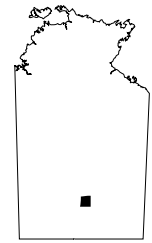


Alice Springs



This is Australia's most famous outback town. No matter which direction you arrive from, one minute there's an endless expanse of red dirt, low shrubs or rugged ranges; the next there's a thriving, modern town.

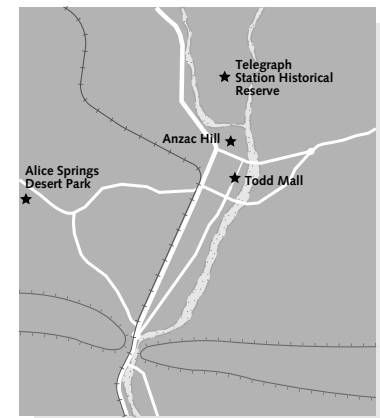
The Alice, as it's often known, began as a simple telegraph station on the Overland Telegraph Line (OTL) 130 years ago and, although famous for its remote location in the centre of Australia, this is no rustic frontier town with steel windmills, saloon doors on the pubs and farmers in Akubra hats sitting under wide verandas. Alice is a modern, low-rise town with shopping malls, fast food joints, swish hotels and a slowly growing 'urban sprawl'.

The change to modern-day Alice (pop 28,200) has happened quite suddenly, fuelled by the tourism boom of the past decade. With the Stuart Hwy and *Ghan* railway line running through it, and Uluru *relatively* close (it's a four-hour drive away!), the Alice is a natural base for exploring central Australia's attractions. The rugged MacDonnell Ranges stretch to the east and west, and you don't have to venture far to find yourself in some wild outback country.

But Alice Springs is fascinating in its own right. You could spend days exploring its historical links, cultural precinct, Aboriginal art galleries and unique places like the Royal Flying Doctor Base and School of the Air. With good shopping, hotels, pubs and restaurants, this is the place to relax, resupply and enjoy a bit of comfort in the desert.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the sun set over the MacDonnell Ranges from **Anzac Hill** (p179)
- Ogling a wedge-tailed eagle in flight and learning about the desert environment at the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179)
- Breakfasting then taking a morning stroll along **Todd Mall** (p189)
- Floating high above the ranges at dawn in a **hot-air balloon** (p184)
- Retracing the steps of the early explorers through a sunset **camel ride** (p184)
- Browsing Aboriginal art in central Australia's best **art galleries** (p199)
- Reliving early Alice history at the **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (p182)



■ TELEPHONE CODE ☎ 08

■ Central Australia: www.welcometocentralaustralia.com.au

■ The Alice Link: www.alice.com.au

HISTORY

Alice Springs began as a staging point on the OTL in 1871. A telegraph repeater station was built near a permanent waterhole in the otherwise dry Todd River. The river was named after Charles Todd, Superintendent of Telegraphs in Adelaide, and the waterhole was named after Alice, his wife.

The taking up of pastoral leases in the Centre, combined with the rush of miners who flocked to the gold and 'ruby' fields to the east, led to the establishment of Stuart a few kilometres south of the telegraph station in 1888. But the gold discovery didn't amount to much, the rubies turned out to be garnets and the proposed railway took another 40 years to reach the town. When the railway finally reached Stuart in 1929, the non-Aboriginal population stood at about 30, but by the time the name was officially changed to Alice Springs in 1933, it had swollen to around 400.

In WWII Alice Springs became a major military base and the administrative centre of the Northern Territory. The biggest boost to the Alice came with the sealing of the Stuart Hwy from Port Augusta in 1987, while the extension of the *Ghan* railway line from Alice to Darwin finally opened in 2004.

ORIENTATION

The MacDonnell Ranges form the southern boundary of the town, split at the south by the narrow Heavitree Gap. The (usually dry) Todd River, the Stuart Hwy and the *Ghan* railway line all run roughly north-south through the town.

The town centre is a conveniently compact area just five streets wide, bordered by the river on one side and the highway on the other. Todd St is the main shopping street of the town; from Wills Tce to Gregory Tce it is a pedestrian mall.

Greyhound buses arrive at and depart from the terminal office on Todd St. The train station is on the western side of the Stuart Hwy in the town's light industrial area. The airport is 15km south of town through the Gap.

Maps

Maps NT (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 5344; 1st fl, Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) has a large range of maps including road maps and topographical sheets.

For town maps of Alice Springs and most tourist road maps, including central Australian outback tracks, your best bet is the Catia office (see Tourist Information opposite).

ALICE SPRINGS IN...

Two Days

Take a trip out to the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179) in the morning for an up-close look at central Australian flora, fauna and eco-systems – allow a few hours. Lunch at a café on **Todd Mall** (p197). In the afternoon stroll around the shops, galleries and historical buildings of the compact town centre. Watch the sunset from atop **Anzac Hill** (p179). On day two, cycle or drive out to the **Old Telegraph Station** (p182) in the morning and visit the **Cultural Precinct** (p179) in the afternoon. Take in the **Sounds of Starlight** (p198) in the evening and a few beers at **Bojangles** (p197).

Four Days

Four days is enough to see most of the sights in Alice Springs. As well as the above, visit the **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base** (p182), **School of the Air** (p182) and the **Reptile Centre** (p182), take a sunset **camel ride** (p184), wander through the **Olive Pink Botanic Garden** (p182) and play a round of **golf** (p189).

One Week

With a week, plan to take a couple of day trips out of town. Hire a bike and cycle out to **Simpsons Gap** (p219). Drive through the West MacDonnell Ranges and camp out for a night or stay at **Glen Helen Resort** (p223), or head east to the ghost town at **Arltunga** (p238). Catch a weekend game of footy at **Traegar Park** (p199).

MPARNTWE

To the Arrernte people, the traditional owners of the Alice Springs area, this place is called Mparntwe. The heart of Mparntwe is the junction of the Charles (Antheke Ulpeye) and Todd (Lhere Mparntwe) Rivers, just north of Anzac Hill (Untyeyetwele). All the topographical features of the town were formed by the creative ancestral beings – known as the Yeperenye, Ntyarlike and Utnerregatye Caterpillars – as they crawled across the landscape from Emily Gap (Anthwerke), in the MacDonnell Ranges southeast of town.

To the west, Mt Gillen is Alhekulyele, the nose of the wild dog creator, where it lay down after an extended battle with an intruding dog from another area. Heavitree Gap (Ntaripe) is also of significance. Being associated with men's ceremonies, women were traditionally not permitted to pass through here and had to take long detours to cross the ranges.

Alice Springs today still has a sizeable Aboriginal community with strong links to the area, and native title over the area was recognised in 2000. If you want to see what's happening in one of the town camps, Hidden Valley, check out the website www.usmob.com.au.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Big Kangaroo Books (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 2137; Todd Mall; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Excellent bookshop specialising in Australian titles: travel, novels, guidebooks and more.

Boomerang Book Exchange (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5843; Shop 10, Reg Harris Lane) Good assortment of secondhand titles.

Dymocks (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9111; Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Mainstream bookshop.

Helene's Books & Things (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 2465; Shop 2, 113 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Piles of secondhand books to buy, sell and trade, including an Australian section.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 8951 6633 or ☎ 000)

Police (☎ 8951 8888 or ☎ 000)

Internet Access

Alice Springs Library (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8950 0555; Gregory Tce; per 30 min \$3; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 10am-5pm Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun) Internet research is free, but you pay for email.

Internet Outpost (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8730; 94 Todd St; per 5/30/60 min \$1/4/7; ☎ 9am-9pm)

JPG Computer (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2040; Coles Complex, Bath St; per hr \$6; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Todd Internet Café (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 8355; Shop 2, 82 Todd St; per hr \$4; ☎ 10am-6pm)

Laundry

Most places to stay have laundry facilities or try **Alice 24 Store Laundromat** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4124; 105 Todd St; per load \$3; ☎ 24hr).

Medical Services

Alice Springs Amcal Chemist (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0089; Alice Plaza, Todd Mall; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm)

Alice Springs Hospital (Map p178; ☎ 8951 7777; Gap Rd; ☎ 24hr)

Money

Major banks with 24-hour ATMs, including Commonwealth, ANZ and National, can be found in the town centre around Todd Mall, as well as the airport. A **Bureau de Change** (Map pp180-1; Todd Mall; ☎ 8am-8pm) kiosk in the Todd Mall exchanges cash and travellers cheques.

Permits

Central Land Council (Map p178; ☎ 8951 6320; www.clc.org.au; PO Box 3321, NT 0871; 33 Stuart Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm) For Aboriginal land permits and transit permits.

Outback Gems (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9299; Shop 2, Coles Complex, Bath St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) This is the place to get free fossicking permits and information. Permits are also available from Catia (below).

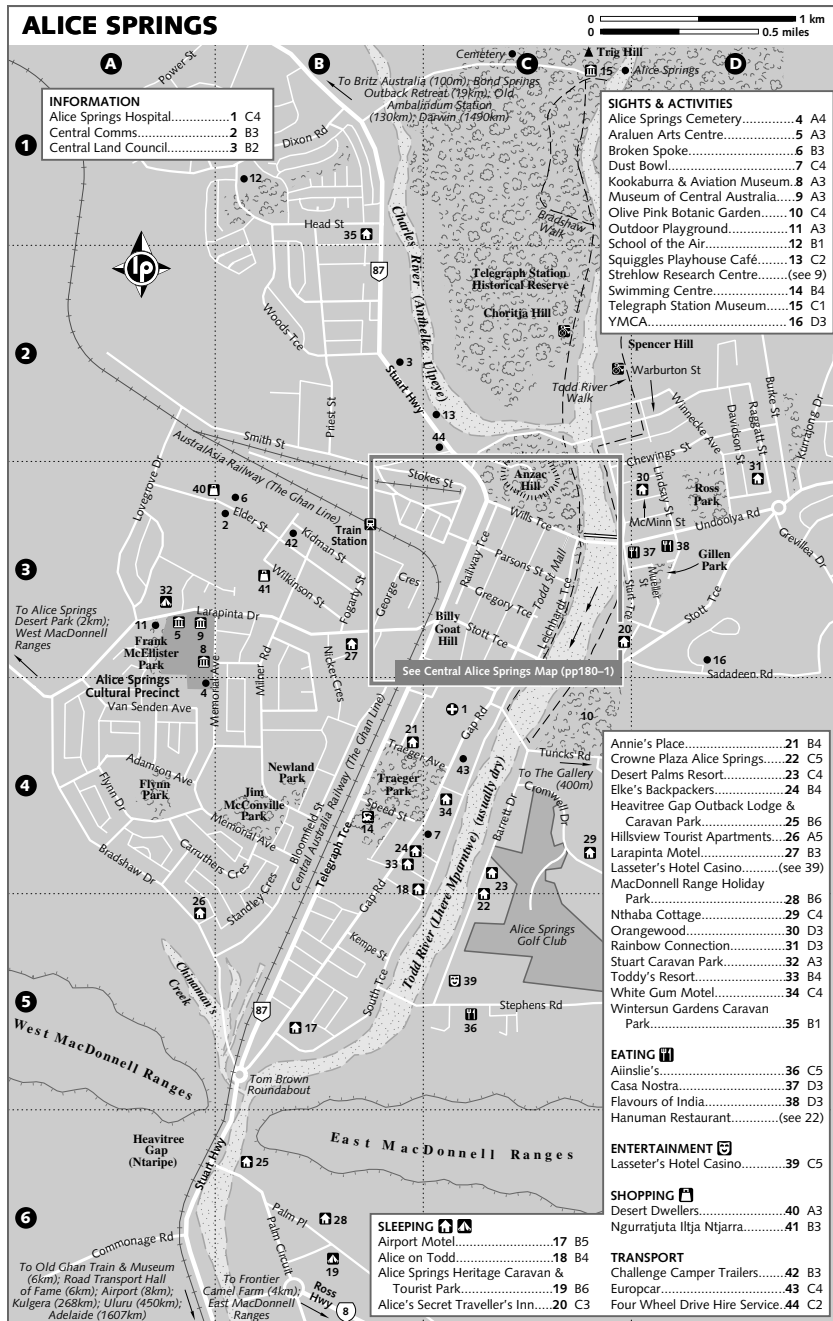
Post

The **main post office** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 13 13 18; 31-33 Hartley St; ☎ 8.15am-5pm Mon-Fri) has a Post Shop at the front and a poste restante window down the passage on the left.

Tourist Information

Welcome to Central Australia is a useful, free brochure that covers all places of interest in Central Australia.

Central Australian Tourism Industry Association office (Catia; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5800; www.centralaustralian tourism.com; 60 Gregory Tce; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm)



Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun), also known as Catia, is a busy but helpful place in the town centre. It has many maps and brochures, plus the free *Visitors Guide*, which has useful business listings. Updated weather forecasts and road conditions are posted on the wall and Mereenie Loop Passes (\$2) and fossicking permits (free) are also issued here. National park notes, including Larapinta Trail, are also available. Catia has a small desk at the airport.

Travel Agencies

Flight Centre (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 4081; Yeperenye Shopping Centre, Hartley St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) specialises in domestic and international flights.

SIGHTS

Anzac Hill

For an expansive view over Alice Springs, take a hike to the top of Anzac Hill (Map pp180-1), preferably about half an hour before sunset. There's a perfect 360-degree view over the modern township and down to Heavitree Gap, while the MacDonnell Ranges stretch east and west. Aboriginal people call the hill Untyeyetweleye (Onjeea-tooia), the site of the Corkwood Dreaming story of a woman who lived alone on the hill. The Two Sisters Ancestral Beings (Arrweketye Therre) are also associated with the hill.

Originally called View Hill or Stott Hill by white settlers, it was renamed Anzac Hill in 1934 in recognition of WWI soldiers. There's a war memorial at the top, along with the Australian and Northern Territory flags.

You can walk the short, sharp ascent to the top along the **Lions Walk** from Wills Tce, or there's vehicle access and parking from the western side.

At the northern foot of Anzac Hill is the RSL Club and **War Museum** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2868; Schwarz Cres; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), which features a collection of firearms, medals and photos of Alice Springs during WWII.

On the southern edge of the town centre you can see the small rise of **Billy Goat Hill** (Akeyulerra; Map pp180-1). Here the Two Sisters Dreaming passed on their way north through the area, and the hill is now a registered sacred site.

Alice Springs Desert Park

There's no better way to see what's really out there in the central deserts than to visit this fabulous **eco park** (off Map p178; ☎ 8951 8788; www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au; Larapinta Dr; adult/seniors/concession/family \$18/13/9/40; ☎ 7.30am-6pm, last entry 4pm). Backing onto the red walls of Mt Gillen 6km west of town, the park contains the ecosystems of central Australia in a series of habitats – desert river, sand country, and woodland – linked by walking tracks.

Walk-through aviaries house water birds and desert parrots such as the magnificent princess parrot, and the excellent nocturnal house displays 20 arid-zone mammal species, half of which are endangered or extinct in the wild in mainland Australia. Once your eyes adjust to the darkness you can spot the bilby, quoll and a plethora of snakes and lizards such as the thorny devil. Don't miss the free-flying **birds of prey show** (☎ 10am & 3.30pm), featuring Australian kestrels, kites and the awesome wedge-tailed eagles. Kids will love the kangaroo and emu enclosures. To get the most out of the park, pick up a free audio guide with commentary in several languages, or join one of the free ranger talks held at various exhibits throughout the day.

There's a free barbecue and picnic area, or you can buy lunch and snacks at the **café** (☎ 9am-5.30pm). The gift shop hires out strollers and wheelchairs, and the park is wheelchair accessible (ask about the electric buggies).

If you don't have your own wheels, use **Desert Park Transfers** (☎ 8952 4667; www.desertparktransfers.com.au; adult/senior/child/family \$30/25/20/80). It operates seven times daily during park hours and the cost includes park entry fee and pick-up and drop-off at your accommodation.

Alice Springs Cultural Precinct

You can easily spend a few hours exploring the **cultural precinct** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1120; www.ascp.com.au; Larapinta Dr; adult/child/family \$9/6/25), which neatly combines Aboriginal art and culture with a fascinating natural history museum, an aviation museum, the enthralling tale of the *Kookaburra* air crash and a historical cemetery. The precinct sits on the site of Alice Springs' first aerodrome, about 2km west of the town centre – you can wander around freely outside, but the 'precinct pass', available at the Araluen Arts Centre, gives entry to all the attractions here.

Telegraph Station Historical Reserve

Alice Springs was born out of the Overland Telegraph Line, so a visit to the old **Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (Map p178; adult/child/family \$7/4/20; ☎ 8am-9pm, museum 8am-5pm), 4km north of town, is a step back to the town's European beginnings. Built along the line in the 1870s, the station was constructed of local stone and continued to operate until 1932. It then served as a welfare home for Aboriginal children of mixed descent until 1963. The buildings have been faithfully restored to give you a good idea of what life was like for the small community here. The main telegraph office still has working equipment inside.

Short **guided tours** (☎ 8952 3993 to confirm times; ☎ 9.15am-4.30pm Apr-Nov) operate roughly every half hour between 9.15am and 4.30pm; there's also an informative self-guided map available. Other ranger-led walks operate between June and August, and the blacksmith's shop is fired up for demonstrations on weekdays.

Nearby is the original Alice Springs, a small waterhole in the Todd River bed. It is not really a spring, but water accumulates here and can usually be found as soaks beneath the sand.

There's a grassy picnic area outside the station museum with barbecues, tables and some gum trees, and a number of **walking tracks** radiate from the reserve. The best is the 30-minute loop to Trig Hill, returning via the original station cemetery.

It's also an easy 4km walk or ride from the Alice town centre – just follow the path north along the riverbank. If you're driving, the Station is signposted to the right off the Stuart Hwy about 1km north of Anzac Hill.

Royal Flying Doctor Service Base

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base** (RFDS; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1129; www.flyingdoctor.net; Stuart Tce; adult/child \$6.50/3; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) amply demonstrates the vision and work of a service that changed the way people lived – without the fear of complete isolation – in remote inland Australia. Established in 1939, the RFDS still operates over-the-air routine medical clinics for isolated communities, covering an area the size of western Europe. It was made famous in Australia by the long-running TV drama *Flying Doctors*.

Entry to the base is by a half-hour tour, which includes a video presentation and

a peek into an operational control room. Then you can wander through the museum with nifty model planes, a cockpit simulator and some ancient medical and radio gear (including an early pedal radio).

The adjoining **café** (☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Sat) serves light meals, cakes and drinks in the courtyard or in cosy surrounds inside.

School of the Air

The **School of the Air** (Map p178; ☎ 8951 6834; www.assoa.nt.edu.au; 80 Head St; adult/child/family \$4/3/14; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-4.30pm Sun), about 1km north of the town centre, is another of those innovations born out of necessity in the remote outback. Started in 1951, this was the first school of its type in Australia, broadcasting lessons to children over an area of 1.3 million sq km. While transmissions were originally all done over high frequency radio, satellite Internet connections and web-cams now mean students and teachers can study in a 'virtual classroom'. You get a guided tour of the centre and during school terms you can hear a live class broadcast from 8.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Friday, or recorded radio lessons at other times.

Alice Springs Reptile Centre

With all 10 of Australia's most poisonous snakes, as well as frilled lizards, bearded dragons and thorny devils, the **Reptile Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8900; 9 Stuart Tce; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) is the place to come face to face with some of central Australia's most frightening critters. It's possible to handle a python and get a kiss from a blue-tongue lizard during the handling demonstrations (usually 11am, 1pm and 3pm). Outside is an enclosure that's home to a formidable-looking perentie (Australia's largest lizard) and Terry, a 3.3m saltwater crocodile.

Olive Pink Botanic Garden

Just across the Todd River from the town centre, the **Olive Pink Botanic Garden** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 2154; www.opbg.com.au; Tuncks Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-6pm) has a fine collection of native shrubs and trees, along with some good mini-bushwalks. The **visitors centre** (☎ 10am-4pm) has exhibits on the evolution and ecology of arid-zone plants, and their traditional use by Aboriginal people. You can also read about the life of the garden's eccentric founder, the prominent central

Australian anthropologist and botanical artist Olive Pink (1884–1975), who was an early campaigner for Indigenous rights. Pink named trees in the garden after government officials, and if any of them failed to please her, she would stop watering their particular tree. Walks from the visitors centre include **Meyers Hill Walk** (35 minutes return), which offers views over the town.

Garden Cafe & Gift Shop (☎ 10am-4pm) serves drinks, ice cream, coffee and cakes.

Adelaide House

Built in the 1920s as the Australian Inland Mission hospital, **Adelaide House** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1856; Todd Mall; adult/student/child \$4/3/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) was the first hospital in Central Australia, designed by the founding flying doctor Reverend John Flynn, and built of local stone and timber carted from Oodnadatta in South Australia. Flynn incorporated into his design an ingenious cooling system that pushed cool air from the cellar up into the building. Since 1998 the building has been preserved as a memorial museum with displays of photographs and implements of the pioneering medical work undertaken in remote areas. At the rear of the building stands a small shed housing the original 'pedal radio'. It was here that electrical engineer and inventor of the famous 'pedal radio,' Alfred Traeger (see boxed text below), and Flynn ran transmission tests of Traeger's new invention.

National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame

This thought-provoking tribute to Australia's pioneering women is in the **Old Courthouse**

(Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9006; www.pioneerwomen.com.au; 27 Hartley St; adult/child \$2.20/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Feb–mid-Dec). There are stories of the exploits and achievements of women from all over the country, including a large pictorial display on women who were 'first in their field' in politics, sport, law, the arts and other endeavours. Among the luminaries are Pat O'Shane, Australia's first Aboriginal barrister, sports stars Cathy Freeman, Evonne Cawley and Dawn Fraser, and Kay Cottee, the first yachtswoman to circumnavigate the world solo – but there are many more unsung achievers. In the old magistrates chamber is a section on 'local stories' from outback heroines such as Olive Pink, Ida Standley and Daphne Calder.

Panorama Guth

In the strange castle-like building in the town centre, **Panorama Guth** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2013; www.panoramaguth.com.au; 65 Hartley St; adult/concession \$6.50/4.40; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is the life work of the late Dutch artist Henk Guth, who moved to Alice and began painting landscapes in 1966. The main attraction is the kitschy but nonetheless impressive 360-degree painted panorama framed by a three-dimensional desert scene. The adjoining gallery features many grandiose Guth paintings, some original Albert Namatjira works and a museum of Aboriginal artefacts.

Old Ghan Train & Museum

At the MacDonnell siding, about 10km south of Alice and 1km west of the Stuart Hwy, the Ghan Preservation Society has restored a collection of *Ghan* locomotives and carriages

ALFRED TRAEGER & THE PEDAL RADIO

In the 1920s communication with isolated outback stations was a major problem. The Reverend John Flynn of the Inland Mission invited Alfred Traeger, an electrical engineer and inventor from Adelaide, to come to the Centre and test out some radio equipment. Outpost transmitters were set up at Hermannsburg and Arltunga, putting both places in instant contact with the radio at the Inland Mission in the Alice. But the equipment was cumbersome and relied on heavy copper-oxide batteries. Flynn employed Traeger to solve the problem, and he eventually came up with a radio set that used bicycle pedals to drive the generator.

Within a few years, sets had been installed in numerous locations throughout the Territory. The Alice Springs station officially started operation in April 1939.

Traeger's pedal sets revolutionised communications in the outback, and by the late 1930s (before which only Morse code was used) voice communication had become the norm. Long after the pedal radios became obsolete, two-way radios were often still referred to as 'the pedal'.

on a stretch of disused track. Train buffs and anyone interested in this frontier-smashing railway (originally called the *Afghan Express* after the cameleers who forged the route) will get a good picture here.

The **Ghan Rail Museum** (off Map p178; ☎ 8955 5047; www.maintraxnt.com.au; Norris Bell Ave; adult/child/family \$6/4/15; 🕒 9am-5pm) has a small, slightly ad-hoc collection of railway memorabilia, photographs and information panels in the Stuart railway station – a 1930s-style station reconstructed from plans originally intended for the Alice.

Road Transport Hall of Fame

If you like big trucks, including a few ancient road trains, the **Road Transport Hall of Fame** (off Map p178; ☎ 8952 7161; Norris Bell Ave; adult/child/family \$8/5/22; 🕒 9am-5pm) has a fabulous collection. In a couple of huge sheds next to the rail museum are over 100 restored trucks and vintage cars, including many of the outback pioneering vehicles. Here you'll find a 1964 B61 Mack truck, Studebakers, Buicks and a 1911 Model T Ford – the oldest vehicle to make the return trip from Alice to Uluru – as well as a collection of memorabilia and a 'restoration yard' (if you're wondering where old road trains go to die and be reborn, this must be it).

ACTIVITIES

Hot-Air Ballooning

Floating high above the desert at sunrise is an unforgettable way to start the day and there are dawn balloon flights daily from Alice Springs. Flights take off some distance south of the MacDonnell Ranges and all include a champagne breakfast. Children pay about 30% less and there are discounts for backpackers, especially if you book through a hostel.

Ballooning Downunder (☎ 1800 801 601, 8952 8816; www.ballooningdownunder.com.au; 30-/60-min flight \$230/330)

Outback Ballooning (☎ 1800 809 790; www.outbackballooning.com.au; 30-/60-min flight \$240/360)

Spinifex Ballooning (☎ 1800 677 893, 8953 4800; www.balloonflights.com.au; 30-min flight \$230).

Bowling

You can unwind with a game of pins at Alice's imaginatively named tenpin bowling alley, the **Dust Bowl** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5051; 29 Gap Rd; adult/child \$8/7 per game; 🕒 noon-late). It stays

open till the last bowlers depart and there's a kiosk and a **bar** (🕒 6-10pm).

Bushwalking

If you really want to get to know this country, head out to the bush. Several easy walks radiate from the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens and the Telegraph Station, including the Telegraph Station to Simpsons Gap route, which is also the first stage of the Larapinta Trail (p218).

Central Australian Bushwalkers (☎ 8953 1956; http://home.austarnet.com.au/longwalk) is a group of local bushwalkers that schedules a wide variety of walks in the area, particularly the West MacDonnell Ranges, from March to November.

If you're keen to tackle part of the Larapinta Trail but don't have your own equipment, **Lone Dingo Adventure** (☎ 8953 3866; cnr Todd Mall & Gregory Tce) can put together packs of camping and hiking gear for hire, as well as GPS and EPIRB equipment (see p200).

Camel & Horse Riding

Camels played an integral part in pioneering central Australia, and travellers can relive some of that adventure. At the **Frontier Camel Farm** (off Map p178; ☎ 8953 0444; www.cameltrucks.com.au) you can take a half-day ride along the Todd River (adult/child \$50/25), or take a camel to dinner or breakfast (p191).

Pyndan Camel Tracks (☎ 0416 170 164; www.cameltrucks.com) has one-hour rides just south of the MacDonnell Ranges (\$35), as well as half-day rides (\$80) and an overnight ride, including dinner and breakfast and a night in a swag, for \$140.

The only place for commercial horse riding in the Alice Springs area is at **Old Ambalindum Homestead** (☎ 8956 9620; tno@bigpond.com; Arltunga Gardens Rd; 🕒 Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun), about 130km northwest of Alice. They offer half-hour riding lessons (\$40), one-hour rides (\$80), two-hour trail rides (\$150) and pony rides for children (\$10). Bookings are essential.

Cycling

Alice is flat and perfect for cycling. Pedal along the excellent track beside the Todd River to the Telegraph Station, west to the Alice Springs Desert Park, or further out on the designated cycle path to Simpsons Gap.

(Continued from page 184)

Alice Bike Hire (☎ 0407 324 697; www.alicebikehire.com; half/full day \$12/20) Drop-off/pick-up service, mountain bikes, kids' bikes and baby seats available.

Broken Spoke (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8744; Shop 3, Elder St Centre, Elder St; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Sells bicycles, parts, accessories and does repairs.

Golf

Alice has a fine, undulating 18-hole golf course (even during dry spells the fairways are kept lovingly green) with a striking backdrop of the MacDonnell Ranges. The **Alice Springs Golf Club** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1921; Cromwell Dr; course fees 9/18 holes \$20/30, club hire half/full set \$15/25; 🕒 6.30am-11pm) is just east of the Todd River.

Indoor Rock Climbing

The **YMCA** (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5666; Saddeen Rd; 🕒 6am-9pm Mon-Thu, 6am-8pm Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat, 1-6pm Sun), east of the river, has an indoor climbing wall. Climbing costs \$10.50/8 for an adult/student or child with equipment. There's also a **gym** (casual visit \$8.50).

Swimming

Almost without exception, all places to stay have a swimming pool, although these vary in size from postage stamp to something you can actually swim in. If you want to do laps, the local **Swimming Centre** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 4633; Speed St; adult/child \$3.20/1.70; 🕒 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) has three outdoor pools and diving boards.

Quad-biking

For a thrill on four wheels you can't beat these go-anywhere bikes, which are automatic, pretty stable to ride and don't require a licence or previous experience. Pick up and drop off at your accommodation is included.

Desert Quads (☎ 8953 7100; www.desertquads.com.au; tours per person \$110-160) Two- and 3½-hour tours leave at least twice daily.

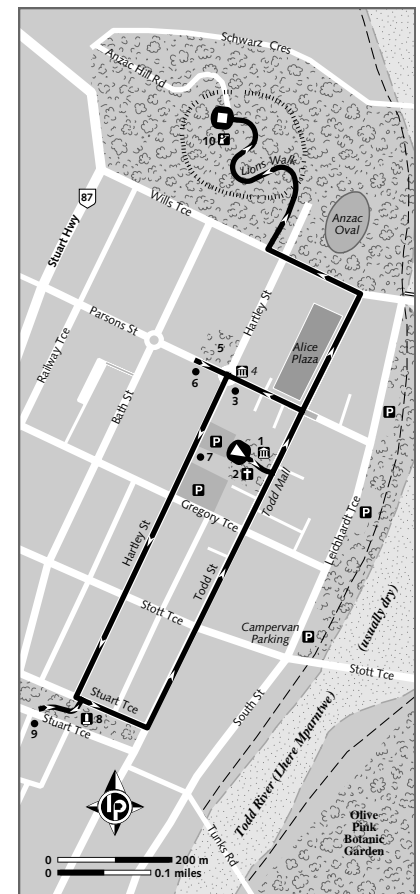
Outback Quad Adventures (☎ 89530697; www.oqa.com.au; tours per person \$100-330) Guided tours (minimum two hours) go out on Undoolya Station. The overnight tour (\$330) includes camping out with dinner and breakfast.

WALKING TOUR: HISTORICAL ALICE

These days Alice Springs has a modern – some would say nondescript – town centre, but hidden among the shopping plazas are a

few interesting survivors from the days when this really was a frontier outback town. You can easily do a walk around the heritage buildings of central Alice in a couple of hours, or longer if you pause in museums along the way (and longer still if you chat with all the little old ladies who look after them).

Start in the grassy space on the Todd Mall, where you'll find Alice's original hospital, **Adelaide House** (1; p183), now an absorbing museum. Next door is the modern **John Flynn Memorial Uniting Church** (2), built in 1956. Walk up to Parsons St, turn left and head up to the low- and wide-roofed **Residency** (3; admission by donation; 🕒 10am-2pm Mon-Fri), built in 1926 as the first home of the Government of Central Australia and



(Continued on page 189)

refurbished to reflect this period. In 1963 the Queen and Prince Phillip stayed here during their royal visit. Across the road, the **old courthouse building (4)**; cnr Parsons & Hartley Sts) was constructed in 1928 as the office of the administrator of Central Australia. From the 1930s until 1980 it was used as the local court and today houses the inspirational National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame (p183). Opposite, the small patch of green is the **DD Smith Park (5)**, dedicated to David Douglas Smith, the first resident engineer who was instrumental in constructing the Stuart Hwy.

Crossing Parsons St you'll find the oldest surviving building in Alice Springs, the tiny **Stuart Town Gaol (6)**; Parsons St; adult/child \$2.20/free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat), sandwiched between the modern police station and law courts. It was built from 1907 to 1908 with locally quarried stone and had its first guests in 1909. Most early inmates were Aboriginal men whose usual crime was killing cattle, but plenty of non-Aboriginal offenders were committed for crimes ranging from horse theft to passing dud cheques. The last two prisoners were interned in 1938 for the heinous crime of travelling on the *Ghan* without a ticket! There are murals on the wall behind.

Back on Hartley St, head south to the old **Hartley St School (7)**, which now houses the **National Trust office** (☎ 8952 4516; Hartley St; admission by donation; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat). The core of the building was built in the late 1920s and it housed the original School of the Air studio.

Continuing down Hartley St and then crossing Stott Tce you come to a 'heritage precinct' where plaques identify a number of early Alice houses that mostly now house government offices. At the end of Hartley St, on the grassy strip along Stuart Tce, is the **Stuart Memorial (8)**, dedicated to pioneering explorer John McDouall Stuart. Across the road is the **Royal Flying Doctor Service Base (9)**; p182) which is definitely worth a visit to see the work and history of this unique service.

Walk east to Todd St and it's two blocks north back to the Todd Mall, where you can browse the shops and galleries before heading to the walking path (Lions Walk) that leads to the top of **Anzac Hill (10)**; p179) – a great place to watch the sunset with a fine view over Alice.

ALICE FOR CHILDREN

Keeping kids occupied should be a breeze in Alice – if the idea of handling a 3m-long python doesn't charm them, nothing will! At the **Reptile Centre** (p182) there are regular handling shows, while the **Alice Springs Desert Park** (p179) is a captivating experience for kids and adults alike. Don't miss taking the kids to the **Heavitree Outback Lodge** (p193) any time after 4pm to handfeed the rock wallabies that climb down from the ranges.

A ride on a camel is a sure-fire winner, so visit the **Frontier Camel Farm** (p184). **Squiggles Playhouse Café** (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8066; Shop 2/39 North Stuart Hwy; children 1-14 yrs \$6.60; snacks \$2-5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) is a chance to go for a coffee and a breather while the kids play in the indoor play centre.

A good **outdoor playground** (Map p178) is at Frank McEllister Park next to the Araluen Arts Centre on Larapinta Drive, with free barbecues and a BMX track.

Childcare centre places are hard to come by in Alice, so plan ahead. **Alice Springs Child Care Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4188; 53 Bath St; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) is a community centre charging \$10/50 per hour/day.

If you need extra baby gear such as prams, capsules and even disposable nappies, **Baby Equipment Hire** (☎ 0413 239997; www.babyehire.com.au) will deliver just about anything baby-related to your door for short- or long-term rental or purchase.

TOURS

Alice Springs is the hub of central Australian tourism and all roads – and tours – start and end here. There are daily trips by bus or 4WD to one or more of the major attractions: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Watarrka National Park (Kings Canyon), Palm Valley, and the West and East MacDonnells, with less frequent tours to places such as Rainbow Valley and Chambers Pillar. Catia tourist office has details on all sorts of organised tours from Alice Springs. You can also book most tours through your accommodation, or try the **Outback Travel Shop** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5288; www.outbacktravelshop.com.au; 2a Gregory Tce).

Town Tours

Alice Wanderer (☎ 1800 722 111; 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) has town tours for \$38 and half-day tours to Simpsons Gap and Standley Chasm for \$70.

Foot Falcon (☎ 8953 4015; www.footfalcon.com; tours \$25-35) has excellent morning, evening and afternoon walking tours covering Aboriginal history, historical buildings and tales of the early days.

Aboriginal Cultural Tours

Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre (☎ 8952 3408; www.aboriginalart.com.au; 125 Todd St; half/full day \$95/165) offers the chance to meet and interact with Aboriginal people and learn about their culture. Tours include a bush walk, Aboriginal dance performance and didgeridoo lesson (also see p199).

Alice Wanderer (☎ 1800 722 111; 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) has half-day tours to the Santa Teresa Aboriginal community and Keringke art centre for \$130.

Dreamtime Tours (☎ 8955 5095; www.rstours.com.au; adult/child \$85/45, self-drive \$70/35; ☎ 8.30-11.30am) has the popular three-hour 'Dreamtime & Bushtucker Tour', where you can meet some Warlpiri Aboriginal people and learn a little about their traditional life. As it caters for large bus groups it can be impersonal, but you can tag along with your own vehicle.

Dining Tours

Take a Camel out to Breakfast or Dinner (☎ 8953 0444; www.cameltours.com.au; Ross Hwy; breakfast adult/child \$80/45, dinner adult/child \$105/75) is a very outback experience, combining a one-hour camel ride with a barbecue breakfast or three-course dinner at the Frontier Camel Farm (p184).

Red Centre Dreaming (☎ 8950 4444; www.aurora-resorts.com.au; Palm Circuit; adult/child \$95/55; ☎ 7-10pm), at the Heavitree Outback Lodge (p193), is a big meal and a cultural experience – a three-course 'Territorial' buffet feed (including drinks) with Aboriginal dancing, music and *story-telling*.

Scenic Flights

Alice Springs Helicopters (☎ 8952 9800; www.anh.com.au) has flights over Alice (\$95), Simpsons Gap (\$240) and West MacDonnell Ranges (\$850).

Murray Cosson's Australian Outback Flights (☎ 8952 4625; www.australianoutbackflights.com.au) operates flights over Alice Springs (\$110), as well as the West MacDonnell Ranges (1½ hours \$295), Kings Canyon including lunch and canyon walk (eight hours \$520), and Uluru and Kata Tjuta (full day \$660).

All prices are per person (minimum two people).

Northern Air Charters (☎ 8953 1444; www.flynac.com.au) operates flights from Alice Springs to Uluru from \$305 per person one way.

Motorcycle Tours

Alice Springs Motorcycle Tours (☎ 1800 555 797; 8955 5797; www.aliceharley.com.au) is the one for lovers of Harleys and black leather. The 30-minute 'town tripper' costs \$55 or you can cruise the MacDonnell Ranges for two/five/seven hours for \$155/360/460.

Tours Around Alice

The major sites of the West MacDonnell Ranges can be seen in a day and with two or more people you'll get a better deal hiring a small car than taking a tour; however, there are a few good 4WD options along here, such as Palm Valley (see p219 for details).

Heading southeast of Alice, the sites you can access with a conventional vehicle are somewhat limited, so a tour is a good option. See p235 for details on tours featuring the East MacDonnell Ranges, Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley.

Numerous operators run tours of two or more days to Uluru, Kata Tjuta and Kings Canyon. See p251 for further information.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

March & April

Alice IS Wonderland Festival The gay and lesbian community hits the town with a week of events in this post-Mardi Gras festival.

GAY & LESBIAN ALICE

For an outback town, Alice Springs has a surprisingly strong and diverse gay and lesbian community. A local outcry over the first **Alice IS Wonderland** gay and lesbian festival (above) in 2001 was met by even stronger local support for the concept. Your first point of contact should be Phil Walcott, the gregarious owner of **Rainbow Connection** (p195), while **Mediterranean Bar Doppio** (p197), just off Todd Mall, is lesbian-owned and a great place to mingle. Every Friday at around 5.30pm there's drinks at the bar of **Alice Springs Resort** (p195) where you can meet loads of interesting people.

WHACKY RACES

They say if you see the Todd River flow three times in your life you're a local, but a lack of water doesn't stop the sports-and-beer-loving people of the Alice having a good time.

Every September (since 1962) the town gears up for one of central Australia's most famous sports events – the **Henley-on-Todd Regatta**. Borrowing its name from the even more famous English boat race, this whacky festival is a race along the sandy bed of the dry Todd River. The 'boats' are bottomless and the crews race barefoot with their lightweight craft hauled up around their waists. No oars, coxes or winged keels are required here, just a swift pair of heels. There are numerous race categories and the boats come in all shapes and sizes – yachts with sails, kayaks, flat-bottom boats pushed through the sand using shovels instead of oars and even a bathtub derby where contestants carry a passenger in a bathtub to the finish! Add to that a sand-ski race, a tug-of-war, and – just to flavour it with a little surf carnival atmosphere in the desert – a 'surf rescue' and iron man and woman events! (For the record, the Todd River has flooded twice in recent memory, with devastating flash-floods in 1983 and 1988 – both in March.)

But for curious visitors to the Alice, much of the real entertainment can be found outside the actual racing. Locals dress up in oddball outfits, a procession of boats and floats winds its way through the streets and, like all good outback happenings, the booze flows freely and partying goes well into the night. Entry to the event is \$10/5 (adult/child), with 10% of profits going to a different charity each year. For information and annual dates, check out the website www.henleyontodd.com.au.

Another out-there race day in Alice Springs is the **Camel Cup**, held in mid-July at Blatherskite Park, south of the Gap. As well as the races, where the gangly legs of dromedaries make a surprisingly swift bid for the finish line, there are stalls, rides, music, plenty of drinking and a carnival atmosphere. And what would a race day be without fashions on the fields and the judging for Mr and Miss Camel Cup? It's a great family day out. For more information, check out www.camelcup.com.au.

Heritage Week The emphasis is on the town's European past during this week of re-enactments, displays and demonstrations of old skills, usually in late April.

May

Alice Springs Cup Carnival (www.alicespringsturfclub.org.au) The highlight of the autumn racing carnival is the Alice Springs Cup held on the first Monday in May.

Bangtail Muster A parade of floats along Todd Mall followed by a sports carnival, also held on the Monday holiday in early May.

June & July

Finke Desert Race (www.finkedeserttrace.com.au) Motorcyclists and buggy-drivers vie to take out the title of this crazy race 240km from Alice Springs along the Old South Rd to Finke; the following day they race back again! It's held on the Queen's Birthday weekend.

Beanie Festival (www.beaniefest.org) An Alice Springs festival with cult status, this event in late June/early July honours the woollen beanie with colourful entries from around Australia and abroad; there are prizes, exhibitions and workshops at the Araluen Art Centre.

Alice Springs Show The annual agricultural show on the first weekend in July has the usual rides and attractions, as well as displays and events.

Naidoc Week (National Aboriginal Islander Day Observation Committee) This is a celebration of Indigenous culture and achievements in the local community.

Camel Cup See Whacky Races above.

August

Alice Springs Rodeo Yee-ha! Bareback bull-riding, steer wrestling, calf roping and ladies' barrel races are some of the events at the rodeo at Blatherskite Park.

Big Screen At the Araluen Art Centre, this is a touring Aussie film festival with a number of free screenings.

September & October

Alice Desert Festival (www.alicedesertfestival.com.au) This arts and cultural festival features music, dancing, exhibitions and street performers.

Henley-on-Todd Regatta See Whacky Races above.

Desert Mob Month-long exhibition of Central Desert artists.

November

Corkwood Festival This annual festival, held on the last Sunday in November, is an arts and crafts festival, but there's also plenty of music and food. Craft stalls are the focus during the afternoon, while the evening is capped with a bush dance.

SLEEPING

The Alice has the best range of accommodation in central Australia, from caravan parks and backpacker hostels to atmospheric B&Bs and luxury hotels, with plenty of standard-issue motels in between. Book ahead during the peak season (June to September) and during festivals.

Budget

PUBS

Todd Tavern (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; www.todd-tavern.com.au; 1 Todd Mall; d \$60; 🍷) In the heart of town at the top end of Todd Mall, the rooms above Todd Tavern are spotless, spacious and motel quality at a budget price. The only downside is the noise from the pub – mainly Thursday to Sunday – but if you're not the early-to-bed type it's great value.

HOSTELS

There's plenty of backpacker accommodation in Alice (and a new Base Backpackers was planned for the town centre at the time of writing), but you'll still need to book ahead if you want a private room. Most places have dorm beds and motel-style doubles. Ask about VIP/YHA/Nomads discounts.

Annie's Place (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1549, 1800 359 089; www.anniesplace.com.au; 4 Traeger Ave; dm/d \$16/60; 🍷 🍺 🍻) Alice's best hostel has plenty of beds but a cosy feel and converted motel rooms (all with bathroom and fridge) around a central pool. Apart from a poky kitchen, the facilities are excellent with a real Internet café and the sociable Travellers Café & Bar (all dinner meals for guests are \$5). Some travellers have complained about a hard sell on their Uluru tours (Mulgas) and a frosty reception if you take a competitor's tour, so beware.

Pioneer YHA Hostel (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8855; www.yha.com.au; cnr Leichhardt Tce & Parsons St; dm \$23-27, tw & d \$65, q \$80; 🍷 🍺 🍻) In the old Pioneer outdoor cinema right in the centre of town, location is the biggest bonus here but it's clean, friendly and well run. The doubles share bathrooms. A good-sized kitchen, common room with pool table and pleasant outdoor area around a small pool make up the fairly typical YHA-type facilities.

Alice's Secret Traveller's Inn (Map p178; ☎ 1800 783 633, 8952 8686; www.asecret.com.au; 6 Khalick St; dm \$18-20, s/tw/d \$38/48/50; 🍷 🍺) Just across the Todd River from town, this is a great

travellers' hostel where you can relax, have a go at a few circus tricks – fire twirling, juggling – strum a guitar or play a game of badminton in the garden. Rooms in a big old house are simple but clean.

Toddy's Resort (Map p178; ☎ 8952 1322, 1800 027 027; www.toddys.com.au; 41 Gap Rd; dm \$17-18, s & d \$65; 🍷 🍺 🍻) Toddy's is a big, ramshackle place with a party atmosphere, helped by the popular all-you-can-eat meals at the outdoor bar every evening. Although there are plenty of beds, the motel-style rooms are hard to get (book ahead) and the other rooms are nothing to write home about.

Elke's Backpackers (Map p178; ☎ 8981 6302; www.elkesbackpackers.com.au; 39 Gap Rd; dm \$18, d \$50-75; 🍷 🍺 🍻) Next door to Toddy's, Elke's is made up of converted motel rooms and, unlike most hostels in town, doesn't mind long-term stays. Most rooms have kitchenette and en suite.

CAMPING & CARAVAN PARKS

Most caravan parks are on the outskirts of Alice, but still relatively close to the centre. All have barbecues, a laundry, swimming pool and shop with basic provisions, as well as cabins.

Heavitree Gap Outback Lodge & Caravan Park (Map p178; ☎ 1800 896 119, 8950 4444; htgl@aurora-resorts.com.au; Palm Circuit; unpowered site per person \$9, powered site for 2 \$20, dm \$25, d \$115-130; 🍷 🍺 🍻) Although the camping area is a bit of a side issue at this resort, it's still the pick of the bunch, nestled at the foot of the ranges where rock wallabies descend for an evening feed. Good facilities, backpacker and motel rooms and a pub next door.

MacDonnell Range Holiday Park (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6111, 1800 808 373; www.macrange.com.au; Palm Place; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$30/25, budget r \$60, cabins \$85-125, villas \$135-150; 🍷 🍺 🍻) Probably the best-kept park in town, this has grassy sites, spotless amenities and good camp kitchens. Cabins and villas accommodate up to six people.

Also recommended:

Stuart Caravan Park (Map p178; ☎ 8952 2547; www.stuartcaravanpark.com.au; Larapinta Dr; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$26/20, cabins \$60-80; 🍷 🍺) Opposite the cultural precinct 2km west of town.

Wintersun Gardens Caravan Park (Map p178; ☎ 8952 4080; www.wintersun.com.au; Stuart Hwy; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$25/20, cabins \$75-110; 🍷 🍺) About 2km north of the town centre.

Alice Springs Heritage Caravan & Tourist Park

(Map p178; ☎ 8952 3135; www.heritagecp.com.au; Ragonesi Rd; powered/unpowered site for 2 \$24/20, cabins from \$85)

Midrange

There's no shortage of hotels and motels in Alice, plus a smattering of B&Bs and some self-contained apartments for longer-term visits.

HOTELS & MOTELS

Desert Palms Resort (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5977; 1800 678 037; www.desertpalms.com.au; 74 Barrett Dr; d/tr/q villas \$120/135/145; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) A world away from the average motel, this is one of the most tranquil places in town, with palms positioned for seclusion and cascades of bougainvillea pouring over balconies. The rows of Indonesian-style villas add to the exotic feel, with cathedral ceilings and tropical-style furnishings. Each has a kitchenette, en suite, TV, breakfast bar and private balcony. The island swimming pool is a big hit with kids.

Desert Rose Inn (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1411; www.desertroseinn.com.au; 15 Railway Tce; budget s/d \$50/60, motel s/d \$60/95; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) A short walk from the town centre, the Desert Rose makes a good alternative to the hostel experience, with budget rooms that share bathrooms, as well as standard motel rooms and an inviting pool, kitchen and common area.

All Seasons Diplomat (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8977; www.accorhotels.com.au; cnr Gregory Tce & Hartley St; budget/standard/deluxe d \$70/135/155; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Right in the town centre, this is a large, nondescript but well-appointed motel with rooms in double-storey blocks. The upper-floor rooms have wrap-around verandas.

Elkira Motel (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1222, 1800 809 252; 65 Bath St; elkira@bestwestern.com.au; budget s/d \$75/85, standard s/d \$90/1000, deluxe s/d \$100/110; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Elkira is a decent mid-priced motel in a central but quiet location. The budget rooms are poky but the others are fine.

Airport Motel (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6611; www.airportmotels.com.au; 115 Gap Rd; s/d \$80/85, deluxe \$90/95; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) It's nowhere near the airport, but this unpretentious motel has some of the biggest rooms in Alice for this price. Prince Charles and Lady Di stayed here in 1983 – believe it or not the Todd River was flooded so they couldn't reach the swish hotels on the east side. The room Diana

stayed in is now the breakfast room, but you can sleep in Charles' old suite (now a family room) for \$115. Bargain!

White Gum Motel (Map p178; ☎ 8952 5144; www.whitegum.com.au; 17 Gap Rd; d \$75-85; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) This ageing motel is well located and perfect if you want a reasonably priced room with your own kitchen – all rooms are fully self-contained.

Larapinta Motel (Map p178; ☎ 8952 7255; 3 Larapinta Dr; s/d/tr/q \$90/100/110/120; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) This motel, which proudly flies the Aboriginal flag and is painted in black, yellow and red, looks after many of the Indigenous people visiting town from outlying communities, including some well-known artists. Everyone is welcome here and the rooms are spacious and clean with kitchenette, TV and en suite.

APARTMENTS

Alice on Todd (Map p178; ☎ 8953 8033; www.aliceontodd.com; cnr Strehlow St & South Tce; studio \$100, 1-/2-bedroom apt \$120/150; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) This swish and secure apartment complex on the banks of the Todd offers modern, self-contained rooms with kitchen and lounge. The two-bedroom apartments sleep up to six people, and the complex has a barbecue area and games room. Stand-by and long-term rates are available.

Hillsview Tourist Apartments (Map p178; ☎ 0407 602 379; www.hillsviewapartments.com; 16 Bradshaw Dr; standard/deluxe apt from \$115/125; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) In a quiet location with a view across to the changing hues of the MacDonnell Ranges, there are good-value two-bedroom apartments with a full kitchen, lounge, bathroom and washing machine.

B&Bs

Alice has just a handful of B&Bs, but they offer an intimate and homely alternative to the motel experience, especially for couples. Children are generally discouraged.

Gallery (off Map p178; ☎ 8953 3514; thegallery@outbacktravelshop.com.au; 16 Range Cres; s/d \$120/150) Overlooking the golf course in a quiet part of town, this beautiful stone house is an oasis of peace. Play a game of snooker, relax in the elevated lounge or on the outdoor decking and admire the artworks on the walls. There are three guest rooms with shared facilities. The owners are a mine of local knowledge and speak five languages.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bond Springs Outback Retreat (off Map p178; ☎ 8952 9888; www.outbackretreat.com.au; PO Box 4, Alice Springs NT 0871; 2-/3-bedroom cottage from \$230/280) This is the closest you'll come to experiencing outback station life while still being a short drive from Alice. Although you're on a working cattle station (around 3000 head of Herefords) the accommodation is exclusive and very private, with just two separate self-contained cottages (refurbished stockman's quarters). Modern comforts are matched by traditional furnishings, giving them a real country feel. A full breakfast is included but the rest is self-catering, so stock up in Alice before you arrive.

Although horses are no longer used with mustering, the old stockyards and riding equipment from the early days have been preserved, along with early stone cottages and the original station school, which operated through the School of the Air. To get here, drive 10km north of Alice along the Stuart Hwy, turn right at the sign and continue a further 6.5km.

Orangewood (Map p178; ☎ 8952 4114; www.orange-wood-bnb.com.au; 9 McMinn St; s/d \$180/210; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) For a cosy stay it's hard to beat Orangewood. The four comfortable rooms all have en suite and little touches like hairdryers and bathrobes. The biggest has a corner spa bath and the garden room is a self-contained private bungalow with a separate lounge room. In the main house there's a sitting room with TV and CD player (shared with resident cat, Angus) and the garden has a couple of loaded orange trees, a pool and barbecue area.

Nthaba Cottage (Map p178; ☎ 8952 9003; www.nthabacottage.com.au; 83 Cromwell Dr; s/d \$100/125, s/d cottage \$125/155) This quaint family home on the east side of town has a beautiful garden at the back, a separate cottage room and a room in the house, both with en suite.

Rainbow Connection (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6441; 22-24 Raggatt St; s/d \$140/170; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Alice's gay-friendly guesthouse has four rooms, three of which are in a separate house with its own full kitchen, lounge and bathroom (perfect for groups). The other room is a funky boutique double room with en suite, earthy tones, TV and fridge. The entertaining area comes complete with mirror ball and stained-glass windows.

Top End

Most of Alice's best hotels are on the eastern side of the river. Weekend deals and special rates are often available – always ask.

HOTELS

Crowne Plaza Alice Springs (Map p178; ☎ 8950 8000; www.crowneplaza.com.au; Barrett Dr; r \$150-170, ste \$250-350; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) With the fanciest lobby in Alice and first-class facilities and service,

this is at the top of the range. Choose from the garden-view rooms or the better range-view rooms – all have balcony or patio, TV, minibar, safe, free movies and bathtubs. Spacious suites all overlook the ranges. A pleasant pool and spa, well-equipped gym and sauna, tennis courts and Alice's best Thai restaurant make up the picture.

Lasseter's Hotel Casino (Map p178; ☎ 1800 808 975, 8950 7777; www.lhc.com.au; 93 Barrett Dr; d from \$110, ste \$310; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Despite all the flashiness of its attached casino, Lasseter's is surprisingly good value if you score one of its special deals. The 140 rooms are bright and spacious with all the mod cons, and the suites come with private spa, bar and a view of the ranges. And you get free golf at the nearby club, along with a brilliant gym, pool and tennis courts.

Alice Springs Resort (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 4545; www.voyages.com.au; 34 Stott Tce; d standard/deluxe \$120/150; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) With a circle of rooms arranged around a swathe of gum trees, refurbished Alice Springs Resort is a very stylish spot. Modern rooms are spacious with TV, mini-bar and writing desk; the deluxe 'River Gum' rooms have a balcony or veranda and a bathtub. There's a cool pool-terrace area with swim-up pool bar.

EATING

Alice has the best eating-out scene south of Darwin and north of Uluru, and it's come a long way in the past decade since the days when a pub meal and a pizza were the top choices. As well as some stylish restaurants and casual cafés, there's a range of international cuisine. For something different, take a camel out to dinner (see Dining Tours p191).

Restaurants

Oscar's (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0930; 86 Todd Mall; lunch \$13-17, dinner \$17-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you ask locals their favourite restaurant, many will say Oscar's, a friendly, informal place at the top end of the mall. It's open all day with great breakfast fare and an emphasis on Italian and Spanish cuisine (pastas, paella, risotto) in the evening.

Overlanders Steakhouse (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2159; www.overlanders.com.au; 72 Hartley St; mains \$19-29; ☺ dinner) A local institution for big steaks of all kinds, Overlanders is an over-the-top representation of all things outback – saddles, cowboy hats, branding irons and all. Amid the drovers' décor you can sample buffalo mignon, kangaroo, crocodile, camel, emu and barramundi. The famous 'Drover's Blowout' (\$50) is a four-course meal that includes soup, a platter of the Aussie meats, choice of steak or barra, and dessert. If you're dining alone, ask for a place at the Overlanders Table, where you can share a blowout with others. The bar is fully licensed and you can even order a Darwin stubby.

Casa Nostra (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6749; cnr Undoolya Rd & Sturt Tce; mains \$10-20; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) With red-and-white checked tablecloths, plastic grape bunches hanging from the bar, and genial staff, Casa Nostra is a popular slice of Italiana just across the river from the town centre. Reliable (but not earth-shattering) pizza and pasta is the bread and butter here. There's an informal, bustling atmosphere and takeaway is available. What's more, it's BYO.

Red Ochre Grill (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9614; Todd Mall; light meals \$9.50-14, mains \$19-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) With innovative fusion cuisine and the perfect day-night dining combination, this is one of the classiest stops on Todd Mall. All-day brunch (burgers, sandwich melts, salads) is served in the afternoon in the semi-open-air section. Dinner in the restaurant – which is framed by superb Ken Duncan outback photography – features offerings such as spiced kangaroo fillets, grilled camel medallions, swordfish steaks or the Aussie game medley, infused with native ingredients such as quandong (native peach) and macadamias.

Thai Room (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 0191; Fan Lane; mains \$8.50-16; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) For good, reasonably-priced Southeast Asian food, duck into tiny Fan Lane. The lunch menu of laksa, pad Thai and curry is a bargain

and this is one of the few BYO restaurants left in existence. The dinner menu is broader.

Malathi's Restaurant (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1858; Sean's Irish Bar, 51 Bath St; meals \$13-29; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) An Indian restaurant in an Irish pub? Malathi's is an interesting local haunt where the Indian chef combines home cooking with Aussie ingredients: Indian tapas, kangaroo and camel shashliks, barramundi devi, laksa and the intriguing Irish chicken curry. The food is excellent, despite the steep prices for traditionally inexpensive dishes.

Bluegrass (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5188; cnr Stott Tce & Todd St; mains \$20-30; ☺ dinner Wed-Mon) Housed in the historical Country Women's Association building, this is an arty restaurant with a lovely garden setting and an eclectic, inspired menu packed with gourmet delights such as Greek-style mezes, gum-smoked rack of lamb, yabbies, kangaroo and seafood.

Flavours of India (Map p178; ☎ 8952 3721; 20 Undoolya Rd; mains \$11-22; ☺ dinner) The décor is far from exotic but the food is inexpensive (most mains around \$13) and includes the usual subcontinental faves of tandoori, butter chicken, rogan josh, biryani and a good vegetarian selection. Takeaway is available.

Ainslie's (Map p178; ☎ 8952 6100; 46 Stephens Rd; mains \$22-30; ☺ dinner) At the Novotel Outback Resort, Ainslie's is well regarded for its gourmet meals including whole baked lamb rump. The licensed restaurant is in a bright elevated area with plenty of glass for watching the sunset on the ranges.

Hanuman Restaurant (Map p178; ☎ 8950 8000; Crowne Plaza Alice Springs, Barrett Dr; mains \$12-28; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner) For Thai food outback-style you can't go past this swish hotel restaurant. With exotic décor, Hanuman is furnished to transport you on a journey along the spice route. Thai dishes (some with an Aussie twist such as camel salad) offer an affordable fine-dining experience.

Keller's (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3188; 20 Gregory Tce; mains \$17-27; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Where do you find Indian fish curry sharing a menu with Swiss sausage and rosti? Keller's is probably the only Swiss-Indian restaurant in the country but don't worry, there's no curried fondue on the menu! Aussie touches include home-made wattleseed ice cream and kangaroo fillet stroganoff.

Barra on Todd (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8951 4545; Alice Springs Resort, 34 Stott Tce; mains \$16-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) The speciality here is barramundi

prepared in a variety of ways such as the tantalising chargrilled barra with risotto on a Moreton Bay bug tail.

Pubs

Todd Tavern Pub Caf (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; 1 Todd Mall; meals \$7.50-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) The Todd Tavern is hard to beat for pub fare served the old-fashioned way – big. You can get the usual burgers and snacks throughout the day, but save an appetite for the buffet-style specials, especially the ragingly popular Sunday roast (\$10) with a mixed carvery plus potatoes and pumpkin pieces the size of footballs. It's also family friendly (children's meals around \$6).

Bojangles (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2873; 80 Todd St; mains \$10.50-22, roast \$13; ☺ lunch & dinner) With its big log tables made from old railway sleepers, cowhide seats and walls dripping with stockman's gear and bush memorabilia, Bo's has bags of atmosphere and a surprisingly gourmet 'Territorian' menu. Start with skewers of croc, kangaroo, camel and emu served with quandong sauce or the savoury damper, and leave room for the king-size steaks or camel and Guinness pie.

Outback Bar & Grill (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 7131; Todd Mall; meals \$10-24; ☺ lunch & dinner, bar 11am-2am) The 'fish bowl' – with its glass tank appearance staring out at Todd Mall – does good-value meals and there's also a little courtyard at the side. Pizzas are \$10 and there is a range of burgers, including the obligatory barra burger (\$12.50) and other bar-style fillers.

Firkin & Hound (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3033; 21 Hartley St; mains \$10-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) The Firkin has an old-fashioned pub menu featuring staples such as bangers and mash, beef-and-Guinness pie and big steaks.

Cafés

Café Mediterranean Bar Doppio (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 6525; Fan Lane; meals \$6-11; ☺ breakfast & lunch) In a quiet covered arcade off Todd Mall, this little piece of Byron Bay in Alice serves up huge and wholesome portions served indoors or within the shaded arcade – there are cooked breakfasts, focaccias, curries, great coffee, fresh juices and more. The walls and windows are a fount of knowledge on the arty/alternative scene and this is a good place to plug into the local gay and lesbian scene.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lane (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5522; 58 Todd Mall; tapas \$3-11, mains \$12-28; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) One local told us the menu here was 'a bit arty farty'. But even in outback Alice, the Lane works on every level, whether it's an intimate dinner or casual meal. Take a table inside the stylish restaurant or out on Todd Mall and dip into the tapas menu of Spanish tortilla, jamon croquettes or pickled octopus. There are also wood-fired pizzas and an à la carte menu that surpasses the usual barramundi and roo fillets. The service is excellent and there's live entertainment on weekends.

Katachi (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 0680; 1/78 Todd St; snacks \$3-8; ☺ 9.30am-late) Walking through the door of this hyper-trendy café, you'd be hard-pressed to believe you're still in Alice. With low furniture, world music playing, the best coffee in town and sushi and sweets (muffins, cakes and desserts) on the menu, it's a soothing place to meet or chill out with a magazine.

Red Dog Cafe (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 1353; 64 Todd Mall; meals \$3-12; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Tables on the mall and simple, hearty fare make this a good place for breakfast, with pancakes (\$7.50) and the full 'bushman's breakfast' (\$10.50).

Jolly Swagman Coffee Shop (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3633; Cummins Plaza, Todd Mall; dishes \$3-9; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Tucked away next to Papunya Tula, this quiet café is a winner for its stuffed damper, mushroom balls, salads and sandwiches.

Sporties Café & Restaurant (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0953; Todd Mall; snacks \$10-15, mains \$15-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With tables on Todd Mall and a bar and restaurant inside, this is a good spot for a lunch-time feed – filling focaccias, baguettes, crepes, pasta – or just a beer or coffee. The broad menu also has steaks and pub-style meals, but the atmosphere inside is more airport-lounge than cosy dining.

Quick Eats

Wicked Kneads (Map pp180-1; Todd Mall; pastries \$3-4.50, focaccias \$7.50-9; ☺ 8.30am-4pm) With some of Alice's best pies (21 varieties), quiche, cakes and pastries, this shop-front bakery on the mall does a busy afternoon trade.

The big shopping centres – Yeperenye Shopping Centre (Map pp180-1) and Alice

Plaza (Map pp180-1) – have food courts with cafés, bakeries, fast food and various ready-made dishes. Alice also has most of the big fast food chains: look for your favourite sign.

Self-Catering

If you're stocking up for a trip into the wild, there are several large supermarkets around the city centre. All are open seven days; there's **Coles** (Map pp180-1; Coles Complex, cnr Gregory & Railway Tce; ☎ 24hr), **Woolworths** (Map pp180-1; Yeperenye Shopping Centre; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat, 7am-10pm Sun) on Hartley and Bath Sts, and **Bi-Lo** (Map pp180-1; Alice Plaza; ☎ 7am-9pm) at the north end of Todd Mall.

Afghan Traders (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8955 5560; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), in a lane off Parsons St behind the ANZ bank, is worth the search for its excellent range of organic and health foods.

DRINKING

Alice has a good range of pubs, bars and cafés, all of which double as eating places. Todd St and Todd Mall are the places to start looking for a drink. Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights are busiest in the pubs.

Bojangles (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2873; www.boslivesaloon.com.au; 80 Todd St; ☎ 11.30am-late) Behind the swinging saloon doors you can't help feeling the 'Wild West meets Aussie outback' theme is a bit contrived, but Bojangles is easily the most popular pub in town, beloved of backpacker groups and jumping most nights of the week. Unfortunately, live music has been replaced by an in-house DJ. It's also a popular restaurant.

Sean's Irish Bar (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1858; 51 Bath St; ☎ 3.30pm-midnight) Sean's is a quirky local pub run by an Irish-Indian couple. There's live music here Friday and Saturday nights but the highlight of the week is the Sunday night jam session. Naturally there's Guinness on tap, and you can grab an Indian feed at Malathi's.

Todd Tavern (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 1255; 1 Todd Mall; ☎ 10am-midnight) The bar of this long-standing pub is a local drinking hole and probably the most typically Aussie pub. There's live music on weekends.

Firkin & Hound (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3033; 21 Hartley St; ☎ 11.30am-1am) The Firkin is Alice's only example of those English-theme pub chains popular in Australia, but here it's

a low-key local affair rather than a pub overrun run with rabid expats and tourists (that's reserved for Bo's). Cosy snugs and a smoky bar make up what's essentially a local drinking hole, with a small dining room.

ENTERTAINMENT

Alice is a rarity – an outback town with a pulse, at least on Friday, Saturday and possibly Sunday nights. The rest of the time it sort of hums, splutters and dies by about 10pm. The gig guide in the entertainment section of the *Centralian Advocate*, published every Tuesday and Friday, lists what's on in and around town.

Nightclubs

Melanka's Party Bar (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2233; www.melanka.com.au; 94 Todd St; ☎ 5pm-4am) The only nightclub in town, Melanka's packs in a young crowd of locals and backpackers, though it doesn't get busy until after 11pm. DJs, dance floors, live bands on weekends, sticky floors and drinks in plastic cups.

Theatre & Cinemas

Sounds of Starlight Theatre (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0826; www.soundsostarlight.com; 40 Todd Mall; adult/concession/family \$25/20/80; ☎ 8pm Tue, Fri & Sat Apr-Nov) Andrew Langford's didgeridoo performances have become an Alice institution with a crescendo of lights and sound effects evoking the spirit of the outback. The surprising versatility of the didgeridoo is backed by various Latin-American instruments and percussion.

Araluen Arts Centre (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5022; bookings ☎ 8951 1122; www.araluenartscentre.com.au; Larapinta Dr) The cultural heart of Alice, this 500-seat theatre hosts a diverse range of performers on national tours, from dance troupes to musicians and comedians. Art-house films are screened every Sunday evening (adult/child \$11/9). The website has an events calendar.

Alice Springs Cinema (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4999; Todd Mall; adult/child \$14/9.50, Tue \$9.50/7.50) This modern multiscreen cinema shows latest release movies between 10am and 9pm. Some hostels offer two-for-one movie ticket deals and Tuesday is discount night.

Casino

Lasseter's Hotel Casino (Map p178; ☎ 8950 7777; 93 Barrett Dr; ☎ 10am-3am Sun-Thu, 10am-4am Fri & Sat,

gaming tables from 2pm) By casino standards it's in miniature, but you'll find all the flashing lights, musical beeps and garish carpets of any pokie-infested venue. Apart from weekend nights it's pretty quiet, and along with the usual games there's the classic Aussie two-up ring (open from 9pm Friday and Saturday). There's live music at the adjacent Limerick Inn (open from 4pm) a few nights a week.

Sport

The main spectator sport in Alice is Aussie Rules football. **Traegar Park** (Map p178; Speed St; adult/concession \$7/2), just south of the town centre, is a decent oval with grandstand. A weekend game is a good chance to see budding young Aboriginal talent in action.

SHOPPING

You can get pretty much anything you need in Alice, and it's a good place to shop for central Australian Aboriginal art, didgeridoos, bush clothing and outdoor gear. Todd Mall is the shopping hub and just off here you'll find the main indoor shopping malls, Alice Plaza (Map pp180-1) and Springs Plaza (Map pp180-1). A block away is Yeperenye Shopping Centre (Map pp180-1). For general items, Kmart (Map pp180-1) is well stocked.

Aboriginal Arts & Crafts

Alice is the centre for Aboriginal arts and crafts from all over central Australia, and

plenty of shops along Todd Mall sell them – including a veritable forest of didgeridoos (an instrument not traditionally played in this part of the Territory).

The following places are owned and run by the art centres that produce the work on sale, which means a better slice of the pie goes to the artist.

Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3408; www.aboriginalaustralia.com; 71 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Established by southern Arrernte people, this is a good first stop. The small shop offers one-hour didgeridoo lessons (\$15) and has a range of authentic art and artefacts, such as T-shirts, woodcarvings, didgeridoos and paintings.

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA; Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9207; www.caama.com.au; 101 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) The small shop here stocks Aboriginal books, CDs and cassettes, and various products with local Aboriginal designs. Many of the CDs are recorded by Aboriginal musicians in the CAAMA studio here, which has its own radio network (8KIN FM).

Ngurratjuta Iltja Ntjarra (Map p178; ☎ 8951 1953; 29 Wilkinson St; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) The 'many hands' art centre is a small gallery and studio for visiting artists from all over the central area. Paintings are reasonably priced here (\$100 to \$300) and you buy directly from the artists. You can see artists at work from Tuesday to Friday.

Papunya Tula Artists (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 4731; www.papunyatula.com.au; 78 Todd St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) The Western Desert art movement began at Papunya in 1971 and today this Aboriginal-owned and -operated centre displays some of the most sought-after artworks in central Australia. Nothing is cheap here – small pieces start at around \$250 – but the bright gallery is a great place to get a feel for quality Aboriginal art. Papunya Tula works with around 150 artists, most painting in Kintore in the far west.

There are also commercial outlets for quality Aboriginal art.

Gallery Gondwana (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 1577; www.gallerygondwana.com.au; 43 Todd Mall; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Quality range of works from leading Central and Western Desert artists, including examples from Yuendumu and Utopia regions.

Mbantua Gallery (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 5571; www.mbantua.com.au; 71 Gregory Tce; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri,

DOING THE DIDGE THING

If you've just bought a didgeridoo and have no idea what circular breathing is, several places in Alice offer lessons.

At **Sounds of Starlight** (☎ 8953 0826; 40 Todd Mall) you can learn from the virtuoso, Andrew Langford, after the show finishes (see opposite). He also sells a range of quality didgeridoos (\$100 to \$400), which come with a lesson. Ask about advanced lessons.

The **Didge Room** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 6646; 94 Todd St), in the Opal Miner shop next to Melanka's, has free beginner lessons each evening at 6pm, 7pm and 7.45pm.

At the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 3408; 71 Todd St) lessons (\$15) are given by the Aboriginal owners.

9.30am-5pm Sat) This privately owned art centre has the best collection of original works by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Barbara Weir and other artists from the Utopia region. There are also some Hermannsburg pots available. The upstairs Educational & Permanent Collection (adult/child \$4.40/3.30) is a superb cultural exhibition space with panels explaining Aboriginal mythology, lifestyle, ceremonies, and customs of marriage and death. The permanent gallery includes many more works by Utopia artists, as well as watercolour landscapes from the Namatjira school.

Outdoor Equipment

Lone Dingo Adventure (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 3866; cnr Todd Mall & Gregory Tce; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has all sorts of quality hiking and camping gear from rucksacks and sleeping bags to maps, GPS systems and EPIRBs (Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon). You can also hire most camping and hiking gear reasonably cheaply.

Desert Dwellers (Map p178; ☎ 8953 2240; 38 Elder St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) has just about everything you need to equip yourself for an outback jaunt – swags (from \$175), tents, sleeping bags, portable fridges, stoves, camp ovens and more.

Markets

Todd Mall Market (Todd Mall; ☎ 9am-1pm 2nd Sun, May-Dec) Craft markets, food stalls, clothing, Aboriginal art, jewellery and kick-knock stalls line Todd Mall every second Sunday. A colourful atmosphere with music, sizzling snacks and a few bargains.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Alice Springs is reasonably well connected by air, with Qantas operating daily flights to/from capital cities. Virgin Blue also operates on major routes. One-way fares from Alice include Yulara (\$125), Adelaide (from \$200), Melbourne (from \$270), Darwin (from \$300), Sydney (from \$230), Brisbane (from \$270), Cairns (from \$300), Perth (from \$300) and Hobart (from \$380). Check websites for latest timetables and fare offers.

The following airlines have desks at the airport:

Aboriginal Air Services (☎ 8953 5000) Three weekly flights between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek (one

way \$280) and three weekly flights to Yuendumu (\$235) continuing on to Balgo and Hooker Creek.

Qantas (Map pp180-1; ☎ 13 13 13, 8950 5211; www.qantas.com.au; cnr Todd Mall & Parson St)

Vincent Aviation (☎ 8928 1366; vincentair@optusnet.com.au) Flies to/from Tennant Creek (from \$250 one way) three times a week.

Virgin Blue (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au)

Bus

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au; Shop 3, 113 Todd St; office ☎ 6am-4pm Mon-Sat) has one daily service from Alice Springs to Yulara (for Uluru) and Adelaide, and two to Darwin. Buses arrive at, and depart from, the Greyhound office in Todd St, opposite Melanka's.

Destination	Duration (hr)	One-way fare (\$)
Adelaide	21	230
Coober Pedy	9	135
Darwin	22	255
Katherine	15	210
Tennant Creek	6½	130
Yulara	5	85

The quickest route from Alice to Cairns is with **Desert Venturer** (☎ 07-4035 5566; www.desertventurer.com.au) via the Plenty Hwy. The three-day coach trip costs \$350 plus \$55 for meals.

Car

Alice Springs is a long way from anywhere, although the roads to the north and south are sealed and in good condition.

CAR RENTAL

All the major hire companies have offices in Alice Springs, and Avis, Budget, Hertz and Territory Thrifty also have counters at the airport. Prices drop by about 20% in the low season (November to April).

A conventional (2WD) vehicle will get you to most sights in the MacDonnell Ranges and out to Uluru and Kings Canyon via sealed roads. If you want to go further afield, say to Chambers Pillar, Finke Gorge or even the Mereenie Loop Rd (until it is sealed), a 4WD is essential. Prices depend on the size of vehicle and length of hire, and not all companies offer unlimited kilometres. Insurance excess is also much higher for 4WD vehicles. Shop around and ask about stand-by rates.

Alice Camp 'n' Drive (☎ 8952 0099; www.alicecampndrive.com) Provides vehicles fully equipped for camping with swags (or tents), sleeping bags, cooking gear, chairs etc. Rates include unlimited kilometres, and vehicles are dropped off at your accommodation.

Avis (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 5533; 52 Hartley St)

Budget (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 8899; www.budget.com.au; Shop 6, Capricornia Centre, Gregory Tce) Also at airport.

Europcar (Map p178; ☎ 131390; www.europcarnt.com.au; 10 Gap Rd)

Four Wheel Drive Hire Service (☎ 1800 077 353; www.4wdhire.com.au) Specialises in Toyota Landcruisers (\$190 a day with unlimited kilometres).

Hertz (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 2644; www.hertzn.com; 76 Hartley St)

Outback Auto Rentals (Map pp180-1; ☎ 1800 652 133; www.outbackautorentals.com.au; Todd St) Local company with cheap deals from \$55 a day.

Territory Thrifty Car Rental (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8952 9999; www.rentacar.com.au; cnr Stott Tce & Hartley St)

CAMPERVAN RENTAL

Hiring a campervan gives you a home on wheels. It's also possible to hire camping equipment packs, including a tent, sleeping bags and cooking equipment from car rental agencies.

Britz Australia (☎ 1800 331 454; www.britz.com.au; cnr Stuart Hwy & Power St) Big range of campervans and motorhomes from \$90 to \$220 a day for 2WD and from \$150 to \$190 for 4WD with unlimited kilometres (excluding insurance). Includes Maui and Backpacker Rentals.

Challenge Camper Trailers (Map p178; ☎ 8952 7999; www.challengecampertrailers.com.au; 19 Kidman St) If you've got your own vehicle (preferably 4WD) these on-/off-road campers are a great idea.

Train

The *Ghan* between Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin is a classic way to enter or leave the Territory. There are two services weekly in each direction between Adelaide and Alice Springs throughout the year; trains depart from Alice Springs train station at 12.45pm on Thursday and 2pm Saturday. There's a third service at 10.10am on Sunday from May to July. Heading north on the newly completed rail link to Darwin there's one service a week departing on Monday at 4.10pm. This train stops at Katherine for four hours on Tuesday morning, allowing a quick visit to the gorge.

It's a popular service, especially during winter, and bookings are essential – contact

Trainways (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au), or book through **Travel World** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 8953 0488; Todd Mall).

The **train station** (Map p178; ☎ noon-4.30pm Mon, 9am-1pm Thu, 10am-2pm Sat) is at the end of George Crescent off Larapinta Drive.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Alice Springs airport is 15km south of the town, which is about \$30 by taxi – there's a free taxi phone outside the terminal. The **airport shuttle** (☎ 8953 0310; \$12 one way) meets flights and drops off passengers at city accommodation. Leaving town it departs from Gregory Tce, near the corner of Todd St (Map pp180-1), but also picks up from all accommodation; book a day in advance.

Bicycle

For details on bike hire, see Cycling p184.

Car & Motorcycle

Parking is free (with time restrictions) in Alice but the central area can get pretty congested on weekdays. The easiest places to find a space are in the car parks of the Coles and Kmart complexes (three-hour limit). Campervans and trailers can park on Leichhardt Tce just north of the Stott Tce roundabout.

Public Transport

Asbus (☎ 8950 0500), the local bus network, runs four routes that depart from outside the Yeperenye Shopping Centre on Hartley St: **West Route (No 1)** Goes along Larapinta Dr, with a daily detour (Route 1C) for the cultural precinct. Route 1C leaves at 9.45am and returns at 3.35pm.

East Route (No 2) East to the residential area along Undoolya Rd

North Route (No 3) Heads north along the Stuart Hwy and passes the School of the Air.

South Route (No 4) Runs along Gap Rd – past many of the hotels and hostels – through Heavitree Gap and along Palm Circuit (useful for the southern caravan parks).

Buses run approximately every 1½ hours from 7.45am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12.45pm Saturday. The adult/child fare for all zones is \$2.20/1.10.

ALICE WANDERER

A hop-on, hop-off bus service, **Alice Wanderer** (☎ 1800 722 111, 8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au;

adult/child \$38/30; ☎ 9am-4pm) covers 12 major sights, including the Telegraph Station, School of the Air, Cultural Precinct, Olive Pink Botanic Garden, RFDS Base and Ghan Museum, complete with commentary. The circuit runs every 70 minutes from the southern end of Todd Mall. You can also

arrange pick-up from your accommodation before the 9am departure.

Taxi

To order a taxi, call ☎ 13 10 08 or ☎ 8952 1877. Taxis congregate on Gregory Tce near the tourist office.